

Intimate Partner Abuse and Homicide During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Situational Action Theory Analysis

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journals.sagepub.com/home/ccj**Kyle Treiber¹****Abstract**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, stay-at-home restrictions significantly changed people's daily lives around the world. Opportunity and strain theories predict this would lead to an increase in intimate partner abuse (IPA), including intimate partner homicide (IPH). This paper applies an alternative theoretical framework—situational action theory (SAT)—to explain mixed findings regarding changes in IPA and unexpected findings regarding (a lack of) changes in IPH. It is argued that SAT may contribute to explaining the impact of stay-at-home restrictions on IPA and IPH in three important ways:

1. by addressing the fact that motivation is necessary but not sufficient for explaining action and better specifying how motivation translates into IPA and IPH;
2. by addressing the fact that people perceive different alternatives for action and better specifying why some people come to see IPA and IPH as acceptable action alternatives;
3. by addressing the fact that exposure affects people differently and better specifying how stay-at-home restrictions shaped people's activity fields and, in turn, their perceptions and action choices.

Keywords

situational action theory, intimate partner abuse, femicide, perception-choice process, activity field

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Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, stay-at-home restrictions significantly changed people's daily lives worldwide. Two prominent criminological perspectives predicted this would lead to an increase in all forms of intimate partner abuse (IPA), including intimate partner homicide (IPH). Opportunity theories argue that crime happens when the right conditions converge—a willing offender, a potential target, and a lack of controls; this perspective predicted IPA would increase under stay-at-home restrictions because these conditions would arise more often when partners spent more time together isolated from moderating influences. Strain theories argue that crime happens when people experience stressors and cope through criminal means; this perspective predicted IPA would increase during stay-at-home restrictions because this created new and exacerbated existing sources of strain between partners and limited their means of coping. While increases in IPA during the pandemic period (roughly 2020-2022) have been widely reported and evocatively described as a “shadow pandemic” (UN Women, 2020), the empirical landscape is complex and the overall picture unclear in terms of substantive changes in IPA, as well as in opportunities and strains. In particular, the expectation that IPH would increase in line with, arguably as an extension of, increases in other forms of IPA has not been borne out in the global data (Aebi et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2022). This paper applies an alternative theoretical framework—situational action theory (SAT)—to address shortcomings in the explanations proffered by opportunity and strain perspectives and take better account of differences in people, settings, and their interaction in explaining mixed findings regarding changes in IPA during the pandemic period, and unexpected findings regarding (a lack of) changes in IPH.

IPA During the Pandemic

Intimate Partner Abuse

When stay-at-home restrictions were implemented during the pandemic period, there was little concrete understanding of how the resulting changes in people's activity fields—the constellation of settings in which they spend their time during a given period (Wikström et al., 2012)—would affect their well-being and behavior. An important area of concern was the impact on crime. IPA is one of the most widespread forms of crime in the home. IPA refers to a range of malicious behaviors between romantic and/or sexual partners, including physical, sexual, and psychological mistreatment (Breiding et al., 2015; UN General Assembly, 1993). To allow for both clarity and nuance, in this paper “IPA” is used in reference to all forms of intimate partner mistreatment collectively apart from intimate partner homicide (“IPH”), while “IPP” refers specifically to psychological abuse (e.g., gaslighting, threats, and coercion), and “IPV” specifically to nonlethal physical abuse.

Most studies focus on IPA perpetrated by males against females, and thus IPA is included as a significant form of violence against women, with approximately one in

three women experiencing IPA in their lifetime (see, for example, Sardinha et al., 2022; White et al., 2024; World Health Organization, 2021). Comparable rates and similar predictors have been reported for male victimization, raising questions about the distinctiveness of IPA between the sexes, as well as the reliability of IPA data (Barton-Crosby, 2017; Chan, 2011; Hamberger & Larsen, 2015; Hamby, 2014; Hardesty & Ogolsky, 2020; Krahe et al., 2005; Larsen & Hamberger, 2015; Spencer et al., 2022). This is not an issue with which this paper will grapple, as it suggests the causes of IPA are the same regardless of the sex of those involved, that is, the same factors will be implicated even if they may be more frequently associated with people of a particular sex. The same is held to be true for IPH where sex differences are much starker; females are at much greater risk of being killed by an intimate partner than males: around 80% of IPH victims are female, and an intimate partner is implicated in 40% of female and only 5% of male homicides (Spencer & Stith, 2020; Stöckl et al., 2013).

An important conceptual question is whether forms of IPA lie along a continuum, sharing similar causes, with more severe behaviors reflecting more aggravated forms, or if they represent distinct phenomenon with different causes. The former view dominates, placing IPH at one extreme of a continuum beginning with psychological abuse and escalating into physical violence (Campbell et al., 2007; Cunha & Goncalves, 2016; Dugan et al., 2003; Matias et al., 2020; Reckdenwald & Parker, 2012; Spencer & Stith, 2020). IPA is often a precursor for IPH; around 75% of IPH cases feature a history of IPA (Campbell et al., 2007; Cunha & Goncalves, 2016; Matias et al., 2020; Spencer & Stith, 2020), and a recent meta-analysis (Spencer & Stith, 2020) found factors distinguishing IPV and IPH differed more in degree than in kind. One factor that consistently distinguishes IPH is the perpetrator's willingness to use lethal force (e.g., strangulation) or access to a deadly weapon (especially a firearm) (Campbell et al., 2007; Cunha & Goncalves, 2016; Matias et al., 2020; Spencer & Stith, 2020). Several studies also identify acute events triggering escalation of IPA to IPH, for example, the ending of the relationship or a partner's infidelity (Aebi et al., 2021; Aguilar Ruiz et al., 2023; Cunha & Goncalves, 2016; Sheehan et al., 2015). These features of IPH will be considered in relation to the impact of stay-at-home restrictions on intimate partner dynamics.

(How) Did IPA Change During the Pandemic Period?

Although a wave of publications appeared in the initial wake of the pandemic predicting a "shadow pandemic" (UN Women, 2020), based on preliminary and anecdotal evidence, as a wider perspective and evidence base has developed, the picture remains unclear (Miller et al., 2022). Many studies report increases in IPA, but those encompassing more data and accounting for more confounds suggest these increases are smaller than predicted (Piquero et al., 2021; Thiel et al., 2022; Uzoho et al., 2023) and vary significantly, with IPA increasing in some contexts (e.g., Evcili & Demirel, 2022; Hamadani et al., 2020; Keilholtz et al., 2023; Romito et al., 2022; Soeiro et al., 2023), remaining unchanged in some contexts (e.g., Chiamonte et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2022; Tierolf

et al., 2021), and even decreasing in some contexts (e.g., Capinha et al., 2022; Estlein et al., 2022; Gosangi et al., 2021; Jetelina et al., 2021; Plášilová et al., 2021).

Some evidence suggests that incidents of IPA did not substantially increase, but the severity did (e.g., Estlein et al., 2022; Gosangi et al., 2021; Stripe, 2020; Thiel et al., 2022; Trafford, 2022), mainly among those with a prior history of IPA (e.g., Lausi et al., 2021; Plášilová et al., 2021; Thiel et al., 2022). Certain types of IPA appear to have increased more than others, particularly psychological abuse (IPP) and remote forms of IPA (e.g., stalking and harassment) (e.g., Arenas-Arroyo et al., 2021; Lausi et al., 2021; McNeil et al., 2023; Soeiro et al., 2023; Trafford, 2022). However, the most severe form, IPH, did not increase in most countries and decreased in many (e.g., Aebi et al., 2021; Byard, 2021; Cantor et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2022).

