

# Conflict Between the Sexes: Strategic Interference and the Evocation of Anger and Upset

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Advances an evolution-based model of strategic conflict between men and women. Conflict is predicted to occur whenever the reproductive strategy adopted by one sex interferes with that adopted by the opposite sex. Three empirical studies tested hypotheses based on this model. Study 1 ( $N = 528$ ) examined sex differences in sources of anger and upset (e.g., about sexual aggressiveness or withholding) among 2 samples of Ss differing in age and marital status. Study 2 ( $N = 60$ ) assessed the perceived magnitude of upset each sex would experience when confronted by each source. Study 3 ( $N = 214$ ) tested predictions within married couples about sex differences in sources of marital and sexual dissatisfaction. These studies provide modest support for the strategic conflict model and implicate the negative emotions of anger and upset as proximate mechanisms that alert men and women to strategic interference. The diversity of upset elicitors discovered here, such as being condescending, possessive, neglecting, abusive, inconsiderate, moody, and self-centered, point to the limitations of this evolutionary model and the need to develop more comprehensive models of conflict between the sexes.

Human conflict is a ubiquitous feature of social interaction, and it occurs in many forms. At the level of nations, wars pervade human history. At the level of groups, politics divide interest groups within nations, and gang fights permeate inner cities. Within families, child abuse and spouse abuse show alarming base rates. At the individual level, particularly among men, episodes of physical aggression sometimes escalate to homicide (Daly & Wilson, 1988). The prevalence and potency of conflict have provoked vigorous research directed at origins and causal conditions (e.g., Patterson, 1975; Peterson, 1983).

Not all conflict, however, is violent. Whenever the interests of two interacting individuals fail to coincide, there is potential for conflict. From the vantage point of evolutionary biology, interests of individuals typically reduce to reproductive interests (e.g., Alexander, 1979; Hamilton, 1964). Conflict between individuals is predicted to occur to the degree that reproductive interests depart. Conflict is expected among unrelated members of the same sex, for example, because they frequently compete for access to the same choice resources such as food, status, and mating opportunities. Conflict during certain periods is expected between parents and their children and between siblings because in these relationships half of the genetic interests are distinct (Trivers, 1974).

## Strategic Conflict Model

Conflict is also expected between men and women, but not just because they typically share no genes by common descent. In human evolutionary history, asymmetries with respect to reproduction have led men and women to pursue different reproductive strategies (Trivers, 1972). These strategies sometimes conflict with one another. Conflict between men and women is predicted to occur whenever the pursuit of one reproductive strategy interferes with the pursuit of another strategy. Despite its theoretical importance and everyday prevalence, little empirical work has been conducted with humans on precisely what men and women actually do that leads to conflict. That is the focus of this article.

Trivers's (1972) theory of parental investment and sexual selection provides a basis for articulating the differences between male and female reproductive strategies and consequently provides a conceptual basis for specific predictions about the sorts of conflict that will occur between males and females. Trivers (1972) posited that the relative parental investment of males and females in their offspring profoundly influences sexual selection (cf. Bateman, 1948). In humans and other mammals, male investment tends to be smaller than female investment (R. A. Fisher, 1930; Trivers, 1972; Williams, 1975). Mammalian fertilization, gestation, and placentation occur internally in females. Males do not incur the direct costs associated with these forms of parental investment. A copulation that requires minimal male investment can produce an obligatory 9-month investment by the female that is costly in time, energy, resources, and foreclosed alternatives.

The sex investing more in the offspring (typically but not always the female among mammals) will be selected to exert stronger preferences about mating partners (Trivers, 1972). In this context, female reproductive strategy is expected, relative to male strategy, to be more discriminating, involving with-

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holding of actual mating until sufficient resources have been invested or promised by the male or until the "best" male (variously defined; see Partridge & Halliday, 1984) is found. Indiscriminate copulation tends to be costly for females, who are hypothesized to have evolved a strategy of high parental investment in relatively few offspring.

Human males, in contrast, are predicted to have evolved an alternative reproductive strategy. The reproductive potential as well as the reproductive variance of men is higher than that of women (Daly & Wilson, 1983). In principle, a single man could inseminate hundreds of women and might achieve great reproductive success by doing so. Because the costs of indiscriminate copulation historically have been less severe and the reproductive benefits much greater for men than for women, men are predicted to have evolved lower thresholds for mating attempts. Thus, male reproductive strategy is hypothesized to be more indiscriminate, sexually aggressive, and wanton (Daly & Wilson, 1983; Dawkins, 1976; Trivers, 1972). Evidence that documents these sex differences in reproductive strategy has been steadily accruing (e.g., Buss, 1988a, 1988b; Daly & Wilson, 1983; Symons, 1979).

These fundamental differences between human males and females in reproductive strategy lead to two specific predictions about the sorts of intersexual conflict that will develop: (a) Women will be upset and angered by features of male reproductive strategy that conflict with their own, namely, the male tendency for greater sexual assertiveness or aggressiveness (e.g., initiating sexual advances sooner, more frequently, more persistently, more aggressively, or with more partners than the woman); and (b) men, in contrast, will be upset and angered by features of female reproductive strategy that conflict with their own—those involving selectively withholding or delaying of consummation opportunities (e.g., declining to have sex, desiring it less frequently, or requiring more stringent external conditions to be met prior to consummation).

Interestingly, there is one set of conditions in which conflict between men and women is predicted theoretically to be minimal or absent (Alexander, 1987, p. 70). These conditions involve monogamous pairs who are investing parentally in mutually produced offspring and who have committed themselves to lifetime monogamy. The interests of men and women approach identity under these conditions to the extent that (a) infidelity is unlikely, too costly, or simply not possible and (b) opportunities for differential diversion of resources to genetic relatives are absent. These conditions should produce maximal cooperation and minimal conflict.

These conceptual considerations lead to a further prediction. Presumptively monogamous pairs, such as legally married couples, should show less conflict of the sort predicted than should male-female mating pairs who have not yet committed themselves to a legally monogamous pair-bond. This prediction would not obtain, however, if either of the two conditions specified in the previous paragraph are not met. Among humans, these conditions are regularly violated. Approximately 80% of all human societies practice polygyny, permitting men to take multiple wives (Ford & Beach, 1951; Murdock, 1967). Even in presumptively monogamous societies such as ours, divorce and serial marriages are common. Finally, estimates of the rate of adultery among married couples range from 26% to 70% for

women and from 33% to 75% for men (Daly & Wilson, 1983; H. Fisher, 1987; Hite, 1987; Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948, 1953; Symons, 1979). These data suggest that lifetime monogamy is often more presumptive than real.

### Negative Emotions Signal Strategic Interference

The following series of studies, designed to test predictions based on the strategic conflict model, was guided by Mandler's (1975, 1984) theory of emotions and Berscheid's (1983) application of that theory to close relationships. According to Mandler's (1975) theory, emotion is experienced whenever there is interruption or interference with a goal-directed sequence of activities. Mandler (1984) placed his interference-emotion theory in adaptive or evolutionary context. Specifically, he proposed that emotions consequent to interruption serve both cognitive and behavioral functions. Emotions draw attention to important classes of events, single out those events for storage and retrieval, and direct new forms of behavior.

