Violence and disorder constitute the primal problem of American history, the dark reverse of the coin of freedom and abundance.

—David T. Courtwright

Violence has accompanied virtually every stage and aspect of our national existence.

—Richard Maxwell Brown

Every society is adept at looking past its own forms of violence, and reserving its outrage for the violence of others.

—Inga Clendinnen

- Late in November 1864, a large force of cavalry militia led by Colonel John Chivington left Denver, Colorado, and early on the morning of November 29 ended up on the banks of Sand Creek where a large party of American Indians, mostly Cheyenne, were camped. They were flying a flag of truce in the belief that they were under the protection of the Colorado authorities. With no warning or call for surrender, Chivington's soldiers attacked and killed around 130 Indians, many of them women and children. No prisoners were taken and many of the victims were mutilated after death. Explaining his practice of killing everybody, including children, Chivington reportedly asserted that "his policy was to kill and scalp all little and big; that nits made lice."
April 23, 1899, was a Sunday afternoon, which allowed more than 2,000 white Southerners to gather for the lynching of Sam Hose near the town of Newman, Georgia. Sam, an African American, had killed his employer during an argument. According to many accounts, he had acted in self-defense since his boss had pulled a gun and threatened to shoot him, but the fact that he was an African American who had killed a white man made that justification irrelevant. On that fateful Sunday, Sam Hose was stripped, mutilated with knives, soaked in oil, and then burned alive while the crowd participated and watched. Reportedly, his only words were, “Oh, my God! Oh, Jesus” as he was burning. The onlookers fought over pieces of his burned body to take home as souvenirs.6

On March 1, 1989, a 17-year-old girl living in Glen Ridge, New Jersey—a relatively affluent suburb—went to play basketball after school. To someone who didn’t know her well, she might appear almost normal, an outgoing teenager who loved sports. In reality, however, she was mentally retarded and very susceptible to suggestion and manipulation. At the park, a large group of popular male high school athletes enticed the young woman into the basement of one of their homes where they brutally raped her. Thirteen star athletes were present, and four were later convicted of raping the young girl with sticks and a baseball bat.7

In February of 2008, Barbara Sheehan shot her husband, Raymond Sheehan, 11 times with two guns. Barbara claimed in trial that it was in self-defense after Raymond had threatened her with a loaded semiautomatic pistol. Their children testified that Barbara had suffered years of abuse. Barbara claimed that Raymond, who was a former police sergeant, told her he would kill her and be able to cover it up because of his investigation skills. After a heated argument, Barbara described how she was trying to flee their home with a gun when Raymond tried to stop her with his gun. She then fired five times. After he fell to the ground and dropped his gun shouting, “I’m going to kill you,” she picked up his pistol and fired 6 more times.8

On April 16, 2007, Cho Seung-Hui killed 32 students, faculty, and staff and left about 30 others injured on the campus of Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. Cho was armed with two legally purchased semiautomatic handguns and a vest full of ammunition. As the police were closing in on the scene, he killed himself. This shooting rampage was the deadliest in U.S. history. Cho was described as a loner who was bullied in high school and never spoke to anyone, not even in classes when he was called upon to do so. In a college English course, his writings were so violent and disturbing that they prompted a professor to contact the campus police and university counseling services.9 He sent an anger-filled video to NBC News explaining his actions and blaming others for the perceived wrongs that drove him to the mass killing.10

During the midnight movie premiere of a Batman film on a Friday night in July of 2012 in Aurora, Colorado, James Holmes, 24, walked into the theater through an exit door. He was dressed head to toe in “ballistic gear” and a gas mask. After releasing a smoke device in the aisles, he began to shoot, killing 12 and wounding another 58. In the previous 60 days, he had legally purchased four guns at local gun shops. Holmes was a former PhD student and an honors graduate in neuroscience from the University of California, Riverside.11
Are these incidents of violence related? Was the murder of Sam Hose over 100 years ago in any way related to the mass killings that occurred at Virginia Tech or at the movie theater in Aurora? While each of these incidents is separated by time, space, circumstance, number of participants, and lethality, they are all in fact linked and part of the same continuum of violent behavior. We often tend to see violence as consisting of discrete acts that are separate from each other, as if each violent incident had occurred in a vacuum. But that is not the case. All violence is connected by a web of actions and behaviors, ideas, perceptions, and justifications. While the individual dynamics of specific violent behavior may vary somewhat, violent acts share a number of essential characteristics that bind them together into what is sometimes called the unity of human aggression.  

One of the primary themes of this book is that all violence is connected. There are a number of commonalities that link the various types of violence we discuss in this book. We find, for example, that violence—regardless of the form it takes—is usually perpetrated for the same kinds of reasons. Whether it’s the bully in the schoolyard, a member of a lynch mob, or a dictator engaged in genocide, these perpetrators rely on similar arguments justifying their violence. In other words, people perpetrate violence for the same kinds of reasons. The white Southerners who lynched Sam Hose saw themselves as defenders of their race and privileged way of life. By killing a white man, Hose was seen as challenging white supremacy in the South. This is essentially the same mentality exhibited by Colonel Chivington and others like him, who defined their killing of American Indians in much the same way. For them, American Indian resistance to the encroachment of the settlers was seen as a threat to European and Christian civilization. They saw their violence as being justified and provoked, not as unfounded aggression. From this perspective, the American Indians, including the women and children, had brought about their own destruction. One witness to the Sand Creek massacre remembered Colonel Chivington speaking to his men just before going into action and saying, “Boys, I shall not tell you what you are to kill, but remember our slaughtered women and children.” Clearly, he defined the subsequent violence as defensive and justified and hoped to evoke the same kinds of sentiments among his men.

