The Invisible Harm of Partner Aggression

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Partner aggression is extremely common and more harmful than may be widely recognized. Most people do not end their relationship the moment a partner becomes aggressive. This talk will examine specific beliefs that people adopt when they are motivated to continue their relationship, beliefs that reinterpret or downplay their partner’s aggressive behavior. Longitudinal and experimental data will be presented that suggest: (1) people who have an aggressive partner experience elevated distress but may not perceive their relationship as being a source of distress; (2) people become increasingly accepting of partner aggression once it occurs in their own relationships; and (3) people underestimate how much better they feel after their aggressive relationship ends. Together the findings reveal harm from partner aggression that may be “invisible”.

Ximena Arriaga is a Professor in the Department of Psychological Sciences and University Scholar at Purdue University. She attained a B.A. degree from the University of Virginia, and a Ph.D. in Social Psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Prior to joining the faculty at Purdue University, she was a faculty member at Claremont Graduate University. Dr. Arriaga studies the rewards and challenges of close relationships. Her current work examines how relationships can alter insecure tendencies (funded by NSF), what makes them endure (funded by NIMH), and why they endure even if they become harmful (funded by the Center for Families at Purdue University). Her research has been cited widely and has been co-authored with many students whom she has supervised. Her teaching has been recognized by the Charles Murphy Award for Undergraduate Teaching which earned her a place in Purdue’s Book of Great Teachers.