Both Mandler (1975, 1984) and Berscheid (1983) discussed these emotional consequences in the context of highly organized and immediate behavioral sequences. The present formulation extends that theory to encompass strategic interference on a larger time scale. In particular, strategic interference is hypothesized to evoke the emotions of anger and upset, whether or not a highly organized behavioral sequence is currently interrupted. The emotions of anger and upset are hypothesized to serve as proximate mechanisms that have evolved to alert human males and females to strategic interference and that cause them to act to reduce that interference. Thus, following Mandler's formulation, conflict resulting from strategic interference produces the emotions of anger and upset that serve adaptive functions.

Given these conceptual considerations, three empirical studies were designed to identify major sources of conflict between men and women and to test the preceding predictions. Because little knowledge currently exists about what men and women actually do that angers and upsets one another, a broad-gauge research strategy was pursued. It was anticipated that this approach would yield data about a range of sources of conflict, in addition to those posited by the conceptual framework of conflicting reproductive strategies.

### Preliminary Study: Identifying Intersexual Sources of Anger and Upset

The goal of the preliminary study was to identify and domain-sample the range and diversity of acts that men and women perform that upset and anger each other. Toward this end, I developed an act nomination procedure. This procedure was designed to capitalize on the wide-ranging upset elicitors experienced by many individuals, rather than relying on the intuitions of a single investigator.

### Method

*Subjects.* Subjects for this study were 107 undergraduates, 51 men and 56 women, enrolled in a large midwestern university in the United States. Participation in this study partially fulfilled an experimental requirement for a psychology course.

*Nominations of sources of upset.* Each subject received a sheet of paper, titled "Conflict Between Men and Women," that requested information about age and sex and contained the following instructional set:

In this study, we are interested in the specific things that males [females] do which *upset, irritate, hurt, or anger* females [males], and the things that females [males] do which *upset, irritate, hurt, or anger* males [females]. We are interested in specific acts or behaviors. Someone should be able to read your act nomination, and answer the following questions: Have you ever performed this act? If so, how often have you performed it? In the following spaces, write down four acts or behaviors that *men you know* have performed which have *upset, hurt, irritated, or angered* a woman. . . . Now write down 4 acts or behaviors that *women you know* have performed which have *upset, hurt, angered, or irritated* a man.

Lines were provided on which subjects recorded their nominations.

*Development of sources of upset instrument.* After identifying a large and diverse set of sources of anger and upset, the next step was to create an instrument that could be used to assess male-female conflict in subsequent studies. Toward this end, I eliminated obvious redundancies. This elimination process erred toward over inclusion in the sense that acts that showed even partial distinctiveness (e.g., "He hit me," "He slapped me") were retained to maximize the comprehensiveness of coverage. After this elimination process, 147 distinct sources of upset remained. Sample acts are "He left the toilet seat up," "She drank too much alcohol," "He flirted with another woman," "She went out with another man," "He called me a bitch," "She played dumb," "He made fun of my body," "She tried to force sex acts on me," "He insulted my intelligence," "She smoked too much," "He hid all his emotions to act tough," and "She cut me down in front of others."

I created two versions of the instrument, one to be completed by men and the other by women. The parallel forms were identical, except with respect to the third-person pronouns. Thus, the version to be completed by men contained the 147 sources of upset starting with "She . . .," whereas the women's version started with "He . . ."

### Study 1: Assessment of Frequencies of Upset Elicitors

The goals of Study 1 were to (a) identify through factor analysis major clusters of intersexual sources of anger and upset, (b) assess reported performance frequencies of each of these major clusters, (c) test the specific hypotheses about sex differences in sources of upset, and (d) test the hypothesis that conflict of the sort predicted will be reduced among presumptively monogamously pair-bonded mates when contrasted with male-female relations prior to marriage.

### Method

*Undergraduate subjects.* Subjects were 317 undergraduates, 175 men and 142 women, who had been involved in a heterosexual relationship within the past year. Subjects were recruited from an introductory psychology class and received experimental credit for participating. In addition to the sources of irritation or upset instrument, subjects answered several questions about the person with whom they had a relationship: the person's initials, his or her age, how many months they had been involved with the person, the probability that they would be with the person in a year, and how close their relationship was on a 1-7 scale.

*Newlywed subjects.* A second sample consisted of 214 individuals who had been married no longer than 1 year. This requirement was imposed in part as an attempt to identify a sample composed of presumptively monogamous pairs. Subjects were obtained through public records of marriage licenses issued within a large county.

*Sources of irritation or upset.* Both samples completed the instru-

ment derived from the preliminary study. The following instructional set was used:

Below is a list of things that women [men] sometimes do that irritate, annoy, anger, or upset the man [women] they are involved with. Please place an "X" next to those acts that the woman [man] you have been involved with has performed *within the past year* that have irritated, annoyed, angered, or upset you.

The instructional set was identical for the undergraduate and newlywed samples, except that the newlywed instructional set made specific reference to the husband or wife rather than the man or woman with whom the subjects were involved. Following this instructional set were listed the 147 acts identified in the preliminary study, with a space next to each in which subjects recorded their responses. To identify possible omissions from the preliminary study, five blank spaces were provided at the end of the instrument in which subjects could record any acts that angered or upset them that were not contained within the set of 147.

### Results

*Factor analysis of upset elicitors.* I conducted a principal-components analysis on the 147 upset elicitors, following standard scoring to achieve unit weighting. The ratio of subjects to variables (3.6:1) was adequate for the purpose of data reduction.<sup>1</sup> Principal-components analysis was followed by varimax rotation. Although 48 factors emerged with eigenvalues of greater than 1.00, the varimax solution failed to converge using this large number of factors. A plot of the eigenvalues showed break at 15 factors (scree test), with eigenvalues for the first 15 factors exceeding 1.98. The varimax solution, rotating 15 factors, converged in 13 iterations. Thus, I retained the first 15 factors for further analysis. The highest-loading items for each of the 15 factors, along with factor loadings, are shown in Table 1 in the order of variance accounted for.

The Condensing factor involves belittling the other, placing self on a superior plane, and an element of sexism. The Possessive-Jealous-Dependent factor contains elements of clinginess and monopolization of partner's time and attention. The Neglecting-Rejecting-Unreliable factor is in several respects the opposite of the Possessive-Jealous-Dependent factor. Instead of the partner's demanding too much time, the upset is about the partner spending too little time with the subject, as well as ignoring feelings and failing to make contact when previously arranged.

The Abusive factor is interesting in that it contains elements of both verbal abuse (calling nasty names) and physical abuse (slapping, spitting, hitting), suggesting that these forms of abuse covary. The Unfaithful factor is homogeneous with respect to seeing members of the opposite sex intimately. Interestingly, however, this factor contains the act of deception "He/she lied to me," which does not contain a specific referent with respect to the content of the lie.