Cho Seung-Hui also saw his violence as justified. He had been bullied in high school and remained an angry loner in college. In the video he left, he stated, “You had a hundred billion chances and ways to have avoided today, but you decided to spill my blood. You forced me into a corner and gave me only one option. The decision was yours.” This kind of violence is referred to as a form of “righteous slaughter” by the sociologist Jack Katz, who points out that the perpetrators of violence often undergo a process in which perceived humiliation is transformed into rage that can culminate in violence. Frequently they perceive that their violence is in defense of some important value or principle. In none of the examples described at the beginning of the chapter were the victims defined as being innocent. Rather, they were perceived as having brought the violence upon themselves; in the eyes of the offenders, the violence they inflicted was entirely appropriate and justified. These perceptions create a potent rationale for harming others. Even some residents in Glen Ridge blamed the young, mentally retarded woman for her own rape. Many victim-blaming comments made it into the media, including “She teased them into it,” “She asked for it,” and
“She was always flirting.”\textsuperscript{17} In fact, some scholars have suggested that a great deal of violence—especially among street criminals—stems from a desire for retaliation in which offenders feel that their victim had wronged them in some way and that their violence was a righteous form of payback.\textsuperscript{18} This commonality of motivation and perception is not the only thread that connects violence. We also find that violence commonly overlaps.

Think about your own behavior. You generally act in similar ways in different contexts. If you are kind to people in your own family, for example, you are generally going to be kind to strangers. Similarly, violence in one sphere of life often affects violence in another sphere. Individuals who are violent in one setting are more likely to be violent in others. In fact, the single best predictor for violent behavior is a history of previous violence.\textsuperscript{19} Of course, this does not mean that an individual who engages in violence is destined for a life of violence; it simply means that those who engage in violence are more likely to do so in the future compared with those without a violent history. This shouldn’t come as a surprise. People who engage in violence have already overcome normative boundaries against aggression and are more or less experienced in its perpetration. Essentially, their threshold for using violence has been lowered, which means that once someone starts using violence, it becomes easier to continue using it. The rape conviction of boxer Mike Tyson in 1992 would be an example of this. Boxers are trained in violence and Mike Tyson was certainly no exception. Speaking about an upcoming fight, Tyson once said, “My main objective is to be professional but to kill him. I want to rip out his heart and feed it to him. I want to kill people. I want to rip their stomachs out and eat their children.”\textsuperscript{20} While this might simply be hyperbole designed to sell tickets, Tyson’s behavior out of the ring indicates there is more than a hint of truth to his statement. Tyson has had numerous encounters with the law, mostly involving violent behavior, such as domestic violence and assault as well as rape. Clearly he is an individual whose violence is not confined to socially accepted venues, such as the boxing ring.

Another example of people engaging in violence in multiple spheres of their lives is illustrated by the Pentagon’s acknowledgment of the serious problem the military has been having with domestic violence among members of its armed forces. For example, at North Carolina’s Fort Bragg military base, four army wives were murdered by their husbands or ex-husbands, with a total of 10 such fatalities occurring there since 2002. Including nonfatal incidents, there were 832 victims of intimate partner assault between 2002 and 2004 at Fort Bragg alone, according to U.S. Army figures. More recently, the military reported that 16 domestic violence fatalities were reported in 2010, a substantial increase from previous years. Child maltreatment cases were also reported to have increased during the same year. One possible cause for this ongoing problem in the military, according to various experts, may relate to the continuing stress and impact of repeated deployment to combat areas.\textsuperscript{21} The violence some soldiers experience in war zones, in other words, may travel home with them and impact their relationships in their private lives.

Violence overlaps in other ways as well. Some suggest that the more a society legitimates violence in certain situations (e.g., war, capital punishment, and justifiable homicide), the more illegitimate violence (e.g., robbery and murder) there will
As American as Apple Pie

❖

This is sometimes referred to as spill-over theory, which suggests that the values and justifications for violence in socially approved settings “spill over” into other settings and result in illegitimate forms of violence. One example of this spillover concerns the death penalty. Some have argued that, instead of decreasing rates of murder, capital punishment may actually serve to increase it. They point to the fact that the states that sentence the greatest number of people to death also tend to have the highest rates of homicide. One proponent of this argument—termed the brutalization hypothesis—is the criminologist William Bowers, who argues, “The lesson of the execution, then, may be to devalue life by the example of human sacrifice. Executions demonstrate that it is correct and appropriate to kill those who have gravely offended us.” His brutalization argument suggests that the death penalty desensitizes society to killing and devalues human life and therefore increases tolerance toward lethal behavior, which in turn results in increases in the criminal homicide rate.

War—another example of legitimate violence—has also been found to increase rates of illegitimate violence, not just by soldiers returning from the battlefield and engaging in domestic violence but in the larger society as well. Some scholars have argued that a nation’s involvement in war tends to legitimize the use of lethal force to resolve conflict within that nation’s population. When a nation or state goes to war, diplomacy is replaced by violence, which is perceived as rational and justified, at least by the leaders of that nation. It isn’t unreasonable, then, for citizens of that society also to be more likely to choose force when confronted with conflict. One of the largest studies to examine the effects of war on postwar homicide across nations was conducted by Dane Archer and Rosemary Gartner, who compared national homicide rates for men and women before and after small and large wars, including the two world wars. They also controlled for a number of factors in their comparison, including the number of combat deaths in war, whether the nations were victorious or defeated, and whether the nation’s postwar economies were improved or worsened. Archer and Gartner found that most combatant nations experienced substantial postwar increases in their rates of homicide and concluded that “the one model that appears to be fully consistent with the evidence is the legitimation of violence model, which suggests that the presence of authorized or sanctioned killing during war has a residual effect on the level of homicide in peacetime society.” Put another way, “It is organized violence on top which creates individual violence on the bottom.”

❖

Photo 1.1  Mike Tyson was arrested after a brawl in New York.
A final example of the spillover thesis is something with which many of us are familiar—being spanked as a child. While most who experience this type of punishment grow up relatively unscathed, research suggests that children who are spanked are more likely to be aggressive as adults compared with children who were not spanked. Murray Straus, in his book *Beating the Devil Out of Them*, argues that the physical discipline of children legitimates other forms of violence in interpersonal confrontations based on his assertion that physical punishment is inescapably an act of violence. Straus contends that the lesson learned by children who are spanked or otherwise physically punished is that violence is an acceptable means to an end. As such, physical responses to conflict may well spill over to other relationships, such as with an intimate partner or spouse.