Overall, across jurisdictions globally, the predicted surge in IPA during stay-at-home restrictions did not transpire. Changes in IPA varied widely between and within jurisdictions. Interpreting, comparing, and consolidating these findings is difficult. IPA is notoriously underreported, and the reliability of self-report methods has been questioned (Hamby, 2014). Many reported incidents go unrecorded (e.g., victims withdraw their reports; there is a lack of actionable evidence; Chan, 2011; Goodmark, 2018; Lausi et al., 2021; Sleath & Smith, 2017). Data on IPA comes from a variety of sources, captures different content, varies in quality, and often does not account for confounding factors. Key sources include the police (e.g., calls for service, arrests; Lausi et al., 2021; Pallansch et al., 2022; Trafford, 2022); IPV services (e.g., calls to hotlines, service utilization; Brink et al., 2021; Pallansch et al., 2022; Perez-Vincent et al., 2020; Romito et al., 2022; Soeiro et al., 2023); and health services (medical reports, health records; Gosangi et al., 2021; Hoffman et al., 2023; Lausi et al., 2021). Reporting may have increased as an extension of help-seeking and significant life changes, as observed in other natural disasters, and because people recognized acts as abusive that previously went unacknowledged (e.g., minor or infrequent IPA, or IPA by a new partner; Kaukinen, 2020; Trafford, 2022). However, access to and the nature of services changed during the pandemic as services were scaled back and adapted, for example, focusing resources on the most serious incidents (Estlein et al., 2022; Fogarty et al., 2022; Gosangi et al., 2021; Hazebrouck, 2022; Maskály et al., 2021; Weeks et al., 2023). Consequently, victims may have been less able or inclined to seek professional help, particularly for less severe incidents. Victims were also isolated from friends and family who might have reported on their behalf, although this was compensated somewhat by neighbors, possibly in response to methods that were implemented to increase awareness and encourage reporting of IPA (Coomans et al., 2023; Eichelsheim et al., 2023; Ivandic et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2022; Perez-Vincent et al., 2020).

Together, these observations suggest that how IPA is reported and recorded may have changed significantly during the pandemic period, making it difficult to compare rates of IPA before and during the pandemic.

Homicide data, on the other hand, is uniquely reliable, as deaths or disappearances are unlikely to go unreported or unrecorded (Andersson & Kazemian, 2018; Ouimet & Montmagny-Grenier, 2014). The reporting and recording of IPH is unlikely to have

changed over the pandemic period; therefore, data on changes in IPH may be more reliable than data on changes in IPA.

Explaining Changes in IPA

Two prominent criminological concepts—opportunity and strain—are widely accepted as key explanatory factors for IPA and hence for why it may have changed under stay-at-home restrictions. Yet while opportunity and strain theories predict that increases in opportunities and strains, respectively, will be associated with increases in rates of IPA, each is missing an important part of the explanation for why and how IPA would increase—opportunity theories are missing an explanation of why people take opportunities; strain theories, an explanation of how strain causes criminal coping. Each relies on different but equally unsupported assumptions about the role of motivations in encouraging and controls in discouraging IPA. Situational action theory (SAT; (Wikström et al., 2024) is suggested as an alternative explanatory framework that accounts for differences in people’s motivations and how they perceive and choose ways of responding, and hence how restrictions during the pandemic (re)shaped their actions.

Opportunity Theories

The core proposition of the opportunity theory perspective is that “opportunity makes the thief” (Clarke, 2012; Felson & Clarke, 1998) or, in this case, the IPA perpetrator. Opportunity refers to a set of conditions conducive to crime, typically the convergence of a probable offender, an attractive target, and ineffective control (e.g., Eck, 2003; Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996; Hollis et al., 2013; Reynald et al., 2018; Tillyer & Eck, 2011). Opportunity theories predict that when intimate partners spend more time together, the likelihood increases that these conditions will converge and create opportunities for IPA and IPH, and more opportunities will lead to more IPA and IPH (Abreu Minero & Nivette, 2023; Aebi & Tiago, 2020a, 2020b; Nivette et al., 2021).

Opportunity theories rely on assumptions regarding people’s willingness to commit IPA in response to relevant motivations (e.g., provocation by one’s partner): the motivation and willingness is not seen as problematic to explain—the motivation is to be expected (an assumption is made about how partners tempt and provoke) and IPA provides a simple and effective way to address it (an assumption is made about how people see their options for action) (Clarke & Felson, 1993; Cohen & Felson, 1979). Thus, according to opportunity theories, what is most important in differentiating situations in which IPA occurs from those in which it does is not the attractiveness of the target or willingness of the perpetrator but how often they converge and the level of controls counteracting them. Thus, opportunity theories focus on differences in exposure to motivators (e.g., targets and temptations) and controls (e.g., guardians and deterrents) as driving factors behind IPA. As exposure to motivators increases and exposure to controls decreases—both of which might be expected as a consequence of stay-at-home restrictions—incidents of IPA, and potentially IPH, are expected to increase.

To understand how opportunities to commit IPA changed as a consequence of stay-at-home restrictions requires understanding how activity fields changed and impacted the quantity (amount) and quality (circumstances) of time partners spent together.

Between early 2020 and late 2021, most countries implemented some form of stay-at-home restrictions. These varied in duration from around 6 to 15 months (250–450 days), with a global average of around 9 months (not necessarily consecutive); to whom they applied (e.g., vulnerable populations and non-essential workers); and their severity (e.g., required by law and prosecuted, recommended but not monitored or sanctioned; see Hale et al., 2023; Mathieu et al., 2020). During the most severe periods of restrictions globally the average increase in time spent at home was 25% to 30% per 24-hour period; this reached 40% briefly in some countries but stayed below 20% in most countries for most of the pandemic period (Mathieu et al., 2020).

Translating this into real-world terms is challenging, however, as the actual increase varied significantly between and within countries. For people who already spent much of their time at home, the change will have been the smallest. For those who regularly spent time outside the home, such as those who worked, attended education, or regularly participated in sports or social activities, it may have been significantly more, for example, the time of the average working day. Studies report an average increase of around 6 hours per day, with a large proportion of people not experiencing any increase (Mathieu et al., 2020; Nishijima et al., 2021; Perez-Vincent et al., 2020). Changes in time people spent at home with their partners further depended on the convergence of their individual activity fields; for example, although stay-at-home parents may not have experienced as large an increase in time at home as their working partners, this resulted in the same increase in their time together. People also played an active role in the reshaping of their activity fields under stay-at-home restrictions through their degree of compliance.

Along with their quantity of time together, partners' quality of time may also have changed. Changes in the activity fields of others in the household, for example, children, other resident family members, their partners, and lodgers, affected who was in the home when partners were home together and how this differed from pre-pandemic conditions. Some people reshaped their households when restrictions were imposed, for example, elderly relatives moved in or out, and in some cases, partners took the opportunity to move in together—forming new households or reforming divided ones—or to separate. These individual decisions significantly impacted the time partners spent together, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The distribution of households with different compositions, before and during the pandemic period, will have varied by jurisdiction (e.g., culturally and structurally), with implications for comparative rates.