The Inconsiderate factor contains a variety of specific acts,

<sup>1</sup> I use factor analysis here as a data reduction tool to avoid cumbersome presentation for each of the 147 upset elicitors separately. Factor analysis provides a method for efficient presentation of data, and I make no claims that this represents the definitive structure of the conflict data.

Table 1  
Factor Loadings for First 15 Factors of Upset Elicitors

Factor and act	Factor loading	Factor and act	Factor loading
Condescending		Physically Self-absorbed ( <i>continued</i> )	
He/she placed more value on his/her opinions because he/she was a man/woman.	.60	He/she acted like a "women's lib" person.	.41
He/she tried to act like he/she was better than me.	.59	He/she talked too much.	.40
He/she treated me like I was stupid or inferior.	.55	Moody	
He/she made me feel inferior.	.51	He/she was moody.	.57
He/she acted condescending toward me.	.50	He/she acted "bitchy."	.48
Possessive-Jealous-Dependent		He/she planned everything for me.	.43
He/she was too possessive of me.	.75	He/she flirted with another woman/man.	.40
He/she acted too dependent on me.	.65	He/she took too long to get ready.	.37
He/she demanded too much attention.	.63	Sexually Withholding-Rejecting	
He/she demanded too much of my time.	.62	He/she refused to have sex with me.	.72
He/she acted jealous.	.62	He/she said "no" about having sex.	.68
Neglecting-Rejecting-Unreliable		He/she told me that he/she was not interested in my sexual advances.	.56
He/she was unreliable.	.52	He/she was a tease sexually.	.47
He/she would not spend enough time with me.	.49	He/she led me on, then turned me off.	.35
He/she did not tell me that he/she loved me.	.47	Sexualizes Others	
He/she ignored my feelings.	.47	He/she talked about how good-looking another woman/man was.	.54
He/she did not call me when he/she said he/she would.	.47	He/she idolized a member of the opposite sex who appeared on TV.	.49
Abusive		He/she talked about women/men as if they were sex objects.	.47
He/she slapped me.	.66	Abuses Alcohol-Emotionally Constricted	
He/she spit on me.	.58	He/she drank too much alcohol.	.60
He/she hit me.	.54	He/she got drunk.	.51
He/she called me nasty names.	.49	He/she smoked too much.	.39
He/she verbally abused me.	.42	He/she hid all his/her emotions to act tough.	.37
Unfaithful		Disheveled	
He/she saw someone else intimately.	.74	He/she did not dress well.	.68
He/she had sex with another woman/man.	.70	He/she did not take care of his/her appearance.	.68
He/she was unfaithful to me.	.65	He/she did not groom him/herself well.	.67
He/she went out with another woman/man.	.65	Insulting of Partner's Appearance	
He/she lied to me.	.46	He/she told me I was ugly.	.65
Inconsiderate		He/she insulted my appearance.	.61
He/she left the toilet seat up/down.	.58	He/she touched my body without my permission.	.46
He/she did not help clean up.	.55	Sexually Aggressive	
He/she burped or belched loudly.	.53	He/she used me for sexual purposes.	.65
He/she yelled at me.	.45	He/she tried to force sex acts on me.	.50
He/she teased me about how long it took me to get dressed.	.45	He/she demanded sexual relations.	.42
Physically Self-absorbed		He/she forced me to have sex.	.39
He/she fussed too much with his/her appearance.	.61	Self-centered	
He/she focused too much on his/her face and hair.	.58	He/she was self-centered.	.39
He/she spent too much money on clothes.	.51	He/she acted selfishly.	.40

including leaving the toilet seat up or down, failing to help with chores, and burping loudly. The label *Moody* does not adequately capture the complex and heterogeneous nature of the ninth factor. Although upset about partner's moodiness shows the highest factor loading, there are also complaints about bitchiness, planning everything for the complainer, flirting with others, and taking too much time to get ready. This factor appears to capture the negative elements of a stereotypically feminine behavior style.

Three factors, in addition to the Unfaithful factor, contain explicitly sexual content. Sexually Withholding involves upset about the partner's refusal to have sex, lack of interest in sex, and declining to follow through on initial apparent sexual interest. Sexualizes Others involves heterosexual attention to TV

personalities and to other members of the opposite sex in general and treatment of members of the opposite sex as sex objects. The Sexually Aggressive factor includes the acts of forcing and demanding sex, as well as using the partner for sexual purposes. Thus, of the four factors with sexual content, two concern extra-pair orientation (Infidelity and Sexualizing Others), and two involve intra-pair upset over sexual rejection and intrusion.

The Abuses Alcohol-Emotionally Constricted factor contains an interesting blend of substance abuse—both alcohol and cigarettes—and upset about constriction and release of emotions. The acts of hiding emotions and not showing one's true feelings signal constriction, whereas the act "He/she used drinking as an excuse to talk nasty" (factor loading of .34) im-

Table 2  
Alpha Reliability Coefficients for 15 Upset Composites

Upset elicitors	No. of items	Under-graduates	Newlyweds
Condescending	20	.82	.85
Possessive-Jealous-Dependent	14	.84	.81
Neglecting-Rejecting-Unreliable	15	.77	.66
Abusive	15	.72	.83
Unfaithful	10	.77	.15
Inconsiderate	9	.55	.70
Physically Self-absorbed	10	.69	.66
Moody	8	.58	.63
Sexually Withholding	7	.67	.69
Sexualizes Others	3	.59	.41
Abuses Alcohol-Emotionally constricted	7	.41	.64
Disheveled	3	.76	.69
Insulting of Appearance	3	.22	.68
Sexually Aggressive	4	.53	.30
Self-centered	2	.63	.64

plies aggressive release of previously constricted emotions under inebriated conditions.

Three factors deal explicitly with upset about physical appearance issues. The Physically Self-absorbed factor includes complaints about the partner fussing too much with appearance, focusing too much on hair and face, and spending too much money on clothes. There are also the curious behaviors of acting like a "women's lib" person and talking too much, which have moderate factor loadings on the physical absorption factor. The Disheveled factor seems to concern upset about the opposite of physical self-absorption, namely, inattention to appearance, dress, and grooming. The Insulting of Appearance factor deals with upset about partner's criticism of appearance. Curiously, the act "touched my body without my permission" also had a moderate factor loading. Self-Centered formed the 15th factor and contains two acts that involve egocentricity and selfishness.

*Reliabilities of composites based on factor loadings.* To obtain reliable indexes of each factor, the highest loading acts within each factor were summed using unit weighting. The alpha reliability coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) for each factor are shown in Table 2 for the undergraduate and newlywed samples separately. Those that are low for a particular sample are revealing. The Unfaithful composite shows reasonably high reliability for the undergraduate sample, but extremely low reliability for the newlywed sample. This finding becomes interpretable in light of the fact that the incidence of reported unfaithfulness among newlyweds is exceptionally low (about 2%), and the variance on this composite for the newlyweds is less than one third of the variance for the undergraduates. The same applies for Sexualizes Others and Sexually Intrusive, both of which show low base rates and low variance for the newlywed samples. In contrast, the only composite showing low internal consistency reliability for the undergraduate sample is Insulting of Appearance,

which shows relatively low base rates and variance for this sample.