We also know that certain qualities or characteristics of violence seem to transcend time and place. We find, for example, that age and gender patterns are very consistent across different societies and in different eras. Young men tend to be responsible for most forms of violence regardless of the time period or the country. Similarities also exist in terms of the motivations and justifications used by those who engage in violence, as we have discussed earlier in this chapter. We hope this discussion helps illustrate our belief that all violence is connected. Violence, in its many forms, is fundamentally linked through various shared qualities that we have briefly reviewed here. This is not to say, however, that all violence is identical. Collective violence, for example, is not simply interpersonal violence with a large number of perpetrators and/or victims. The social and collective elements of group violence differentiate it from interpersonal violence in a number of ways. Yet both types still share a number of other important commonalities. In many ways, therefore, it can be said that acts of violence are simultaneously unique and comparable. So far, we have looked at several examples of violence, but we have not yet defined exactly what we mean by the term “violence.” In the next section, you will see that coming up with a concrete definition of violence is not always such an easy task.

**Defining Violence**

Defining violence is a trickier job than you might expect given our apparent familiarity with the concept. Violence is one of those words that everyone knows, but few have grappled with in any detail. Despite this familiarity, we are usually fairly vague about its meaning, and our perceptions can vary tremendously depending upon any number of factors. While at first glance the concept seems clear enough, the more closely we examine violence, the more elusive it becomes. So before proceeding, we need to discuss some of the complexities and issues raised by attempts to define violence.

The first thing we need to understand is that violence encompasses many different kinds of behaviors in many different kinds of situations. Recognizing all of them as being categorically part of the same phenomenon can be difficult, especially if the violence is not always evident in the act. Pulling the trigger of a gun, for example, or pressing a button that launches a missile may not be violent actions in and of themselves, but the consequences of these actions unquestionably are violent. Do we perceive and define them the same way as hitting a person or stabbing someone—acts in which the
violence involves human contact and the consequences are therefore more immediate and close? How about instilling so much terror and instability into someone's life that they flee their home with their children to an unknown land or refugee camp where food and safe drinking water aren't available on a regular basis but loss and insecurity are guaranteed? What if the perpetrator of this act was someone you pledged to “love and cherish until death do you part?” So which of these acts do we consider to be violence? All of them? Or only some of them?

We must also recognize that everyone perceives and understands violence in their own way, based on their individual history and the context of their life. Many people only use the term in reference to physical acts of aggression and harm, while others include emotional or psychological acts as well. For some, violence refers solely to human-perpetrated acts, while others include destructive natural forces, such as tornados, storms, earthquakes, and hurricanes. Accidental acts of harm are also not always defined as violence. If someone was injured by another person who intentionally hit them, most of us would clearly see this as an act of violence. Yet if the same injury occurred unintentionally—say, as the result of a collision on a basketball court or a soccer field—many of us would not define it as violence.

The perceived legitimacy of aggressive acts also affects whether or not they are defined as violence. Some individuals only use the word to refer to illegal or illegitimate acts of aggression. Other words are often used to describe aggressive acts that are socially approved. As an illustration, take two incidents that are behaviorally similar:

1. Scenario 1. During an attempted robbery, an offender shoots the store clerk because he perceives the clerk to be reaching down under the counter for a gun; the store clerk dies.
2. Scenario 2. After pulling over a driver for speeding, a police officer shoots the driver whom he perceives to be reaching into his coat for a gun; the driver dies.

The behavior in both scenarios is similar, yet the label given to each would almost certainly be very different. The first would undoubtedly be labeled as an act of felony murder, which in some states is the most likely kind of case to receive the death penalty. The second would most likely be ruled as the legitimate use of deadly force with no criminal label whatsoever attached. While the physical behavior is the same, the legal and social acceptability are very different, and this influences which words are used to describe each act.

Keep in mind that violence is a loaded word; it is a word rich in meaning that usually evokes powerful emotions. When people think of violence, they generally attach very negative connotations to it. This makes defining violence even harder because there are numerous acts that many of us do not perceive as violent, since they are perceived and defined as being acceptable and may even be encouraged. Commenting on this issue, the legal scholar Lawrence Friedman writes, “In part, violence is a matter of definition, or at least of perspective. . . . Every society defines a sphere of legitimate private violence.” In other words, the legitimacy or illegitimacy of any particular act lies not in any intrinsic quality of the act itself but rather in its definition. As we noted at the beginning of the chapter, evidence indicates that many perpetrators of violence see themselves as being justified in their actions and often define their acts as
a legitimate response to some behavioral or ethical breach on the part of their victim. In this sense, the offender perceives his or her violence as a form of social control, and this perception of the crime as a form of self-help serves to legitimize the act not only to the offender but perhaps to others as well. Violent people often feel they are acting legitimately and morally to protect something they value or to exact the appropriate penalty from someone who has wronged them. Regardless of the context, violent offenders often provide justifications for their offenses. Like Cho Seung-Hui who claimed he was provoked to go on a shooting rampage at Virginia Tech, men who have been convicted of felony assault against their intimate partners also often justify their violence including such statements as “she disrespected me and deserved it,” or “a man has a right to control a woman.”

We hope you can now see that, depending upon who is doing what to whom and the reasons why, we either accept or condemn acts of violence. Our understanding is therefore highly situational and contingent. This means that the context is extremely important in helping shape our understanding of and reaction to violent acts and actors. The context of violence is shaped in large part by several factors, including the following:

- The victim
- The offender
- The specific nature of the violence
- The location of the violence
- The rationale for the violence

Let’s start with the victim. If the victim is someone with whom we can identify or someone we know and can relate to, we are more likely to condemn the violence. Many factors, including gender, race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and nationality, play a role here. If the victim is someone who is like us, we are more likely to sympathize with them and see the situation through their eyes. On the other hand, the greater the social distance between us and the victim, the less likely that we will empathize with them. This judgment, however, does not occur independently of the perpetrator. If we know and can identify more easily with the perpetrator compared to the victim, we will be more willing to find ways to rationalize and even accept their violence. Figure 1.1 illustrates these relationships. Essentially, it is easier for us to rationalize, condone, and accept behavior from people who are like us, and it is easier for us to condemn and judge those who are different from us.