What was the impact of these changes in activity fields on opportunities for IPA? Because in opportunity theories, “opportunity makes the thief,” we can “take criminal inclination as given” (Cohen & Felson, 1979: 589) and focus on how restrictions reshaped people's convergence with attractive targets for IPA and ineffective controls.

Partners are attractive targets because they have considerable intrinsic value (e.g., enhance one's self and social image, perform tasks, gratify intimate needs; Clarke, 1999; Cohen & Felson, 1979; Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996). IPA is a means of securing these valued outcomes, and when circumstances are practically conducive—the victim is available and vulnerable and their victimization easily concealed, as may have more often been the case under stay-at-home restrictions—people will take those opportunities and commit IPA.

The presence of others who might control—for example, monitor and sanction—IPA changed significantly for many under stay-at-home restrictions, both inside and outside the home (Andrade et al., 2022; Canzi et al., 2021; Vergauwen et al., 2022). For some—for example, partners isolating on their own—unmonitored time at home increased; for others—for example, partners isolating with others—any unmonitored time may have been lost. Monitoring also changed outside the home. Partners were, by definition, isolated from external parties who might monitor IPA, both formally—for example, health or social services (Lausi et al., 2021; Pallansch et al., 2022)—and informally—for example, friends and family (Andrade et al., 2022; Canzi et al., 2021; Vergauwen et al., 2022). However, the more continuous presence of neighbors counterbalanced some of the reduction in external monitoring, as evidenced by an increase in third-party calls to IPA services (Coomans et al., 2023; Eichelsheim et al., 2023; Ivandic et al., 2020; Perez-Vincent et al., 2020), potentially amplified by measures encouraging monitoring and reporting.

Changes in monitoring and reporting impacted the certainty and celerity of sanctions. This included formal sanctions as policing practices changed in some jurisdictions (Maskály et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2022; Pallansch et al., 2022; Trafford, 2022), for example, focusing on more severe incidents. Given reductions in and restrictions on services, victims may have been less likely to bring incidents to authorities' attention.

The main opportunity theory expectation is that people would commit more IPA during stay-at-home restrictions because they spent more time together and there would be fewer controls. While this may have been the case generally, there was significant variation in the degree of change partners experienced in both the quantity and quality of their time together, shaped by selection. For example, partners who experienced the most significant changes in their time together are those who spent more of their pre-pandemic time outside the home, for example, at work or in discretionary activities (Ivandic et al., 2020; Nishijima et al., 2021), and therefore who may be more likely to conform to social norms and have a wider social network. However, opportunity theories suggest that even “generally law-abiding people can be drawn into committing specific forms of crime if they regularly encounter easy opportunities” (Clarke, 2012, p. 6). Partners who moved in together during stay-at-home restrictions also experienced more significant changes in their time together and opportunities to commit IPA.

Would any different changes be expected in opportunities for IPH than IPA? Are different kinds of opportunities associated with IPH than IPA, that is, are there distinct characteristics of targets that make them more or less attractive for IPH than IPA, or controls that are more or less effective at deterring IPH than IPA?

IPH is not generally a practical means of achieving desired goals such as making one's partner pay for transgressions or behave as one would like; therefore, only under extreme circumstances, such as the gravest transgressions, is it likely a person would see their partner as an attractive target for IPH. IPH would not be an effective means of controlling one's partner, for example, except when it (re)asserts control over a critical threat to the relationship, such as a partner leaving or being unfaithful, events that have been linked to IPH and were less likely to occur during stay-at-home restrictions (Aguilar Ruiz et al., 2023; Campbell et al., 2007; Dugan et al., 2003; Sheehan et al., 2015).

As IPH is less likely to go unnoticed or unreported, the certainty of monitoring and celerity of sanctions may have changed less than for IPA. Concealing IPA may have been even more difficult under stay-at-home restrictions, especially in more urban environments.

While this suggests the same increase in opportunities would not be expected for IPH as less severe forms of IPA, opportunity theories would still predict an increase in IPH as a consequence of increased exposure to an attractive target. Data do not evidence such an increase. It is possible the effect is masked by variation in changes in exposure. However, the explanation and not the data may be insufficient, relying on too many unverified assumptions about people's desires, motives, reasoning, and circumstances' power to govern them. It overlooks the importance of differential preferences and sensitivities, values and perceptions, agency and choice. To understand the impact of changes in opportunities requires looking beyond how opportunities change, to see for whom they changed (Wikström & Treiber, 2015). Once individual differences and their interaction with opportunities are acknowledged, it becomes clear that people differ not only in how many opportunities they encounter but also whether they see them as opportunities and take those opportunities.

Strain Theories

Strain theories present a competing framework to opportunity theories premised on the idea that people's motivations rather than given are central to the explanation of why IPA happens. Strain theories suggest IPA is a strategy people adopt to cope with negative emotions triggered by strains—events or conditions that trigger a negative emotional response (Agnew, 2006). IPA is one way people manage negative emotions arising from strains associated with their intimate relationships, but also strains that are unrelated, for example, a loss of status or lack of control in other spheres. An acknowledged limitation of strain explanations is that most individuals do not respond to strain by committing acts of crime (Agnew, 2006, p. 87). Thus, an increase in strains during stay-at-home restrictions would not directly predict an increase in IPA. For most people, experiencing more strain, just like experiencing more opportunities, will not increase their IPA.

Like opportunity theories, strain theories rely on assumptions regarding motivation to commit IPA. In contrast to opportunity theories, strain theories recognize that variation in motivation plays an important role in IPA and focus on differences in

experiences of and responses to strain; if strains increase, and noncriminal means of coping decrease—both of which can be expected during stay-at-home restrictions—incidents of IPA, and potentially IPH, are expected to increase.

Strains unquestionably increased during the pandemic period, but their relationship with changes in IPA is weak (Buttelt et al., 2021; Cunha et al., 2023; Gresham et al., 2021; Halperin et al., 2023; Hammett et al., 2022; Piquero et al., 2021). This is likely due to the nature of these strains and variations in individual circumstances; while some couples experienced exacerbation of existing strains or new strains, some experienced a reduction in strains (Estlein et al., 2022; Keilholtz et al., 2023; Wyckoff et al., 2023).

Importantly, some of the most significant new and/or exacerbated strains involved prosocial concerns, which may be less associated with criminal coping, that is, separation from others, concerns about others' health and well-being, and concerns about normative expectations and activities such as those relating to education, employment, and parenting. Consequently, the most significant increases in strain were reported by parents, particularly women, groups that are particularly unlikely to cope in criminal ways (Estlein et al., 2022). IPA may have been more a source of strain, for example, compounding health concerns, than a means of coping (Colton et al., 2023).

Studies report considerable variation in strains association with intimate relationships during stay-at-home restrictions. Most partners did not report negative effects on their relationship (Andrade et al., 2022; Canzi et al., 2021; Estlein et al., 2022; Vives-Cases et al., 2021).

This evidence suggests that increasing strain may be an imprecise predictor of increases in IPA. Would any difference be expected in changes in IPH compared to IPA? IPH would only be implicated as a coping strategy for the most severe strains, such as the relationship coming to an end. The pandemic both increased and decreased opportunities for people to leave a relationship: some people became more dependent on their partner and confined in the home where they could not threaten the relationship; others had a chance to make a clean break and move beyond the reach of their partner. Although most relationships ultimately end, most do not end in IPH, so this itself is not enough to cause IPH; characteristics of the person and the circumstances will play a crucial role in determining strains and their translation into action. Although strain theories acknowledge this (e.g., Agnew, 2006, p. 89), they rely on models of cumulative risk to predict conditions under which strains are most likely to be associated with criminal coping rather than detailing a clear mechanism that explains how strain causes specific criminal coping.