*Base rates and sex differences in upset elicitors.* I then used these 15 composites to test the hypotheses about sex differences. The clearest tests of the sex-differentiated hypotheses advanced earlier pertain to Sexual Aggressiveness (which women were predicted to complain more about, as it represents a feature of hypothesized male reproductive strategy) and Sexual Withholding (which men were hypothesized to complain more about, as it represents a feature of the hypothesized female reproductive strategy).

A third hypothesis might involve the Unfaithful factor. However, I predicted no sex differences for this upset elicitor for two reasons—one conceptual and one empirical. Conceptually, unfaithfulness by a partner does indeed threaten a mate's potential resources. If a female partner is unfaithful, a man's probability of paternity is lowered (Daly & Wilson, 1983; Dickemann, 1981). If a male partner is unfaithful, the woman risks the diversion of his resources away from herself and her (potential) offspring (Buss, 1988b). Thus, on conceptual grounds, men and women are both predicted to become upset at a partner's unfaithfulness, and there are no clear conceptual grounds for predicting that one vector will be stronger than the other.

Both emotional and behavioral mechanisms have been proposed in the evolutionary literature to have evolved to guard against unfaithfulness by a partner. Daly, Wilson, and Weghorst (1982) proposed that sexual jealousy is an emotional mechanism of mate guarding, whereas Buss (1988b) has identified a set of 19 behavioral tactics of mate guarding. Empirical studies on these mechanisms, however, have revealed no sex differences in either jealousy or the frequency of mate retention tactics (Buss, 1988b). Conceptual and empirical considerations, therefore, suggest that unfaithfulness by a partner would be equally upsetting for men and women, but for different ultimate reasons.

I conducted a 2 (male, female)  $\times$  2 (newlywed, undergraduate) analysis of variance (ANOVA) for each of the 15 composites.<sup>2</sup> Table 3 shows the main effects for sex of target of the complaint, Table 4 the main effects for sample, and Table 5 the interactions between sex of target of complaint and sample.

With respect to the Sexual Aggressiveness factor hypothesized to upset and anger women, no significant sex difference emerged. At the level of specific acts, however, undergraduate women reported more anger and upset about men demanding intimacy ( $t = 2.08, p < .039$ , two-tailed) and touching their bodies without their permission ( $t = 2.71, p < .007$ , two-tailed). It should be noted that only one of the four acts in the Sexually Aggressive factor yielded this difference, and the "touching their bodies" act comes from another factor. One interpretation is that the extremely strong sexually aggressive acts such as trying to force sex acts on another are performed infrequently, as re-

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that in this design there is the possibility of dependence in the male subjects' and female subjects' data for the newlywed sample. Because members of couples tend to be similar to each another owing to such processes as assortative mating (Buss, 1985), this dependence is likely to work against the central hypotheses by causing the sexes in this sample to be more alike than they would otherwise be in the general population.

Table 3  
Base Rates and Sex Differences in Upset Elicitors

Upset elicitor	Sex of target of complaint				F	p
	Male		Female			
	M	SD	M	SD		
Condescending	.14	.17	.08	.12	19.03	.000
Possessive– Jealous– Dependent	.17	.22	.19	.20	2.15	ns
Neglecting– Rejecting– Unreliable	.16	.17	.11	.15	17.15	.000
Abusive	.05	.10	.06	.12	0.41	ns
Unfaithful	.06	.12	.07	.15	1.28	ns
Inconsiderate	.23	.24	.09	.12	109.82	.000
Physically Self- absorbed	.07	.11	.14	.18	28.46	.000
Moody	.19	.19	.30	.23	37.13	.000
Sexually Withholding	.06	.14	.14	.19	28.24	.000
Sexualizes Others	.12	.24	.15	.23	3.62	ns
Abuses Alcohol– Emotionally Constricted	.16	.17	.13	.16	4.55	.033
Disheveled	.07	.21	.05	.17	2.93	ns
Insulting of Appearance	.04	.13	.02	.09	5.36	.021
Sexually Aggressive	.03	.11	.02	.10	0.41	ns
Self-centered	.21	.35	.18	.32	1.14	ns
Total	.12	.08	.11	.09	0.52	ns

Note. N = 528.

flected in the low base rates (3% for men and 2% for women). The milder acts of demanding intimacy and touching body without permission show base rates of 16% and 7%, respectively, for undergraduate and newlywed men, and corresponding base rates of 8% and 1% for undergraduate and newlywed women. These results provide some support for the hypothesis that men upset women with sexual assertiveness, but only among the undergraduate sample.

The second hypothesis, that men will express anger and upset about the features of female reproductive strategy involving sexual withholding and rejection was strongly confirmed in both the undergraduate and newlywed samples. This confirmation was also seen at the level of specific acts such as “She refused to have sex with me,” “She told me she was not interested in my sexual advances,” and “She said ‘no’ about having sex.” All these acts showed significant sex differences in the predicted direction for both the undergraduate and newlywed samples.

Several strong sex differences emerged for which I made no predictions. Across both samples, men expressed upset about women being moody and physically self-absorbed. Women expressed anger and upset more than did men about tendencies toward being condescending, inconsiderate, neglecting or rejecting, abusive of alcohol, and emotionally constricted. The

sexes did not differ, however, in the total number of upsets experienced across all sources.

*Differences between newlywed and undergraduate samples.* Several upset elicitors showed sample differences that transcended sex (Table 4). Specifically, the undergraduates expressed upset and anger about their partner being unfaithful, possessive, neglecting, abusive of alcohol, sexually aggressive, and sexualizing of others more than did their newlywed counterparts. These results support the hypothesis that there will be reduced sexual conflict with presumptively increased-commitment monogamous pair-bonds. In contrast, the married sample showed substantially higher base rates of upset about their partner being abusive, inconsiderate, moody, and disheveled.

*Interactions between sex and marital status.* Table 5 shows the five significant interactions between sex and marital status. The Possessive–Dependent cluster is performed less frequently by newlywed men than by any of the other three groups. In contrast, these newlywed men elicited far more complaints from their partners about being inconsiderate and disheveled than did any of the other subgroups. The newlywed women differed from the other three subgroups in eliciting less upset due to alcohol abuse or emotional constriction and being neglecting or rejecting.