In the same vein, the type of violence affects how we perceive and define specific acts. Minor acts of violence are generally easier to accept than more severe forms. It is much easier to dismiss or minimize a push or a slap than a punch or a kick. The heinousness of an act of violence is also influenced by the brutality involved and the number of victims. Acts of violence involving gratuitous cruelty or torture are much less likely to be deemed acceptable. Location has also been an important variable. Historically, if violence was perpetrated in the home, it was generally conceded to be much more acceptable than if carried out in a public place or work setting. What happened behind closed doors was once considered to be private and no one’s business. This was especially true if the victim was a wife or child and the perpetrator the
husband or father. In public, however, the violence was more easily condemned. The justification expressed for the violence is also important since it helps the social audience understand the rationale for the aggressive behavior. If we agree and/or understand the motivation, then it becomes easier to accept and even commend specific acts of violence.

In sum, it is important to recognize that our individual perceptions and definitions of violence revolve around a number of variables that help shape our understanding of the act and is testimony to the difficulty we have in defining it. In other words, our relationship with violence is complex and at times contradictory. Sometimes we condemn and punish those who inflict violence, and sometimes we celebrate and reward those who perpetrate it. We read or hear about a shooting somewhere, and we are appalled. The idea of moviegoers being ambushed by an armed gunman at a midnight screening of a Batman movie is horrific. The events at Virginia Tech, along with the massacre at Sandy Hook elementary school and the execution-style murders of the Amish schoolgirls in Pennsylvania, for example, have seared themselves into our collective awareness as horrible tragedies. Yet when Navy Seals killed Osama bin Laden, many applauded his death. When police officers shoot and kill someone they perceive as dangerous, such as when London police officers shot and killed a young Brazilian man they suspected of being a suicide bomber after the bombings there in July 2005, many rationalized
the killing as an understandable act in a time of terror. Yet when drug dealers kill each other in pursuit of illegal profits, we almost universally revile it. In short, we judge acts of violence selectively. Some call forth our interest and compassion and demand an emotional response, while others barely stir any interest. Some receive our approval, while others earn our condemnation. We can see this differentiation at work in one study looking at attitudes toward different types of violence. Leslie Kennedy and David Forde examined the attitudes of a sample of Canadians to determine levels of support for the same act of violence in different situations. Their findings are summarized in Table 1.1 and reveal that the same violent behavior receives widely disparate levels of support and approval depending upon the situation in which it occurred. These results are consistent with earlier research in the United States.36

By now it is likely you will agree that defining violence is a difficult task, in large part because our understanding of its nature is so subjective and varied. We think it is helpful at this point to go over some definitions that have been proposed by those who study violence. Table 1.2 provides a list of some of the more popular definitions. We also include definitions of aggression, since both terms are often used interchangeably—even within the scholarly community.37 We should note, however, that some researchers make distinctions between violence and aggression. For example, Bartol and Bartol contend that all violence is aggressive, but not all aggression is violent.38 For them, violence only refers to aggressive physical behavior, while aggression can also refer to behavior that is psychologically harmful. Moreover, aggression is more often used in connection with a person’s psychological affect, demeanor, and mindset, while violence is more specifically intended to encompass the harmful physical behavior itself. In many ways, aggression may precede and accompany violence. For the purposes of this book, however, the terms “violence” and “aggression” are so similar in their everyday usage that we will not make this type of distinction.

Reviewing Table 1.2, we find a range of definitions that differ and overlap in some important ways. First, all definitions agree that violence and aggression are harmful. Where they differ, however, is in conceptualizing what kinds of harm qualify as violence. Some of the definitions include inflicting psychological or emotional harm as violence, while others do not. But the bottom line is that, whether perpetrated for noble reasons or for petty and selfish ones, violence is about injuring, damaging, destroying, and killing. It is invariably destructive. This is not to say that violence cannot be perpetrated for constructive reasons but rather that the act of violence is always destructive. It is therefore important to differentiate between the intent or purpose of the act and the act itself. The behavior and the intent of the behavior are separate. The purpose of the violence may be positive or negative or perhaps even a mixture of both. But the violence itself always remains the same: injurious and damaging. Second, these definitions help us understand that violence can take a number of forms. The most common difference is that between physical and emotional or psychological violence, although not everyone agrees that nonphysical forms of aggression (e.g., verbal) can be considered violence.

There are many other ways that violence can be classified and categorized. One distinction that is sometimes drawn is between expressive and instrumental acts of violence. Instrumental acts of violence are those in which violence is a means to an end. An assault during an armed robbery, for example, would fit into this category.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation in Which One Man (Assailant) Punches an Adult Stranger</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents Who Approve of the Violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If adult stranger was in a protest march showing opposition to the other man’s (assailant’s) views</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If adult stranger was drunk and bumped into the man (assailant) and his wife on the street</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If adult stranger had hit the man’s (assailant’s) child after the child accidentally damaged the stranger’s car</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If adult stranger was beating up a woman and the man (assailant) saw it</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If adult stranger had broken into the man’s (assailant’s) house</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation in Which Police Officer Strikes an Adult Male Citizen</th>
<th>Percent of Respondents Who Approve of the Violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If the male citizen had used vulgar and obscene language against the officer</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the male citizen was being questioned as a suspect in a murder case</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the male citizen was attempting to escape from custody</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the male citizen was attacking the police officer with his fists</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The violence is committed to help accomplish the robbery, but it is not an end in itself. Expressive acts of violence, on the other hand, are those in which the motivations are expressive of some emotional state, such as anger or jealousy. In these cases, the violence serves to fulfill some internal or intrinsic desire. As the name implies, the violence is “expressing” something.