Beyond Opportunities and Strain: SAT

Opportunity and strain perspectives are underpinned by assumptions about what motivates people and how people respond. These assumptions overlook key aspects of how people interact with social environments needed to explain why IPA and IPH happen, and therefore why they would or would not change during stay-at-home restrictions.

SAT (Wikström, 2006, 2019; Wikström et al., 2024) may contribute a more developed framework for understanding the impact of stay-at-home restrictions on IPA and IPH in three important ways:

1. by addressing the fact that motivation is necessary but not sufficient for explaining action and better specifying how motivation translates into IPA and IPH;
2. by addressing the fact that people perceive different alternatives for action and better specifying why some people come to see IPA and IPH as acceptable action alternatives;
3. by addressing the fact that exposure affects people differently and better specifying how stay-at-home restrictions shaped people's activity fields and, in turn, their perceptions and action choices.

Basics of SAT

SAT is a general, dynamic, mechanism-based theory of crime (Wikström, 2019). It has been widely tested and received empirical support in a diverse range of cultural contexts (for a review, see Pauwels et al., 2018; Wikström et al., 2012, 2024). SAT explains crime as moral actions—actions that break rules of conduct about what it is right or wrong to do (Wikström, 2010; Wikström et al., 2024). SAT sees people as rule-guided actors and seeks to understand why some people see acts of rule-breaking, such as IPA and IPH, as acceptable and choose to commit them.

SAT argues that people commit IPA and IPH when they see them as acceptable responses, given the circumstances, to motivations they experience, and there are no conflicting alternatives or adequate controls to stop them from choosing IPA or IPH by redirecting preferences or effectively enforcing opposing rules of conduct (Wikström et al., 2024). Motivation is defined as attention directed toward a goal that a person may seek to achieve through action. SAT posits that people come to see and choose their options for action in response to motivation through a rule-guided mental perception-choice process. Perception refers to “the selective sensory awareness and interpretation of the immediate surrounding,” including potential motivators and rule-guidance (Wikström et al., 2024). Choice refers to “the formation of an intention to act (or withhold an action)” in response to a perceived relevant motivator in the context of perceived rule-guidance (Wikström et al., 2024). Such action processes (mechanisms) are rarely detailed in criminological theories, many of which rely (implicitly, if not explicitly) on a form of rational choice through which personal costs and benefits are the main shapers of motivations, perceptions, and choices (Treiber, 2017; Wikström & Treiber, 2015). Consequently, in these theories, personal costs and benefits determine which personal characteristics and environmental features are most relevant. Because SAT's action process is guided by rules rather than expected outcomes, it emphasizes different casual factors: relevant rules and their enforcement.

According to SAT, three personal characteristics are key to understanding why crime happens. The first is people's particular proclivities (desires and sensitivities),

which orient their goal-directed attention toward particular motivators (opportunities and frictions) (Wikström et al., 2024). People prone to IPA might have certain proclivities, for example, a desire to control or punish their partner, or sensitivity to friction arising from conflict with their partner. This emphasis on differential motivation contrasts with the presumption of most rational choice models that self-interest universally orients people's goal-directed attention (Cornish & Clarke, 2008, 2014; Treiber, 2017; Wikström & Treiber, 2015). The second personal characteristic is people's personal morality (relevant personal rules) (Wikström, 2010). People prone to IPA may see it as an acceptable way to assert control, punish, or handle friction. The third is their ability to exercise self-control (enforce personal rules) (Wikström & Svensson, 2010; Wikström & Treiber, 2007). People with poor ability to exercise self-control may lack the ability to follow personal morals and not commit IPA when motivated, even if they understand it is wrong.

SAT identifies personal morality and ability to exercise self-control as the key determinants of people's crime propensity: their tendency to perceive and choose an act of crime in response to a motivator. People vary in their general crime propensity—to see and choose various crimes as options across a range of circumstances—as well as their specific crime propensities—to see and choose particular acts of crime, such as IPA, across a range of circumstances (Wikström & Treiber, 2009b). SAT's emphasis on personal characteristics associated with rule-guidance contrasts with the emphasis other theories place on personal characteristics associated with perceptions of costs and benefits, such as underarousal, sensation-seeking, short-sightedness, risk-taking, and callousness (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Treiber, 2017; Wikström & Treiber, 2015).

In parallel to relevant personal characteristics, SAT highlights three relevant features of settings and circumstances that are key to understanding why crime happens (Wikström, 2007b; Wikström et al., 2024). The first is the potential motivators a setting presents, which, depending on setting users' proclivities, orient their goal-directed attention. Settings conducive to IPA would present relevant motivators, such as opportunities to control or punish one's partner, or frictions arising from partner conflict. This emphasis on the differential relevance of potential motivators contrasts with a rational choice presumption that personal costs and benefits universally orient goal-directed attention (Cornish & Clarke, 2008, 2014; Wikström, 2007b; Wikström & Treiber, 2015). The second and third key features are the moral context (relevant rules of the setting) and the efficacy of deterrence (enforcement of the rules of the setting) (Wikström, 2007a). Settings conducive to IPA lack cues indicating that IPA is unacceptable or even present cues that it would be tolerated and lack effective deterrence such as salient social costs and legal sanctions.

According to SAT, the moral context and deterrence are the key determinants of a setting's criminogeneity: its tendency to induce users to perceive and choose an act of crime in response to its relevant motivators (Wikström, 2007b; Wikström et al., 2012, 2024). Settings vary in their criminogeneity in terms of their conduciveness to rule-breaking generally, and in terms of their conduciveness to particular kinds of rule-breaking, such as IPA. This emphasis on environmental features associated with

rule-guidance contrasts with an emphasis on features associated with costs and benefits, such as material rewards, social consequences, monitoring, guardianship, target hardening, and social control (Clarke & Felson, 1993; Cohen & Felson, 1979; Felson & Clarke, 1998; Wikström & Treiber, 2015).

SAT emphasizes the centrality of the interaction between people (with particular characteristics) and places (with particular features) to explain acts of crime, including IPA (Wikström, 2014, 2019; Wikström et al., 2012). First, the interplay between people's proclivities and relevant motivators in the setting determines if they are tempted or provoked. Without relevant opportunities and frictions, desires such as to control or punish one's partner, or sensitivities, for example, to partner conflict, will not be activated; conversely, people who do not desire to control or punish their partners will not be tempted by opportunities to do so, and those tolerant of partner conflict will not find it provocative. Thieves need opportunities, but not everyone is an opportunistic thief. Strains may tempt or provoke, but not everyone is susceptible.

Once motivated, how people respond also depends on the person—environment interaction. Particular crime propensities must be activated by specific criminogenic inducements, and settings' particular criminogenic inducements will only be relevant for specific crime propensities (Wikström et al., 2024). A propensity to see and choose IPA as an action alternative must be activated by external inducements to see IPA as an acceptable response to particular motivators. Without such inducements people may not perceive IPA as an option (even if they would find it acceptable) or may be deterred from choosing it if they do. Such inducements will only be relevant for those with a propensity to see and choose IPA as an acceptable action alternative; if they do not see IPA as acceptable, they will not perceive it as an option regardless of external inducements, and if they have a strong capacity for self-control may be able to choose a morally acceptable option even if induced to consider IPA.