Table 4  
Base Rates and Sample Differences in Upset Elicitors

Upset elicitor	Newlyweds (N = 211)		Under- graduates (N = 317)		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Condescending	.11	.16	.11	.15	0.09	ns
Possessive– Jealous– Dependent	.15	.18	.20	.23	9.33	.002
Neglecting– Rejecting– Unreliable	.10	.13	.16	.18	17.20	.000
Abusive	.07	.14	.04	.09	10.62	.001
Unfaithful	.02	.05	.10	.16	43.31	.000
Inconsiderate	.27	.24	.10	.14	167.19	.000
Physically Self- absorbed	.11	.15	.10	.15	0.25	ns
Moody	.29	.23	.21	.20	16.11	.000
Sexually Withholding	.10	.17	.10	.17	0.04	ns
Sexualizes Others	.08	.19	.17	.27	16.59	.000
Abuses Alcohol– Emotionally Constricted	.12	.17	.16	.16	6.50	.011
Disheveled	.09	.22	.05	.17	6.07	.014
Insulting of Appearance	.04	.14	.03	.10	0.99	ns
Sexually Aggressive	.01	.07	.04	.12	6.05	.014
Self-centered	.18	.33	.20	.34	0.30	ns
Total	.12	.09	.12	.08	0.02	ns

Note. N = 528.

Table 5  
Significant Interactions Between Sex and Marital  
Status of Target of Complaint

Source of upset	Sample		F	p
	Newly-wed	Under-graduate		
Possessive-Jealous-Dependent				
Male	.09	.22	19.59	.000
Female	.21	.18		
Neglecting-Rejecting-Unreliable				
Male	.15	.17	7.24	.007
Female	.05	.15		
Inconsiderate				
Male	.41	.12	59.94	.000
Female	.13	.06		
Abuses Alcohol-Emotionally Constricted				
Male	.16	.16	5.23	.05
Female	.09	.16		
Disheveled				
Male	.12	.05	4.02	.05
Female	.05	.04		

Note. Male and female refer to the sex of the person who has elicited the upset in their partner.

## Discussion

This study, combined with the preliminary study, provides a rich depiction of the diverse upsetting actions that one sex can inflict on the other. Because I used factor analysis primarily as a technique for efficient data reduction and presentation, further research is needed to document the definitive structure of the major sources of upset. Nonetheless, the present results provide a substantive basis for future research on conflict between the sexes, and suggest that a comprehensive model of intersexual conflict will have to account for perhaps a dozen or more major sources of upset.

Of the two major hypotheses derived from the strategic conflict model, I found strong support for the prediction of men's upset and anger about women's withholding of sex. This hypothesis was confirmed in both the undergraduate and newly-wed samples. In contrast, the hypothesis that women would be upset and angered by the hypothesized feature of male reproductive strategy involving sexual aggressiveness received partial confirmation at the act level in the undergraduate sample, but no support at the composite level.

In addition to these basic findings, several important sex differences emerged about which no a priori hypotheses had been advanced. Women showed greater upset about their male partner's inconsiderate, neglecting, and condescending behavior. Men in both samples expressed greater upset about female moodiness and physical self-absorption. The undergraduate sample showed greater upset about the unfaithfulness and sexualization of others by their partners. The married men and women were more upset than were the undergraduates about their partner's abusive, inconsiderate, moody, and disheveled behavior.

Overall, these results provide only partial support for the the-

ory of conflict between the sexes on the basis of conflicting reproductive strategies. In addition, they suggest that the transition from dating relationships to marital relationships of substantial commitment results in a lowering of extra-pair sexual orientation, both in sexualizing others and in reported extra-pair matings. These results must be qualified by the fact that the first year of marriage represents a special stage within relationships, and the degree of monogamous commitment may not last as these marriages progress (cf. Daly & Wilson, 1983; H. Fisher, 1987; Hite, 1987; Kinsey et al., 1948; Symons, 1979). The samples also differ in age as well as marital status, and the independent contributions of these variables cannot be evaluated in this study. Finally, these results are limited in assessing incidence of anger and upset elicitors without assessing their importance. This was the major purpose of Study 2.

## Study 2: Assessments of Magnitude of Upset

The goals of Study 2 were to assess the perceived magnitude of upset and anger associated with each of the 147 upset elicitors and, in doing so, to provide an independent test of the central hypotheses about strategic conflict. The specific predictions were that (a) sexual aggressiveness will be more upsetting to women than to men, and (b) a partner's withholding of sex or rejecting sexual advances will be more upsetting to men than to women. Conflict between the sexes about features of the opposite sex's reproductive strategy should be reflected not only in the incidence of complaints about those features, but also in the magnitude of upset associated with those features.

## Method

**Subjects.** Subjects were 30 male and 30 female undergraduates who participated in this study as part of experimental credit for a psychology course. None of these subjects participated in Study 1.

**Judgments about magnitude of upset.** Subjects made judgments about the magnitude of upset that would be evoked by each of the 147 acts used in Study 1. The instructional set was as follows:

Below is a list of things that men [women] sometimes do that irritate, annoy, anger, or upset the women [men] they are involved with. We are interested in how irritating, annoying, and upsetting each act is. In other words, if a man [woman] performed the act, how much would it be likely to irritate, annoy, anger, and upset the woman [man] that he [she] was involved with. Use this 7-point scale: a "7" means that the act would be *extremely* irritating, annoying, or upsetting; a "1" means that the act would be only *slightly* irritating, annoying, or upsetting; a "4" means that the act would be *moderately* irritating, annoying, or upsetting. Use intermediate numbers for intermediate judgments. *If the act would not be irritating, annoying, or upsetting at all, write in a "0".*

Following this instructional set were the 147 upset elicitors.

**Design.** The design of the study was  $2 \times 2$ , with two levels of sex of rater (male, female) and two levels of sex of actor (person performing act that was upsetting). Fifteen subjects occupied each of the four cells of the  $2 \times 2$  design. This design permits analysis of main effects due to sex of actor (about which the main hypotheses were formulated), main effects due to sex of rater, and the interactions.

## Results

**Reliability of judgments.** I computed alpha reliability coefficients for each of the four cells of the matrix, as well as for

the total set of judgments. The alpha reliability coefficient for the 30 judges' ratings of male actors is .95. The corresponding alpha for female actors is .94. Male and female raters showed no differences in reliability of judgments, achieving an alpha of .94 in each case. Overall, the composite reliability of the 60 judges showed an alpha coefficient of .97. Thus, there was substantial composite agreement about which acts were more and less upsetting. I also computed alpha reliabilities for each of the 15 composites, as shown in Table 6. These range from .92 to .43, with a mean of .77.

*Main effects due to sex of actor.* I performed ANOVAs using sex of rater, sex of actor, and the interaction term for each of the 15 composites separately. Main effects for sex of actor are shown in Table 6. I found strong support for the central hypotheses. Sexual Aggressiveness was judged to be far more upsetting when performed by a man than by a woman. This effect is seen as especially prominent in the following acts, each of which showed the predicted sex difference due to actor in degree of upset: "He demanded intimacy," "He used me for sexual purposes," "He talked about women as if they were sex objects," "He demanded sexual relations," "He touched my body without my permission," "He tried to force me to have sex," and "He tried to force sex acts on me."