Another way of categorizing violence is provided by Peter Iadicola and Anson Shupe, who suggest that there are three main interconnected types of violence, which they label interpersonal, institutional, and structural. **Interpersonal violence** consists of the assaults, rapes, robberies, and murders, which often come to mind when thinking about violence. **Institutional violence**, on the other hand, concerns the violent behaviors that are perpetrated in organizational settings. For example, Iadicola and Shupe consider family violence a form of institutional violence because it happens within the context of the family. Also included are corporate and workplace violence, military violence, religious violence, and state-perpetrated violence, all of which occur within the context of established social institutions. **Structural violence** is all about discriminatory social arrangements that can also be construed as violence. Including structural arrangements in their definition allows Iadicola and Shupe to...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Definition of Violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary</em></td>
<td>“Exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse . . . intense, turbulent, or furious and often destructive action or force”¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The National Panel on the Understanding and Control of Violent Behavior</td>
<td>“Behaviors by individuals that intentionally threaten, attempt, or inflict physical harm on others”²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newman</td>
<td>“A series of events, the course of which or the outcomes of which, cause injury or damage to persons or property”³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iadicola and Shupe</td>
<td>“Violence is any action or structural arrangement that results in physical or nonphysical harm to one or more persons”⁴</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weiner, Zahn, and Sagi</td>
<td>“The threat, attempt, or use of physical force by one or more persons that results in physical or nonphysical harm to one or more persons”⁵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartol and Bartol</td>
<td>“Destructive physical aggression intentionally directed at harming other persons or things”⁶</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Definition of Aggression</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bartol and Bartol</td>
<td>“Behavior perpetrated or attempted with the intention of harming another individual physically or psychologically (as opposed to socially) or to destroy an object”⁷</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkowitz</td>
<td>“Any form of behavior that is intended to injure someone physically or psychologically”⁸</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES:

examine societal inequalities as violence in light of the negative effects that certain living conditions may have on a group. For example, they write, “Violence may be action that denies a minority group’s access to education, health care, housing, an adequate diet, and other necessities of survival and human development.” While our book does not address structural violence per se, we do underscore the inequalities related to both the collective and individual violence that we examine. In addition, the violence we examine encompasses both interpersonal and institutional types of behavior.

At this point in your reading, you must be expecting us to tell you which definition we subscribe to in this book. Rather than disappoint you, we can suggest that the definition which most closely aligns with our approach in this book is the one presented by Iadicola and Shupe, who define violence as follows: “Violence is any action or structural arrangement that results in physical or nonphysical harm to one or more persons.” That being said, we also want to acknowledge that most of the definitions presented in Table 1.2 would serve our purposes equally well. While there are many ways to define violence, most of the attempts discussed above share a number of qualities, and the types of violence we have chosen to discuss in this book fall within these broad conceptualizations. Therefore, settling on a single definition to guide our discussion is not as crucial as it might otherwise be. In addition to defining violence, another important issue that must also be addressed relates to how we measure violence, and as you might imagine, attempting to measure the extent of violence in U.S. society is also a complex issue.

**Measuring Violence**

It is not our intention in this discussion to exhaustively review all of the sources of information on violence, nor do we provide a summation of all of the strengths and weaknesses of each method of collecting data. There are far too many data sets on violence, each encompassing different specific collection methodologies and populations, and each with its own unique set of strengths and weaknesses. Instead, we simply want to provide a brief introduction to a few of the main sources of data on violence and to discuss some of the primary pitfalls and shortcomings commonly found in attempts to accurately identify the scope and magnitude of violent behavior. Additionally, throughout the book in individual chapters, more specific estimates and measurement issues related to separate forms of interpersonal violence, such as murder, rape, and intimate partner violence, will be covered in more detail. The present discussion, on the other hand, should give you a more general sense of the more common ways in which information on violence is gathered, and some of the important and relevant concerns attached to them. While it might seem mundane and somewhat technical, we should remember that measurement is an important issue. The accuracy of our insights and explanations about violence is largely dependent on the quality of the information that we are able to gather. Moreover, resources and strategies aimed at preventing violence and helping violent crime victims are also based on these estimates. Bad information can and does result in poor choices being made by policymakers, politicians, activists, and other concerned citizens. Depending on who is gathering the data and what methods they employ to get that information, the results
can vary widely. When most students are asked about how statistics on violence are gathered, they tend to think first and foremost about police reports. You will soon see, however, that relying on reports of crime to police is somewhat problematic. That being noted, we can say that estimates of interpersonal violence are usually based on reports to the police and surveys of the general population.\footnote{41}

**Reports to Law Enforcement Officials**

The most widely used source of statistical information about violent crime in the United States is the **Uniform Crime Reporting Program** (UCR), compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The UCR has collected information about criminal incidents of violence reported to the police since 1930; the reports are based on the voluntary participation of state, county, and city law enforcement agencies across the United States.

For the crime of homicide, information about both the victim and the offender (e.g., the gender and race of both, the relationship between the victim and offender, the weapon used) is obtained in a separate reporting program called the **Supplementary Homicide Reports** (SHR). Unfortunately, such detailed information is not collected for other crimes in the UCR. To remedy this problem, in 1988 the FBI implemented a change in its collection of crime information to include more characteristics of the incident; appropriately, this is called the **National Incident Based Reporting System** (NIBRS). NIBRS data is more specific than the UCR and includes many more offenses that local agencies have to report information on. It includes detailed information on crime incidents, including the characteristics of the victim, such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, and resident status. In all, NIBRS categorizes each incident and arrest in one of 22 basic crime categories that span 46 separate offenses. A total of 53 data elements about the victim, property, and offender are collected under NIBRS.\footnote{42} As you can imagine, it takes a great deal of time and money to make this change and fill out this paperwork at the local police department level. Because of this time and expense, only over half of all states currently use the NIBRS format for collecting information about reported crimes.