What kinds of interactions occur between people and places (situations) depends on how different people exhibiting different propensities intersect with settings and circumstances presenting different inducements. This is captured in the concept of exposure (Wikström, 2014; Wikström et al., 2012, 2024). People vary in their exposure to settings—for example, those that present potential motivators within a moral context conducive to IPA—as an outcome of their activity fields. The link between activity fields and criminogenic exposure is similar to that of routine activities and opportunities but with added attention to the people exhibiting different activity fields, that is, their relevant characteristics.

Activity fields are shaped by socioecological processes of selection (Wikström, 2007b, 2020; Wikström et al., 2024; Wikström & Treiber, 2019). People actively shape their own activity fields through self-selection by exerting their personal access agency to place themselves into preferred settings. Their ability to self-select into particular settings is limited by their specific access opportunities, which are constrained by social selection, social forces that place certain kinds of people in or exclude them from certain kinds of settings (Wikström et al., 2024). These forces are an outcome of cultural conditions that establish rules about access and structural conditions that govern how resources (capital) that shape access are distributed (Wikström & Sampson, 2003).

Restrictions during the pandemic period dramatically reshaped people's activity fields, imposing new sociocultural rules and transforming social structural conditions; as a consequence, access opportunities were reduced as people were powerfully socially selected into a narrower set of environments, as was their access agency to self-select into many environments to which they previously had regular access (Wikström et al., 2024).

To summarize, SAT suggests IPA occurs when people see it as an acceptable response to a relevant motivator in a particular context as a consequence of their proclivities, propensities, and exposure to criminogenic inducements. Rates of IPA thus reflect the distribution of IPA-prone people and IPA-inducing settings, as well as the nature of activity fields (e.g., shaped by selection effects) in a population. Changes in rates of IPA, for example, its prevalence, frequency, nature, and distribution, therefore occur as an outcome of changes in people's relevant motivations (determined by their proclivities, potential motivators, and their patterns of convergence), perception of IPA as an acceptable action alternative (determined by people's personal morality, settings' moral norms, and their patterns of convergence), and choice of IPA as the preferred alternative (determined by people's self-control capacities, settings' deterrent capacities, and their relevance).

SAT can reframe the question "How would stay-at-home restrictions affect IPA and IPH?" into 'How would stay-at-home restrictions impact people's motivations, perceptions, and choices relating to IPA and IPH?' Would they directly impact (1) people's proclivities or exposure to motivators; (2) their crime propensities—personal morals relating to IPA and IPH, or ability to exercise self-control; or (3) their exposure to conducive settings—those with weak moral norms relating to IPA and IPH, or ineffective deterrence?

It is difficult to account for the fact that people's experiences during the pandemic varied considerably when trying to draw general conclusions and predict overall changes. However, it is possible to analyze the impact that certain conditions may be expected, according to SAT, to have had (or not had) on IPA and IPH. These can then be applied to understanding the outcomes under specific conditions.

Motivation: Orienting Toward Action Goals

The strain perspective predicts that changes in motivation are key to understanding changes in IPA during the pandemic: increased strain should translate into increased IPA. SAT provides a more nuanced explanation of how, detailing the determinants of differential motivation: people become motivated when they encounter motivators (opportunities or frictions) that resonate with their particular proclivities (desires and sensitivities) to activate and orient their goal-directed attention, tempting them to satisfy a desire, or provoking them to eliminate friction. How did these interactions change as a consequence of stay-at-home restrictions? Did people's proclivities change—did they come to desire previously unappreciated ends or become sensitive to previously disregarded irritants? Were dormant proclivities activated as people encountered new opportunities and frictions, or did their exposure to relevant motivators change?

Changes in Proclivities. It is unlikely that people's desires or sensitivities dramatically changed over the pandemic period. Such changes typically take place over a longer time period than most stay-at-home restrictions were in place (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018; Verplanken & Orbell, 2022). Stay-at-home restrictions also did not generally expose people to unfamiliar settings. Thus, it is more likely that people were exposed to familiar motivators than novel opportunities to satisfy untapped desires or novel frictions that activated dormant sensitivities. While some novel opportunities did emerge, especially for IPP—for example, to use health concerns to control a partner (keep them from leaving home or socializing with others)—these would be relevant only for people with pertinent desires (Ragavan et al., 2022).

While sensitivities may not have inherently changed, they may have been magnified if other stressors depleted limited self-regulatory capacities (Baumeister et al., 2006, 2007; Hagger et al., 2010), potentially lowering the threshold for frictions to activate sensitivities and provoke a response. People faced many stressors during the pandemic period, some the most acutely when stay-at-home restrictions were imposed, for example, instability in employment, isolation, childcare, and poor physical and mental health. The number, type, and magnitude of stressors people experienced varied significantly, both materially and relative to pre-pandemic. However, as many stressors reflect prosocial concerns, those with relevant sensitivities may not have been prone to antisocial responses. Indeed, groups who reported the greatest levels of stress during the pandemic period were women and parents, groups that also exhibit more prosocial, and fewer antisocial, tendencies (Estlein et al., 2022).

People's proclivities may not have changed during stay-at-home restrictions, but their time at home with their partners potentially did, and exposed them more frequently to any opportunities and frictions these circumstances presented. If these were relevant opportunities to satisfy their desire to dominate, control, or punish a partner, or frictions that created negative sentiments toward their partner, this would have increased temptations and provocations they might respond to with IPA. It is also possible the prevalence of these opportunities and frictions declined during stay-at-home restrictions, as people may have perceived less need to dominate or control their partners, for example, their movement and activities, and fewer transgressions, for example, occurring outside the home or when socializing with others (Bhuptani et al., 2023; Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020; Kaukinen, 2020; Ragavan et al., 2022; Soeiro et al., 2023; Souma et al., 2022; Trafford, 2022).

SAT emphasizes that people respond differently to these potential motivators. The same factors that provide opportunities to control one's partner may, given different desires, provide opportunities to cooperate and bond with a partner; the same factors that create negative sentiments toward a partner may, given different sensitivities, create negative sentiments toward the circumstances and direct attention toward improving those circumstances and strengthening the relationship. Facing adverse conditions together can enhance partners' camaraderie and oppose friction, bringing them together rather than pulling them apart. Accordingly, couples report a range of impacts of the pandemic period and stay-at-home restrictions on their relationships (Canzi et al.,

2021; Estlein et al., 2022; Vives-Cases et al., 2021; Zhang, 2022). Most partnerships were not adversely affected (Estlein et al., 2022).

Motivation and IPH. IPA is generally conceptualized as a continuum from IPP to IPH of actions that achieve similar goals, for example, dominating, controlling, or punishing a partner, or resolving conflict. Stronger motivations may be associated with perceiving more severe forms of IPA as acceptable or controls being insufficient to counter them. This is consistent with the observation that acute triggering events are implicated in IPA escalating into IPH (Aguilar Ruiz et al., 2023; Campbell et al., 2007; Cunha & Goncalves, 2016; Dugan et al., 2003). Given such events may have been less likely during stay-at-home restrictions, and it was less likely the activity fields of partners who did separate would converge, exposing ex-partners to relevant opportunities and frictions, a decrease in IPH might be predicted, although across the entire pandemic period rates may have remained stable as restrictions and consequently activity fields fluctuated.