Sexual Rejection or Withholding was judged to be far more upsetting when performed by a woman than by a man. This effect is especially powerful for the acts "She was a tease sexually," "She said 'no' about having sex," and "She led me on, then turned me off." All of these individual acts were judged to be more upsetting for men when performed by a woman than for women when performed by a man. These effects occurred for both male and female judges and thus transcend the perceptions of the sexes. Thus, these data confirm both central hypotheses about reproductive strategy conflict.

I found two additional unanticipated main effects. Moodiness was judged to be more upsetting when displayed by a woman. In contrast, Insulting of Appearance was judged to be far more upsetting when perpetrated by a man than by a woman.

*Main effects due to sex of judge.* Results from the 15 analyses of variance also showed six significant effects due to sex of the judge. No specific predictions about sex of judge had been advanced. For all six significant effects, female judges perceived the following act composites to be more upsetting than did male judges: Condescending, Possessive-Jealous-Dependent, Abusive, Physically Self-absorbed, Insulting of Appearance, and Sexually Aggressive. For none of the 15 factors did men judge the sources of conflict to be more upsetting than did women. Indeed, a total score, based on unit weighting of all 147 sources of conflict, showed that women in this sample judged conflict to be generally more upsetting than did the men ( $F = 8.24$ ,  $p < .006$ ).

*Interactions between sex of actor and sex of judge.* I obtained 2 significant interactions from the 15 computed. Although these interactions were not predicted in advance, they are presented for completeness and because they are particularly interesting. The cell means and interaction statistics are shown in Table 7. The first interaction occurred for the Possessive-Jealous-Dependent composite. Female raters apparently believe that when women perform Possessive-Jealous-Dependent acts, it is espe-

cially upsetting to the men with whom they are involved. In contrast, male raters apparently believe that when women perform these acts, it is not particularly upsetting to the men with whom they are involved.

The second significant interaction occurred for the Sexually Aggressive composite. Female judges appear to believe that when men perform sexually aggressive acts, it is extremely upsetting to the women with whom they are involved. Indeed, the cell mean for female judgments of the degree of upset when men perform sexually aggressive acts is 6.47 on a 7-point scale, which exceeds any other cell mean for any combination of sex of rater and sex of actor. In contrast, male judges apparently believe that when women perform sexually aggressive acts, it is not particularly upsetting to their male partners—a cell mean of only 3.02, which is below the midpoint of the 7-point scale.

## Discussion

Results from Study 2 provide independent support for the central hypotheses on the basis of conflicting reproductive strategies. Panels of judges perceive that Sexual Aggressiveness, a hypothesized feature of the male reproductive strategy, is far more upsetting for women when performed by men than for men when performed by women. These judges also perceive that Sexual Withholding and Rejection, a hypothesized feature of female reproductive strategy, is far more upsetting to men when performed by women than for women when performed by men. These results suggest that conflict generated by different reproductive strategies is reflected not simply in the frequency with which the upset elicitors are performed, but also in the magnitude of upset apparently generated by them.

### Study 3: Consequences of Anger and Upset in Married Couples—Marital and Sexual Dissatisfaction

The main goal of Study 3 was to examine the consequences of each of the 15 major sources of upset for an important set of life outcomes: marital dissatisfaction and sexual dissatisfaction. I made two predictions on the basis of the two central hypotheses advanced earlier: (a) Male dissatisfaction was predicted to be associated with the female spouse withholding sex, and (b) female dissatisfaction was predicted to be associated with the male spouse being sexually aggressive. Sex differences in sources of dissatisfaction were thus predicted to be linked with manifestations of sex differences in reproductive strategies.

## Method

*Subjects.* Subjects were the 214 individuals constituting the 107 newlywed couples who participated in Study 1.

*Marital satisfaction questionnaire.* During the testing session, when couples were separated physically, each subject completed a marital satisfaction questionnaire. The two relevant variables for this study are overall satisfaction ("Thinking about all things together, how would you say you feel about your marriage?") and sexual satisfaction ("How do you feel about your sexual relationship?"). Both variables were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*unsatisfied*) to 7 (*extremely satisfied*).

## Results

To identify the relations between the marital and sexual satisfaction variables, I computed correlations separately for men

Table 6  
*Judgments About Magnitude of Anger and Upset*

Upset elicitor	$\alpha$	Actor				F	p
		Male		Female			
		M	SD	M	SD		
Condescending	.92	5.46	0.91	5.25	0.83	1.12	ns
Possessive-Jealous-Dependent	.86	4.01	0.98	3.91	1.01	0.09	ns
Neglecting-Rejecting-Unreliable	.86	4.87	0.87	4.99	0.85	0.28	ns
Abusive	.92	5.88	0.95	5.55	0.91	1.81	ns
Unfaithful	.84	5.92	0.91	6.04	0.60	0.28	ns
Inconsiderate	.70	4.23	0.67	3.84	0.98	3.13	ns
Physically Self-absorbed	.81	3.94	1.05	4.25	0.92	1.96	ns
Moody	.70	4.10	0.79	4.76	0.81	10.63	.001
Sexually Withholding	.80	4.29	1.16	5.03	0.99	7.30	.01
Sexualizes Others	.43	4.63	0.98	4.17	1.26	2.46	ns
Abuses Alcohol-Emotionally Constricted	.76	4.96	0.93	5.03	1.09	0.20	ns
Disheveled	.92	4.45	1.48	4.89	1.44	1.08	ns
Insulting of Appearance	.52	5.32	1.09	4.54	1.11	7.99	.001
Sexually Aggressive	.92	6.15	1.08	4.02	1.89	34.79	.001
Self-centered	.58	5.23	1.18	5.34	1.05	0.13	ns
Total		4.89	0.72	4.83	0.66	0.07	ns

Note. N = 60. Possible mean values for magnitude of upset range from 0 (no upset elicited) to 7 (extremely upsetting).

and women. For men, the correlation is .44 ( $p < .0001$ ); for women, the correlation is .48 ( $p < .0001$ ).

*Marital satisfaction and upset elicitors.* Shown in Table 8 are the correlations between marital satisfaction and sources of upset. All are negative, about half significantly so. Male dissatisfaction is especially strongly linked with complaints about the wife being possessive, neglecting, moody, sexually withholding, and sexualizing of others. Female dissatisfaction is especially linked with complaints about the husband being condescend-

ing, possessive, neglecting, abusive (the largest correlation: .48,  $p < .001$ ), unfaithful, inconsiderate, moody, sexualizing of others, and sexually aggressive. These results provide modest support for the hypotheses that male dissatisfaction will be linked with female sexual withholding, and that female dissatisfaction will be linked with male sexual aggressiveness. To test whether the correlation between the subjects' marital satisfaction and the degree of the partner's sexual withholding is stronger for male subjects than for female subjects, I computed a z test (Cohen & Cohen, 1975). This yielded a z of -0.52, which was not statistically significant. The analogous correlation for the sexual aggressiveness upset elicitor, however, yielded a z of 1.90 ( $p < .05$ , one-tailed). A more refined test of these hypotheses deals with the examination of sexual satisfaction directly.