Both the UCR and the NIBRS data collection methods are problematic when estimating incidence rates of violence. It’s not hard to imagine why. If victimizations are not reported to police, they are never counted in either data collection effort in the first place and, based on comparisons with national survey data, it is estimated that only about 40% to 50% of crimes become known to police. This is particularly problematic for certain types of violence, such as rape and violence that occurs between intimates, such as spouses and boy/girlfriends. We know that a large percentage of these victimizations are never reported to police. In sum, there is a great deal of evidence that documents the large gap between the true extent of victimization and offending and the amount of crime known to police. The major sources of this gap, according to Clayton Mosher, Terance Miethe, and Dretha Phillips, are the following: the inability of police to observe all criminal activity, the reluctance of crime victims and witnesses to report crime to the police, and variation in the recording of “known” crime incidents because of police discretion.\footnote{43}
Because of this weakness in police reports, random sample surveys of the population are often used as the social science tool of choice for uncovering more accurate information about violent victimization. However, as can be imagined, surveys employing diverse methodologies and different definitions of violence have resulted in tremendously diverse estimates. Taking violence against women as an example, survey estimates of how many women experience violence from an intimate partner annually range from 9.3 per 1,000 women to 116 per 1,000 women. This is a huge range. Further, the methodological differences across survey methodologies often preclude direct comparisons across studies.

Since we discuss surveys used to measure various types of violence within the chapters of this book, at this point we will describe only two more general surveys. The first was designed to more accurately measure crime victimization and is sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) of the U.S. Department of Justice. It is called the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). Instead of focusing on victimizations, the second survey we will discuss was designed to measure the offending behavior of adolescents and is called the National Youth Survey (NYS).

The National Crime Victimization Survey annually interviews over 100,000 individuals aged 12 or older and is the second largest ongoing survey sponsored by the U.S. government. It measures both violent and property crime victimizations. But asking respondents to recall incidents of victimization is a tricky business. How would you word questions to uncover incidents of violent victimization? After several changes and redesigns, the NCVS currently uses the screening questions listed in Table 1.3.

As you can see from Table 1.3, the screening questions rely on very behavior-specific wording instead of asking directly about victimizations using crime jargon such as “have you ever been robbed?” This is important. A great deal of research has demonstrated that asking questions using behavior-based wording instead of legally based phrases uncovers a significantly greater number of victimizations, particularly when victims may not self-identify themselves as crime victims. As you might imagine, asking people about their experiences in this way uncovers many more victimizations than those reported only to police.

Who are the most likely offenders of violent crime? Relying on police reports to estimate who is most likely to perpetrate acts of violence involves the same problems as using these data to estimate who is most likely to be victimized. Are offenders who are arrested for violent offending actually representative of all offenders? The quick answer is no. Not surprisingly, early self-report surveys of offending behavior in the 1940s revealed that a relatively large number of committed offenses were undetected by the police. Although police report data at the time indicated offenders were more likely to be minorities from low socioeconomic backgrounds, self-report data revealed that a great number of offenses were being reported by people from relatively privileged backgrounds. As you might guess, these offenses rarely came to the attention of the police, and when they did, they rarely resulted in an arrest. Based on these early studies, researchers interested in offending behavior—like those interested in victimization—began to rely on survey methodology instead of police reports. That trend continues to this day.
Table 1.3 Screening Questions Used by the NCVS to Uncover Violent Victimization

1. Other than any incidents already mentioned, has anyone attacked or threatened you in any of these ways?
   a. With any weapon, for instance, a gun or knife
   b. With anything like a baseball bat, frying pan, scissors, or a stick
   c. By something thrown, such as a rock or bottle
   d. Include any grabbing, punching, or choking
   e. Any rape, attempted rape or other type of sexual attack
   f. Any face-to-face threats
   g. Any attack or threat or use of force by anyone at all? Please mention it even if you are not certain it was a crime.

2. Incidents involving forced or unwanted sexual acts are often difficult to talk about. Have you been forced or coerced to engage in unwanted sexual activity by:
   a. Someone you didn’t know before
   b. A casual acquaintance
   c. Someone you know well?

   If respondents reply affirmative to one of these latter questions, interviewers next ask “Do you mean forced or coerced sexual intercourse?” to determine whether the incident should be recorded as rape or as another type of sexual attack.

3. People often don’t think of incidents committed by someone they know. Did you have something stolen from you OR were you attacked or threatened by:
   a. Someone at work or school
   b. A neighbor or friend
   c. A relative or family member
   d. Any other person you’ve met or known?

SOURCE: NCVS, Bureau of Justice Statistics

One of the most thorough contemporary surveys of offending behavior is the National Youth Survey, which was first collected in 1976 from a national probability sample of 11- to 17-year-olds. These youth were interviewed many times during the following years, with the last interview data collected in 1995, although there are similar surveys that have taken its place. Table 1.4 displays some of the questions used to measure the violent offending behavior in the NYS. As you can see, here too researchers have used behavior-specific wording instead of relying on the use of crime categories and labels.

We hope this brief description of how we measure violence has given you a better sense of how information on violence is gathered and what are their corresponding weaknesses. Keep in mind that we will be talking about measurement issues regarding particular types of violence more extensively throughout the book. For now, though, we want to provide you with a general overview of the scope of violence in the United States and look at how this compares with violence in other times and places.
Violence and U.S. Society

When we turn on the evening news, read the local newspaper, or get on the Internet, we can’t get away from the fact that violence, in its many forms, is a common companion in our lives. We live in a violent world. Whether we acknowledge it or not, the problem of violence pervades our lives and often defines who we are as individuals, communities, and nations. This is as true for the United States as it is for any other place around the world. We experience it in our homes, at work, and in public places. In fact, many of us experience violence directly as victims. In 2011 alone, according to the National Crime Victimization Survey, 5.8 million Americans over the age of 12 were victims of violent crimes.\(^48\) When you consider that this type of victimization occurs every single day and that the effects of this victimization often last years, if not a lifetime, you begin to realize the impact that this violence has on our society.