Motivation: Conclusions. In summation, it is unlikely that people's active proclivities markedly changed or that previously inactive proclivities became activated during stay-at-home restrictions, although heightened stressors may have aggravated sensitivities and lowered the threshold for provocation. It is more plausible that particular desires and sensitivities that people exhibited prior to the imposition of stay-at-home restrictions were exacerbated by more regular exposure to relevant motivators. These effects would only have been relevant for some people (moving beyond opportunities)—specifically, those with relevant desires and sensitivities (moving beyond strain). Importantly, SAT argues that whether motivation translates into particular actions depends on what people see as acceptable responses.

Perception: Seeing IPA as Acceptable

At the core of SAT's explanation of crime is the rule-guided nature of people's action. SAT does not make assumptions or value judgments about which rules do or should guide people's actions but instead seeks to understand the rules that different people and places accept and enforce and the role this plays in action. One of the key roles SAT ascribes to rule-guidance is shaping which actions people see as acceptable. The perception of alternatives refers to the selective process through which a set of action alternatives emerges that are perceived as viable responses to a particular motivator in particular circumstances (Treiber, 2017; Wikström et al., 2024). While alternatives may be selected in or out of this set based on aspects such as feasibility or salience, according to SAT moral rule guidance is of particular relevance in perceptions involving acts of crime. A moral filter guides the selection of actions a person sees as acceptable under the circumstances into the set of possible responses for consideration (and excludes actions a person does not see as acceptable), predominantly through the implicit, unconscious application of personal moral rules to the perceived moral context in which motivators are encountered, bolstered by affective processes (moral

emotions) that signal the importance of rule-following (Wikström, 2010; Wikström et al., 2024).

An important premise of SAT is that rule guidance varies between and within people and between and within social contexts. Acts that cause harm are regulated in most social contexts, but the nature of these regulations varies, for example, in scope and enforcement. In many social contexts, IPA breaks social norms, if not laws, but in others, it is accepted and may even be expected (Delaney, 2023; Neighbors et al., 2010). People also vary in whether or not they find IPA acceptable, under what circumstances, in what forms, and to what degrees (Barton-Crosby, 2017). Even within social contexts in which IPA is legal and/or culturally normative, it may not be universally perceived as acceptable, and within contexts in which it is illegal and/or culturally deviant, it may not be universally perceived as unacceptable.

By taking this variation into account, SAT avoids common pitfalls of criminological theories that adopt universal and/or moralistic assumptions about rule-guidance, for example, that all people share a conventional morality, or that certain actions possess an inherent moral value (Bandura, 2016; Hirschi, 1969). Arguably, people vary in what actions they find acceptable (in particular circumstances) and how acceptable they find them, and this has critical relevance for understanding why they break rules (Wikström, 2010, 2019). Arguably, some people, in some contexts, commit IPA because they do not see it as wrong, nor do they perceive that other people see it as wrong.

How and why might perceptions of IPA's acceptability have changed as a consequence of stay-at-home restrictions? Would people's personal morality change, for example, how wrong they felt IPA to be? Did moral contexts change, that is, how wrong settings indicated IPA to be, and how much it was disapproved of by others? Or did the interplay change: were people exposed to a different array of moral contexts that changed how their morality applied and, hence, how they perceived their options for action and whether they considered IPA?

Changes in Personal Morality. Like proclivities, propensities tend to take a long time to develop and change (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018; Hart et al., 2009; Verplanken & Orbell, 2022). SAT posits that people's morality changes through a psychological process of moral education in which moral content encountered through direct instruction, indirect observation, and experimentation is evaluated and integrated into previously established personal morality (Wikström, 2020; Wikström et al., 2024; Wikström & Treiber, 2019). Such content influences personal morals incrementally. During stay-at-home restrictions people spent the majority of their time with close family members who are unlikely to have introduced novel moral content that dramatically changed their personal morality. The wider moral context did change; people became subject to new laws and social norms, for example, about masks, social distancing, self-isolating, vaccination, and restricting movements and activities. While such rules did not directly relate to IPA, disagreement about the rules and how strictly to abide by them may have created a new source of friction for some partners (Wyckoff et al., 2023), albeit likely in line with existing conflict around each other's conduct,

for example, unwillingness to follow the rules and lack of compliance. However, this would not necessarily have affected whether people subsequently saw IPA as an acceptable response.

Changes in Moral Contexts. During the pandemic, many jurisdictions experienced an increase in rhetoric around prosocial behavior, morality, and rule-following in the context of the pandemic (Ekberg et al., 2021; Morales, 2022; Skog & Lundström, 2022). Prominent public discourses asserted the need to make altruistic sacrifices in support of the common good by following new rules designed to minimize transmission of COVID-19, maintain manageable demands on public institutions and resources, and sustain the economy. Rule-breaking elicited moral outrage publicized through media outlets and, in some cases, legal consequences (Coglianese & Mahboubi, 2021; Ekberg et al., 2021; Georgieva et al., 2021; Skog & Lundström, 2022). Strong prosocial messages emphasized the importance of prioritizing the health and well-being not only of close contacts but also fellow national and global citizens. These messages may have strengthened prosocial values with which they resonated, but had less impact on values with which they conflicted, and may even have served as a source of friction (Wyckoff et al., 2023).

In many cultural contexts, specific messages were also widely communicated about the risks of IPA during stay-at-home restrictions, and many countries introduced new services and made services more accessible remotely (Emezue, 2020; Fogarty et al., 2022; Garcia et al., 2022; Hazebrouck, 2022; Weeks et al., 2023). Where effective, these efforts enhanced awareness of IPA as unacceptable, strengthening the salience of rules (laws, social norms) against IPA, but this may not have changed people's perception of the acceptability of IPA, given the rules themselves did not change.

Despite these external discourses, the moral context in most homes was unlikely to change dramatically. Moral contexts are shaped directly by the norms and expectations of the people taking part in those settings, and household rules regarding IPA would have been established prior to the pandemic. However, if other family members or regular visitors to the home influenced that moral context, their increased presence or absence could have an impact on the shared or prevailing rules of conduct during stay-at-home restrictions. Likewise, new additions to the household, for example, new partners, may have affected the moral context. These changes may have encouraged or discouraged partners' perception of IPA as acceptable.

Changes in Exposure. Interactions are central to SAT's explanation of IPA, which it posits will only be seen as acceptable in settings conducive to IPA and only by people prone to seeing IPA as acceptable. For most people, neither their IPA morality nor exposure to relevant moral contexts is likely to have qualitatively changed. However, those who were prone to IPA and whose home environments were conducive to IPA prior to the pandemic may have experienced heightened exposure under stay-at-home restrictions, leading them to see IPA as an acceptable response to their motivations more often.

Perception and IPH. Rule-guidance will vary regarding acceptable responses to motivations, but as the severity of actions increases, fewer people see them as acceptable regardless of their motivations (Wikström, 2010; Wikström et al., 2012). Although IPH involves rule-guidance regarding behavior toward one's partner, it crosses a distinct threshold for rule-breaking from other forms of IPA; while some people consider certain forms of violence acceptable under certain circumstances, lethal violence is rarely considered acceptable in any circumstances (although there are rare examples in which it is, e.g., honor killings; Standish, 2014). Given motivations and morals likely did not change significantly during stay-at-home restrictions, it is unlikely people experienced more situations in which they perceived IPH as acceptable, regardless of how significant their strains, how attractive their targets, or how weak their controls.