*Sexual satisfaction and upset elicitors.* Table 8 also shows the correlations between sexual satisfaction and complaints about being upset and angered by the spouse's behavior. The strongest predictor of sexual dissatisfaction for males is sexual withholding by the wife. The strongest predictor of female sexual dissatisfaction is sexual aggressiveness by the husband. To test whether the correlation between sexual withholding by partner and sexual dissatisfaction is higher for male subjects than for female subjects, I computed the z. For sexual withholding, z was -2.22 ( $p < .02$ , one-tailed). The analogous test for whether the correlation between sexual aggressiveness by a partner and sexual dissatisfaction by the subject is stronger for female subjects than for male subjects revealed a z of 3.11 ( $p < .002$ , one-tailed).

Table 7  
*Interactions Between Sex of Actor and Sex of Judge*

Sex of actor	Sex of judge	
	Male	Female
Possessive-Jealous-Dependent		
Male	3.87	4.14
Female	3.18	4.64
Interaction: $F = 7.44, p < .01$		
Sexually Aggressive		
Male	5.80	6.47
Female	3.02	5.13
Interaction: $F = 4.22, p < .05$		

Table 8  
Correlations Between Upset Elicitors and Criterion Variables

Upset elicitor	Marital satisfaction		Sexual satisfaction	
	M	F	M	F
Condescending	-14	-42***	-10	-31***
Possessive- Jealous- Dependent	-27**	-34***	-19	-24*
Neglecting- Rejecting- Unreliable	-25*	-39***	-23*	-26***
Abusive	-19	-48***	-20*	-33***
Unfaithful	-18	-29**	-14	-16
Inconsiderate	-03	-30**	-16	-11
Physically Self- absorbed	-18	-22*	-13	-05
Moody	-36***	-34***	-36***	-16
Sexually Withholding	-24*	-19*	-37***	-16
Sexualizes Others	-23*	-26**	-16	-07
Abuses Alcohol- Emotionally Constricted	-12	-17*	-12	-09
Disheveled	-04	-16	03	-10
Insulting of Appearance	-09	-17	-14	-19
Sexually Aggressive	-04	-23*	-06	-36***
Self-centered	-06	-16	-12	-05
Total	-31***	-52***	-28**	-34***

Note. Correlations under M are between the husband's satisfaction and his upset about acts performed by the wife; those under F are between the wife's satisfaction and her upset about acts performed by the husband. Decimal points have been omitted.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

These results support the central hypotheses about conflict arising from one reproductive strategy's interfering with a different reproductive strategy enacted by the opposite sex.

### Discussion

Study 3 provides evidence about the relationship concomitants of these sources of upset. I used correlations between marital and sexual satisfaction and particular upset elicitors as a further test of the central hypotheses regarding conflict between male and female reproductive strategies. Modest support was found for both predictions, suggesting that male sexual aggressiveness and female sexual withholding are indeed linked with dissatisfaction in their mates.

### General Discussion

Because little systematic knowledge exists about the content of conflict between men and women, I used a research strategy that identified many diverse sources of upsetting actions performed by members of the opposite sex. An evolution-based strategic conflict model was then used to derive specific hypoth-

eses about sources of conflict. Three empirical studies tested predictions based on these hypotheses. The simultaneous use of a "bottom-up" exploratory approach and a "top-down" hypothesis-testing approach is especially effective for domains such as this, about which little is known. This discussion focuses on the empirical status of the model and its limitations, alternative theoretical accounts, proximate mechanisms through which conflict might be enacted, and further falsifiable predictions generated by the model.

Across the three studies, I derived six empirical tests from the strategic conflict model. The first set of tests consisted of frequencies of predicted elicitors of anger and upset among two samples of subjects that differed in degree of pair-bond commitment. Both samples showed the predicted male upset about female sexual withholding. In contrast, the predicted sex differences about upset surrounding sexual aggressiveness were supported only at the act level for the undergraduate sample and not at all for the newlywed sample. This finding may reflect the particular stage associated with the first year of marriage, the possibility that sexual aggressiveness of men is directed more prominently toward women with whom they are not pair-bonded, or the limitations of this specific evolutionary hypothesis. Future research on nonbonded couples and on older married couples is needed to differentially falsify these alternative interpretations.

A second set of tests of the central predictions involved judgments about the magnitude of upset elicited by each of the major classes of conflict. Results from these judgments strongly supported both hypotheses. Women were judged to be far more upset than were men by the partner's sexual aggressiveness, whereas men were judged to be more upset than women by the partner's sexual withholding.

A third set of tests of the central hypotheses involved predictions about different sources of marital and sexual dissatisfaction for men and women. Results supported the hypotheses that, within couples, men's dissatisfaction is linked with women's sexual withholding, whereas women's dissatisfaction is linked with men's sexual aggressiveness. These results were particularly powerful in the context of sexual dissatisfaction. They corroborate Study 2's results and suggest that hypothesized sources of conflict occur within couples, in addition to between the sexes generally. In sum, the results from three separate tests of the central hypotheses yield support for the evolution-based strategic conflict model.

### Limitations of the Strategic Conflict Model

This model is limited in several respects. Perhaps most important, the model does not contain enough specificity with respect to a host of other sources of conflict. I found diverse sources of conflict that were not anticipated by the model, including upset about partners being condescending, possessive, rejecting, abusive, inconsiderate, self-absorbed, moody, emotionally constricted, disheveled, and self-centered. Identifying these diverse sources of upset represents a substantive contribution that can be used in future work on conflict in close relationships. In this sense, the broad net cast by act-frequency methods complemented in the context of discovery what the strategic conflict model failed to derive deductively. The current version

of the strategic conflict model can account for only a small portion of these diverse upset elicitors.

Two sex differences emerged within each sample that are especially striking, yet were not predicted by the model. Women show a higher incidence of upset about men being inconsiderate and condescending. Men show a higher incidence of upset about women being moody and physically self-absorbed. The origins of these replicable sex differences remain obscure conceptually but provide important data that must be accounted for by any general model of conflict between the sexes (see Cunningham, 1986, and Symons, 1979, for possible hypotheses about physical self-absorption; see Kenrick & Trost, 1986, for a general treatment of heterosexual relationships from an evolutionary perspective).

Another important set of findings not anticipated by the model was the importance given by the panels of judges to the clusters of Unfaithful and Abusive. Except for Sexual Aggressiveness by men, these two clusters were judged to be more upsetting for both sexes than any of the other upset elicitors. Although not predicted by the strategic conflict model, these results map nicely onto Darwin's (1871) distinction between natural selection (adaptations that facilitate survival) and sexual selection (adaptations that favor reproductive advantage). A partner's unfaithfulness represents a direct threat to reproductive success through alien insemination of the wife or diversion of resources by the husband (Buss, 1988b). Abuse (especially if physical) signals injury and in its stronger forms represents a threat to survival. Any comprehensive model of conflict between the sexes must account for the tremendous importance placed on the upset generated by unfaithfulness and abuse in close relationships.