Figure 1.2 illustrates rates of total nonfatal violence, which includes rape and sexual assaults, robbery, aggravated assaults, and simple assaults as well as a separate trend line for serious nonfatal violence, which excludes simple assaults. As you can see, violence peaked in the early 1990s and has generally been declining since that time. However, when homicide rates are examined (Figure 1.3), we learn that the decline in violence was not consistent across subgroups of the population. While homicide victimization rates declined for both white and black males, it remained virtually constant for white females and appears to have actually risen back to the high rates observed in the early 1980s for black females. As we will note again and again throughout this text, context matters! How do we compare to other countries?

Figure 1.4 reveals that, although the United States generally has very high rates of murder, we are not necessarily alone. However, if you look closely, we are in the company of countries such as Iraq and Brazil; rates of murder for other Western industrialized countries such as Sweden and Germany are less than half those of the United States. Rates of victimization are just the tip of the iceberg regarding our experiences with
violence. In addition to direct victimization, we also often experience it vicariously. We
thrive to see violence in sports and enjoy violent video and computer games. We flock to
movies that are saturated with graphic acts of explicit and realistic violence. In fact, the
average child will view 200,000 acts of violence and 16,000 murders by the time they
are 18 years old. Our airwaves are full of violent images, and research suggests that
this trend is becoming more prevalent. In fact, there is evidence that media violence has
become more plentiful, graphic, sexual, and sadistic. Can we watch these images and
not be affected by them? The evidence strongly suggests that we can’t.

We also worry about violence constantly and change our behavior in response to
perceived threats of violence. We avoid certain parts of town, add security features to
our homes, and vote for “get tough” laws in order to protect ourselves from violent
offenders. During the first decade of the 21st century, Americans were fighting in Iraq
and Afghanistan and news reports were full of fallen soldiers, car bombings, torture of
prisoners, and beheadings of hostages. In short, whether domestically or internationally,
violence is part and parcel of U.S. life. In fact, Iadicola and Shupe assert that violence is the “overarching problem of our age” and suggest that every social problem is influenced by the problem of violence.52 James Gilligan, a medical doctor who directed the Center for the Study of Violence at Harvard Medical School, put it this way:

The more I learn about other people’s lives, the more I realize that I have yet to hear the history of any family in which there has not been at least one family member who has been overtaken by fatal or life threatening violence, as the perpetrator or the victim—whether the violence takes the form of suicide or homicide, death in combat, death from a drunken or reckless driver, or any other of the many nonnatural forms of death.53

So it’s safe to say that violence is not foreign to us, but rather is something with which we rub shoulders constantly. We know violence through our own lived experiences and the experiences of our family, friends, and neighbors as well as through the media images we view and the games we play.

Figure 1.3  Homicide Rates for White and Black Males and Females, 1980–2008
At a deeper level, this means that our identities as citizens, parents, children, spouses, lovers, friends, teammates, and colleagues are often shaped by violence, at least in part. Who we are as individuals and as human beings is shaped by the culture within which we live. How we define ourselves, the ways in which we relate to others, and our notions of what we stand for and what we believe in are all determined in large part by the influences and experiences of our lives—or, as the great English poet Alfred Lord Tennyson once wrote, “I am a part of all that I have met.” In a similar vein, although a bit less poetically, the sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann suggest, “Identity is a phenomenon that emerges from the dialectic between individual and society.” In short, our life experiences shape who we are. Therefore, if violence is a part of our reality, then it plays a role in molding us as human beings and influences how we understand the world around us. To acknowledge this is to understand that violence is part of who we are and central to knowing ourselves and the lives we lead.

Because of this prevalence and its impact on our lives, some have suggested that Americans have created and embraced a culture of violence. Culture is a nebulous concept that includes values, beliefs, and rules for behavior. Culture also dictates what is expected, what is valued, and what is prohibited. Essentially, then, this argument contends that our history and experiences have resulted in a system of values and beliefs that, to a greater extent than in some other cultures, condones, tolerates, and even
expects a violent response to various and specific situations. Other scholars have further developed this theme by arguing that, instead of a culture of violence in the United States, there are subcultures of violence specific to particular regions or groups. First articulated by the criminologists Wolfgang and Ferracuti, this viewpoint suggests that members of some groups are more likely to rely on violence. As they suggest:

Quick resort to physical combat as a measure of daring, courage, or defense of status appears to be a cultural expectation. When such a cultural response is elicited from an individual engaged in social interplay with others who harbor the same response mechanism, physical assaults, altercations, and violent domestic quarrels that result in homicide are likely to be relatively common.

This argument has been applied to various subcultural groups such as Southerners, young African American males, and others. The South historically has had much higher rates of violence than other regions of the country, and many have suggested that it is a consequence of Southern notions of honor that demand a violent response to certain provocations. Southern culture, in other words, is more violence prone than other regional cultures. Violence, then, is something that appears to be embedded in our values and attitudes, which is why some have suggested that violence is “as American as apple pie.”

Yet, for something that is so much a part of our lives, we remain remarkably ill informed about what violence really is, how and why it is perpetrated, and what its consequences truly are. James Gilligan makes this point when he asserts that “human violence is much more complicated, ambiguous and, most of all, tragic, than is commonly realized or acknowledged.” Much of what we think we know owes as much to myth and stereotype as it does to fact. This shouldn’t be a big surprise since so much of what we think we know is based on what we see on popular television shows and in movies. In fact, up to 95% of Americans cite the mass media as their main source of information on crime and violence. Unfortunately, these images have been shown to be misleading, incomplete, and erroneous. For example, on October 12, 1998, a 22-year-old gang member named Omar Sevilla, also known as “Sugar Bear,” was shot to death as he walked to a drug and alcohol treatment center. On the same day, a German tourist named Horst Fietze was shot and killed while walking with his wife only a few blocks away from the site of the “Sugar Bear” murder. While Sevilla’s death went almost completely unnoticed in the press, Fietze’s killing received a great deal of media attention. Such selective reporting is not unusual. One study of newspaper reporting on murder found that it was the atypical homicide that was reported on most frequently, while the routine type of killing was sometimes not even considered.