Perception: Conclusions. In summation, it is unlikely people's personal morality markedly changed or that they encountered novel moral contexts during stay-at-home restrictions. Thus, it is unlikely that incidents in which IPA was perceived as acceptable markedly changed. If a home environment was already conducive to IPA, that is, household members already saw IPA as acceptable, then they would likely continue to see IPA as acceptable when they spent time together at home. If their home environment was not already conducive to IPA, that is, they did not see IPA as acceptable, then it is unlikely they would start to see IPA as acceptable. Importantly, SAT argues that people make choices among the acceptable options they perceive (Treiber, 2017; Wikström, 2019; Wikström et al., 2024). Thus, whether they choose IPA as the preferred acceptable alternative depends on how they make their choices.

Choice: Choosing IPA as the Preferred or Only Alternative

According to SAT, people choose action alternatives (form intentions to pursue them) either out of habit—if they perceive and experience no conflict in relation to only one alternative they are willing to pursue—or deliberately—if they perceive competing or conflicted alternatives and need to decide which to pursue (Treiber, 2017; Wikström et al., 2024).

Habitual action choices become automated through regular satisfaction of particular motivations in particular contexts; the more regular the satisfaction, the less particular the motivations they satisfy and the contexts in which they are implicated (Treiber, 2011, 2017; Verplanken & Orbell, 2022). Habitual actions are still rule-guided, shaped by experience in a familiar moral context. They are also still chosen; people allow their immediate perception of how to respond to the motivator in the setting, which activates the primed habitual action, to guide the action choice. This means habits are constrained by personal moral rules and the perceived moral norms of the setting, but this constraint has a more retroactive than synchronic dynamic (Treiber, 2017; Wikström & Treiber, 2009a, 2009b).

Deliberate action choices involve the evaluation of one or more alternatives a person perceives as potentially acceptable means of satisfying their motivation. This evaluation process is activated by perceived competition or conflict between

alternatives and/or rule guidance and involves the active assessment of perceived alternatives to determine which is the preferred morally acceptable alternative (Treiber, 2011, 2017; Wikström, 2010). When people deliberate, they organize and evaluate action-relevant information from the external setting and internal knowledge, including information about potential outcomes (their subjective value, predicted likelihood, etc.) and rule-guidance—relevant rules of the person and the setting, their importance, and their enforcement (Treiber, 2017). SAT posits that controls, defined as situational influences on action choices that oppose the selection of alternatives that break the rules, only play a role in deliberate choices because only deliberate choices involve the management of conflicting rule-guidance; in habitual choices, people do not perceive any conflicts between their personal rules or the rules of the setting and the habitual action (Wikström et al., 2024).

Did the balance between habitual and deliberate choices change during stay-at-home restrictions? Were people more or less likely to perceive conflicting alternatives? Did stay-at-home restrictions disrupt or cultivate habit formation? Did the input to the process of deliberation change, for example, expected outcomes, rule-guidance, and controls? Was there a greater need for controls, for example, to counteract more situations in which IPA was perceived as an acceptable alternative? Did this provide more opportunities to strengthen self-control? Was there less effective deterrence (e.g., as a consequence of changes in people present)? Did this change which options people saw as preferred?

Changes in Habits. Stay-at-home restrictions increased the amount of time people spent in the same domestic setting for extended periods of time. These were typically settings with which they were familiar and had likely already developed habits associated with situations that frequently arose. To the extent that their motivations and perception of alternatives remained the same, habitual actions would be chosen more often. This would suggest people who habitually choose IPA in response to interactions with their intimate partner would tend to increase their habitual IPA during stay-at-home restrictions.

These choices can be disrupted by perceived conflict between the habitual alternative and rule-guidance in relation to the motivation as a consequence of changes in the motivation and perceived rule-guidance (Treiber, 2011, 2017). For example, one of the potential outcomes of heightened messaging around IPA may have been to make conflicting rule guidance more salient; however, it is unlikely these messages dramatically changed the perceptions of people who regularly perceived IPA as acceptable. This would be especially true of those with well-established habits who perceived IPA as not only acceptable, but unconflicted and did not consider other alternatives (Albarracín & Shavitt, 2018; Verplanken & Orbell, 2022).

Changes in habits themselves depend on processes of habituation—the process of habit formation whereby an action becomes increasingly primed through successful repetition, and increasingly automated, as the choice process shifts from being conscious and reflective (governed by executive functions) to increasingly unconscious and reflexive (governed by expectancies) (Treiber, 2017; Verplanken & Orbell, 2022).

Processes of habituation will therefore be affected by changes in the regularity or degree of success of a particular action. If IPA achieved desired outcomes more regularly during stay-at-home restrictions, it may have become increasingly habituated—increasingly the only alternative perceived and thus automatically chosen for action in response to certain motivations. Activation and consequently strengthening of existing habits may explain why IPA increased among those with a history of IPA prior to the pandemic (Lausi et al., 2021; Plášilová et al., 2021; Uzoho et al., 2023), while the formation of new habits may help explain why there was a rise in certain forms of IPA (such as IPP).

If IPA was enacted less regularly, or less successfully, it could become less habituated, that is, less likely to be perceived as the only alternative. If proclivities associated with IPA such as a desire to control one's partner, or frictions from concerns about infidelity, were satisfied or resolved by the limitations placed on a partner's movement during stay-at-home restrictions, habitual IPA may have become less primed (although evidence suggests established habits are difficult to modify, and will reactivate when relevant circumstances are reencountered; Albarracín & Shavitt, 2018; Verplanken & Orbell, 2022).

It is also possible that people developed new habits during stay-at-home restrictions if they began responding regularly to relevant motivators with an alternative action that proved equally, or more, successful. Changes in the moral context may have provided the impetus for this; for example, children present in the home may have increased awareness of other more acceptable alternatives than IPA for dealing with frictions, which over time may have become primed through habituation. This may also explain increases in less severe forms of IPA, such as IPP.

Habitual Choices and IPH. While IPA has qualities that make it a good candidate for habituation—it occurs in a specific, familiar context in which a person regularly acts—IPH does not. IPH is not an action that can be repeated regularly and successfully. Therefore, any changes to habit activation or formation would not be expected to influence IPH during the pandemic (or at any other time).

Changes in Deliberation. The ability to deliberate (executive capabilities) is unlikely to have changed as a consequence of stay-at-home restrictions, although there was more consumption of alcohol and substances that can temporarily impair executive control (Colton et al., 2023). However, changes in the moral context may have changed conflicting rule-guidance, affecting how often partners deliberated about committing IPA. As the input of other parties decreased during stay-at-home restrictions, conflicting rule-guidance may have decreased, leaving it to be determined mainly by the partner dynamic, although the presence of others and wider moral messages will have also exerted some influence.

There may be less need for control if there is less conflict. Rules only need to be enforced if there is a possibility of their being broken; if rule-breaking is not seen as an option, the rule does not need any further enforcement. Key forms of control are self-control, people's ability to act in accordance with personal morals when they

consider breaking them (e.g., through consideration of the salience of the rule and the consequences of breaking it, and action alternatives); and deterrence, settings' ability to induce their users to comply with their moral rules of conduct when those users consider rule-breaking (e.g., through consideration of cues demonstrating relevant rules and the consequences of breaking them, and action alternatives).