### *Evolution and Ontogeny of Sex Differences*

Although these studies, hypotheses, and findings were generated by and interpreted in the context of an evolutionary psychological model, additional theoretical accounts are possible and even necessary. Unspecified by this account, for example, are (a) the ontogeny of observed sex differences, and (b) a full account of the proximate psychological mechanisms through which they operate. I examine these in turn.

One can speculate about at least two general ontogenies. One might involve genetic differences between men and women. These differences may translate into hormonal effects (e.g., testosterone differences) that lead to observed sex differences in proclivities toward sexual aggressiveness and withholding as well as upset about displays of the opposing strategy by the opposite sex. Behavioral genetic and psychophysiological studies are needed to test this speculation.

A second ontogenetic course would involve differential socialization by parents, with no genetic or physiological differences between the sexes. It is possible that sex differences in reproductive strategies centering around sexual aggressiveness and withholding, as well as sex-differentiated upset about features of the opposite sex's strategy that conflict with one's own, are due entirely to differential socialization of the sexes. Parents or others in our culture may teach girls to be sexually withholding and boys to be sexually aggressive, and may inculcate sex-appropriate anger and upset when the opposite sex interferes

with these proclivities. It is also possible that genetic sex differences and sex role socialization combine to produce these observed sex differences. There currently is no evidential basis for preferring one ontogenetic account over the other.

Both accounts of the ontogeny of these sex differences are compatible, in principle, with the evolutionary strategic conflict model. The strategic conflict model would predict, for example, that parents would socialize their sons and daughters differently (daughters to be more upset by sexual aggressiveness and sons to be more upset by sexual withholding) precisely because it has been in the best reproductive interests of the parents to instill these particular psychological mechanisms differentially. Parents in our evolutionary past who failed to instill these mechanisms in their sons and daughters may have experienced lower reproductive success than parents who successfully socialized their children in these ways.

Cross-cultural studies of conflict between the sexes are critical for illuminating these ontogenetic causal issues. Is sex role socialization *arbitrary vis-à-vis* sex-differentiated reproductive strategies? Are there cultures in which socialization of strategies are reversed, where men get upset because women are too sexually aggressive and women get upset because men are sexually withholding? Recent empirical evidence from 37 societies around the world has suggested that sex-linked reproductive strategies show considerably more uniformity than one would expect on the arbitrary socialization account (Buss, 1989). Men worldwide favor cues to reproductive value in mates (e.g., youth, physical qualities), whereas women worldwide favor cues to resources and providing capabilities (Buss, 1989). Evidence is now needed on the cross-cultural prevalence of sources of conflict between the sexes and on the pervasiveness of sex-linked patterns of socialization.

There are four crucial points behind these ontogenetic speculations: (a) The ontogeny of the current sex differences is a different causal question than the evolutionary (or ultimate) causal question, which deals with adaptive significance on a generational (not ontogenetic) time scale; (b) we currently know little about the ontogeny of these and most other sex differences; (c) linking the current strategic conflict model with a socialization mechanism yields specific predictions about the content of, and selective rationale behind, particular patterns of socialization; and (d) a complete causal account should include a specification of the psychological mechanisms underlying observed sex differences, as well as their function (adaptive problem solved), their evolution (origins on a generational time scale), and their ontogeny (developmental course). These are complementary, not competing, forms of explanation.

### *Proximate Mechanisms and Further Falsifiable Predictions*

What are the implications of this research for proximate mechanisms that might be involved in conflicting male and female strategies? This research points directly to the role of the "negative" emotions of anger and upset as proximate mechanisms. Mandler's (1975, 1984) theory of emotions is especially relevant in this context. Mandler (1975) proposed that emotions occur whenever a goal-directed sequence of activities is interrupted or interfered with. This theory is closely congruent

with Peterson's (1983) definition of conflict itself. Peterson (1983) defined conflict as "an interpersonal process that occurs whenever the actions of one person interfere with the actions of another" (p. 365).

The model of conflict between the sexes proposed in this article suggests that a man's pursuit of reproductive strategy will interfere with a woman's pursuit of reproductive strategy under certain conditions. It is reasonable to speculate that over the past several million years of human evolution, men and women have evolved mechanisms that alert them to sources of strategic interference so that they can (a) alter their own behavior to eliminate or reduce the interference and (b) influence the behavior of the opposite sex to eliminate or reduce the interference.

These empirical results suggest that the negative emotions of anger and upset may be precisely the proximate mechanisms by which men and women are alerted to strategic interference. The fact that men and women differ in the nature of the events that elicit anger and upset, and that these differences are partly predictable from interference with their respective reproductive strategies, implicates these negative emotions as proximate mechanisms that function to draw attention to certain classes of events and to produce action to eliminate those interfering events. Future research could profitably explore the behavioral options that are predicated on anger and upset evoked through these sex-differentiated sources.

An unanswered question about proximate mechanisms concerns their generality or context specificity. Consider the strongest finding across studies: greater male than female upset about sexual withholding by the opposite sex. Sexual withholding created upset in men more frequently (Study 1), was judged to be more upsetting for men when it occurred (Study 2), and was significantly linked with male dissatisfaction within newlywed couples (Study 3). If female reproductive strategy prior to pair-bond formation is generally more discriminate and withholding, would natural selection not have favored context-dependent elimination of sexual withholding once a suitable pair-bond had been achieved? Clearly, the mechanism does show some context dependency of precisely this sort: Sex and reproduction are prevalent among bonded couples and less so among nonbonded couples (Symons, 1979).

However, the persistence of the sex difference in upset over sexual withholding among newlywed couples, the group in which it is least expected, suggests that the female mechanism leading to sexual withholding perseverates to some degree even when marital pair-bonds are formed. This intriguing finding suggests one of two possibilities: (a) the mechanism is a general one (e.g., lower sex drive) that perseverates even in contexts in which it provides no specific adaptive advantage to the woman, or (b) the selective withholding of consummation opportunities continues to provide adaptive advantage to the woman after pair-bonding (e.g., as a device to ensure continued male provisioning or as a means to secure more optimal birth spacing). Future research on proximate mechanisms and their functions is needed to clarify these intriguing results.

Future research could also be directed toward longitudinal research that tests further predictions from the strategic conflict model. The model implies, for example, that there will be sex differences in the causes of pair-bond dissolution such that women will terminate relationships because of male sexual ag-

gressiveness, and men will terminate relationships because of female sexual withholding. Another longitudinal research direction would be to examine male-female relationships through the childbearing and child-rearing years. Conflict between the sexes under these conditions is expected when men are in a position to devote reproductive effort toward additional mating opportunities, which would conflict with a female strategy to influence the man to devote parental effort toward their children.

In this sense, the present series of studies represents just the start of a close examination of male-female conflict. Results from these studies show promise for the strategic conflict model and suggest that emotions play a crucial role as proximate mechanisms through which conflict, and its potential amelioration, is enacted. As such, these results and the model that predicted them take us one step closer to understanding the battle between the sexes.

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