Photo 1.2 Referee trying to stop a hockey fight
The organization of this book is the result of an imperfect compromise on a number of different levels. First, of necessity we are not able to examine all of the varied types of violence that exist. While some readers might disagree with our choices, we have had to pick and choose which types to include and which types to exclude, and we feel that our choices provide a broad-based understanding of the varied ways in which violence is often manifested. Second, we recognize that we have not always been able to devote the amount of attention and space to various issues, perspectives, and theories. Many of the individual topics contained in this book have had entire volumes written about them, and it is simply beyond the scope of this book to address all of the relevant issues in the level of detail and depth that some may desire. Third and last, dividing this book into chapters on different types of violence regrettably contributes to the mistaken notion that the kinds of violence discussed in this book are discrete and separate events. However, for the sake of clarity and to conceptually assist the reader, we have chosen to structure the book around chapters that review specific types of violence in detail. The first chapters focus on interpersonal acts of violence, while the later chapters cover collective types of violence. The specific chapters are arranged as follows:

Chapter 2—Explaining Violence: This chapter provides a review of the various biological, psychological, and sociological theories that have explanatory power for violent behavior. Human behavior is complex and is subject to a variety of influences that are captured in the different perspectives we review in this chapter.
Chapter 3—Aiding and Abetting Violence: This chapter comprises a discussion of a number of elements that often are contributors to or correlates of violent behavior. Firearms, drugs, and alcohol are the most obvious of these, but this chapter also explores a number of other correlates, such as certain kinds of group dynamics that contribute to violent acts.

Chapter 4—Assault and Homicide: Since a large percentage of homicides occur as the result of conflict situations, such as fights or arguments, this chapter discusses homicide as the most lethal outcome on a continuum of assaultive violence. The chapter provides a broad discussion of the epidemiology of murder and assault in the United States as well as a contextual discussion of the “assault event” and delineates the interactions that are most likely to lead to homicide. The chapter concludes with a discussion of capital punishment, which is the most severe mechanism of social control for some types of homicide.

Chapter 5—Violence in the Home: This chapter provides a discussion of intimate partner violence, child abuse and neglect, and elder abuse. In addition to noting that all forms of violence occur in the home—including murder, rape, and assault—the chapter also talks about the crime of stalking, which often co-occurs with other intimate partner violence. The chapter concludes by discussing the various policies aimed at preventing violence in the family, including the efficacy of mandatory arrest policies and batterer treatment programs.

Chapter 6—Stranger Danger: This chapter provides a discussion of the stranger-perpetrated assault and homicide and looks at how it differs from similar violence perpetrated by known offenders. In addition, since robbery is more likely to be perpetrated by strangers than known offenders, it also provides an in-depth analysis of robbery in the United States. The chapter relies on official statistics to present the epidemiological overview but also offers insights into the motivations of robbery offenders from qualitative research that has been conducted with robbers themselves.

Chapter 7—Rape and Sexual Assault: This chapter reviews the major trends and patterns of rape and sexual assault. Additionally, it explores what is known about the type of individuals who perpetrate this form of violence and their rationales for doing so. Lastly, this chapter addresses rape in two contexts that rarely receive attention: rape perpetrated in U.S. prisons and rape perpetrated as a means of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Chapter 8—Mob Violence: This chapter explores a number of examples of group violence that are largely spontaneous and involve informal and short-lived social groupings. Riots, lynchings, and vigilantism comprise the three primary types of mob violence reviewed in this chapter, with a number of different case studies reviewed within each category.

Chapter 9—Terrorism: Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Americans have become very aware of and concerned about this particular type of group violence. This chapter begins with a discussion of the difficulties in defining terrorism, followed by a review of the different typologies of terrorist groups based on their motivations. Specific examples of terrorist groups and their acts are also discussed in terms of how they fit in with the typologies and motivations discussed earlier.
Chapter 10—Genocide. Genocide is a term that is increasingly familiar to many, given its apparent prevalence. This chapter provides an overview of the concept, including a number of well-known case studies from recent history, a discussion of the reasons why it is perpetrated, and a summary of its impact on the development and application of international human rights law.

Chapter 11—Toward Violence Prevention. The concluding chapter presents a brief review of some of the costs of violence in order to highlight the need for more effective means of preventing and/or reducing the frequency and severity of violence. A major focus of this chapter stresses the utility of relying on more of a public health approach to the enduring problem of violence that confronts our communities, our society, and our world.

Key Terms

aggression  National Incident Based Reporting System  Supplementary Homicide Reports
brutalization hypothesis  National Youth Survey  Uniform Crime Reporting Program
expressive violence  righteous slaughter
institutional violence  spillover theory
instrumental violence  structural violence
interpersonal violence  subcultures of violence
National Crime Victimization Survey

Discussion Questions

1. Go to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) website, www.fbi.gov/ucr/05cius/about/aboutucr.html, and find a link to its Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program. Here you will find a historical discussion of the program and how the FBI is now implementing a new program called the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS). What advances does the new NIBRS reporting system have compared with the older UCR program? Will the new system address problems of underreporting in general? Will it still be necessary to have other measures of victimization, like the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)? Why or why not?

2. Spend a few evenings watching the news on a local television network. Monitor how the network covers incidents of violence, both locally and nationally. In your opinion, do you think it has captured the reality of violence in your area or in the nation? What types of violence are most likely to be portrayed? What types of victims and offenders are most likely to be represented?

3. Without looking back at the definitions of violence presented in this chapter, come up with your own definition of interpersonal violence. What elements must a definition have to be useful? Now try your hand at defining genocide. What elements do you believe are necessary to label a case of mass killing as genocide? Now list the ways in which you would measure two types of violence. Be specific. If you are going to use a survey, what types of questions would you ask respondents?