The ability to exercise self-control is unlikely to have changed dramatically during stay-at-home restrictions, though temporary effects on the ability to exercise self-control may have increased, for example, as a consequence of increases in substance use or overuse (depletion) (Baumeister et al., 2007; Colton et al., 2023). Impairment of these abilities may have led to increases in IPA for those who perceived IPA as acceptable but previously deliberatively chose other alternatives. However, evidence of such effects is mixed (Colton et al., 2023). For those who did not see IPA as acceptable—still the majority of people, despite the prevalence of IPA—they are unlikely to have had any impact.

Levels of deterrence generally reduced during stay-at-home restrictions; thus IPA could have increased for those whose IPA was controlled by the threat of consequences prior to the pandemic. These changes would be irrelevant for those who did not commit IPA prior to the pandemic because of deterrence.

Deliberate Choices and IPH. People will choose to commit IPH deliberately when they consider it as a viable option, evaluate it and compare it with competing alternatives, and find it both morally acceptable and the preferred alternative. This requires a person to see IPH as an acceptable response to particular circumstances and to view it favorably when compared with other alternatives. This evaluation and comparison process is not necessarily a rational one, and the outcome is not based solely on expected utility; affective information will play a key role in the acceptability of the IPH (e.g., righteousness, shame, excitement, fear—both anticipated and anticipatory) and the formation of intent may be foreshortened by impulsivity, urgency, callousness, and so on (Treiber, 2017; Wikström et al., 2024). Circumstances in which IPH occurs are often emotionally charged, shaping the deliberative process and potentially undermining the efficacy of controls. Would we expect people to make different choices regarding IPH as a consequence of stay-at-home restrictions? The reason they will not have previously chosen to commit IPH will be because they have not encountered a relevant motivator in a conducive moral context and, therefore, have not considered the possibility; or, if they have, because they have not perceived IPH as an acceptable alternative when an opportunity has arisen; or, if they have, because they have not seen IPH as the preferred alternative. As discussed, it is unlikely that people encountered novel motivations conducive to IPH as a consequence of stay-at-home restrictions. It is also unlikely that people changed their perception of IPH as a morally acceptable alternative. However, it is possible that some people's response to relevant motivators increased as a consequence of depleted resources to manage stressors, or the alternatives they perceived for action were reduced by changes in their activity fields (e.g., the possibility of escaping a partner's presence). In regards to changes in whether IPH is evaluated as the preferred alternative, it is possible that changes in controls may

have shifted the balance among alternatives in favor of IPH for those who were only restrained by social control, and/or who lacked self-control capacity. However, this does not suggest stay-at-home restrictions would have a general effect on people's perception of IPH as a preferred alternative or even a particularly strong specific effect; seeing IPH as a morally acceptable and preferred alternative would remain rare, even for those most vulnerable to doing so. Therefore, SAT would not expect the same increase in people seeing IPH as an acceptable alternative, and choosing it as the preferred acceptable alternative.

Choice: Conclusion

In summation, it is unlikely that people's choices changed significantly under stay-at-home restrictions, given that the alternatives they perceived changed significantly. Given their increased exposure to a familiar context, habitual actions may have increased, including habitual IPA. Changes in home environments may also have disrupted existing habits. While perceived alternatives may not have changed significantly, perceptions of conflict may have—increasing or decreasing—affecting the need for controls. This need will determine the relevance of changes in the efficacy of controls.

While the ability to exercise self-control may not have intrinsically changed, some temporary influences may have reduced self-control capacities. Deterrence through both formal and informal social controls may also have reduced, affecting the evaluation of competing/conflicting alternatives and reducing opposition to choosing IPA, but only for people who see IPA as an option but recognize it breaks a personal or contextual rule.

Overall Conclusions

This application of SAT to the question of whether IPA and IPH would increase as a consequence of stay-at-home restrictions highlights the complexity of explaining moral action and taking into account the variety of people's experiences during the pandemic. Some general, albeit conditional, conclusions can be drawn.

1. Under stay-at-home restrictions, IPA would increase predominantly for those who exhibited IPA prior to the pandemic.
2. This would be related to the increase in their exposure to settings and circumstances in which they previously encountered opportunities they could satisfy and frictions they could resolve through IPA, saw IPA as an acceptable response, and chose it over any competing alternatives.
3. This would also be related to a reduction in external controls, although for most people, a reduction in external controls would not be associated with any increase in IPA.
4. IPH would be less likely to increase than IPA, as people rarely see IPH as acceptable, and it was less likely they would encounter circumstances that

would lead them to see and choose IPH as acceptable and the preferred alternative under stay-at-home restrictions.

These general conclusions culminate from effects that are posited by SAT in relation to each stage of the action process through which IPA and IPH come about.

In relation to motivation, the largest impact of stay-at-home restrictions on the interplay between people's proclivities and settings' potential motivators would arguably come from an increase in exposure to relevant motivators already encountered in the home prior to the pandemic. While there is unlikely to have been a large effect of people developing or expressing new proclivities in response to novel motivators, existing proclivities may have been aggravated by a general increase in other stressors. Many stressors would not be associated with any increase in IPA.

In relation to perception, changes in the perception of IPA as an acceptable alternative would be unlikely unless the moral context of IPA in the home changed significantly. The largest effect on the moral context in the home would relate to changes in household composition and contact with others.

In relation to choice, stay-at-home restrictions may have affected the frequency of habitual IPA for people with existing habits, while changes in controls may have impacted the evaluation of alternatives for people who perceived IPA as acceptable but previously chose competing alternatives.

Thus, during stay-at-home restrictions, it is probable that IPA increased for those who already experienced relevant motivations, perceived IPA as an option, and chose it (habitually or deliberately), when spending time at home with their partner, especially if their home circumstances did not change. For others who did not experience relevant motivations, see IPA as an option, or prefer it to other options, increased exposure to their partner in the home will have been largely irrelevant in relation to IPA. Likewise, new or exacerbated strains will not have directly translated into increased IPA as people differ in their sensitivities and in what they see as acceptable responses; people who have not previously been motivated by strains or seen IPA as an acceptable response are unlikely to have begun doing so.

Those who did experience novel motivations, changed their perception of IPA as acceptable, or their assessment of IPA as a preferred or uncontested option will be those who experienced particularly significant changes in their relationships and home environment that affected the moral context of motivations and the enforcement of rules discouraging IPA.

Crucially, people's experiences during the pandemic and how they responded differed, both because their circumstances differed (both at the macro and micro environmental level) and their personal characteristics differed. Explanations positing general effects relying on general assumptions about people's motivations, perceptions, choices, and experiences during the pandemic lack the specificity to account for these differences. SAT offers a more nuanced and specific explanation of the conditions under which changes in IPA might be expected during stay-at-home restrictions, detailing how changes in exposure to motivators activate relevant desires and sensitivities, how changes in moral contexts (rules and their importance) change the kinds

of actions people see as acceptable; and how perceived options translate into action through automatic and deliberate processes, and the conditions that may affect habits and influence the outcome of deliberation.

In conclusion, some people are resistant to IPA inducements (relevant motivators and moral contexts conducive to IPA), and some are susceptible (depending on their proclivities, personal IPA morality, and ability to exercise self-control). Only those who were susceptible were prone to IPA under stay-at-home restrictions, and changes in their IPA depended on changes in their exposure to IPA inducements. The same is true for IPH, but with fewer people being prone to IPH and fewer changes in IPH inducements, SAT would not predict the same increase in IPH as IPA.

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