

# Cobras and Pit Bulls—Men Who Batter

**I**n their book, *When Men Batter Women*, Drs. Jacobson and Gottman describe battering as “*physical aggression with a purpose to control, intimidate, and subjugate another human being. Battering is always accompanied by injury, and is virtually always associated with fear and even terror on the part of the battered woman.*”

Knowing what makes a batterer tick can help determine whether an abusive relationship can be salvaged or whether it is beyond repair.

Drs. Jacobson and Gottman have found that batterers tend to fall into one of two categories: **Pit Bulls** (men whose emotions quickly explode, who are insecure and have an unhealthy dependence on the women they abuse) or **Cobras** (men who are cool and calculated as they inflict pain and punishment on their victims).

During their study, Jacobson and Gottman confirmed that **there is nothing a battered woman can do to stop the battering**, and once it begins, it rarely stops even though the batterer may go through a treatment program.

Usually when physical violence decreases or stops, it is simply replaced by verbal threats and emotional abuse. This type of battering does not leave marks and is not against the law, but it works because it scares battered women as much as physical abuse does. It is especially useful to abusers because they can control their victims through threats and verbal reminders of previous battering while keeping themselves out of trouble with the law.

The following chart describes the major differences between Cobras and Pit Bulls. **Although there are some distinctive differences, both are very dangerous and unpredictable.**

Cobras	Pit Bulls
Calm internally while battering; cool and calculating or out of control explosions	Internally aroused (anger increases) as battering continues
Evidence of criminal traits, shows violence toward others, little or no remorse	Usually violent only toward partner, feels some level of guilt, but usually blames partner
No fear of abandonment, but desperate need to control; superficial commitments	Emotionally dependent on partner, frequently jealous, paranoid and obsessive
Motivated by desire for immediate gratification and control	Motivated by fear of being abandoned and need to control
Strikes fast and hard combined with belligerence and emotional abuse, but can be distracted after victim leaves	Strikes hard and refuses to let go; frequently stalks victim for years after she leaves
Harder to leave initially, but safer to leave in the long run	Easier to leave initially, but more dangerous to leave in the long run
Knows how to con police officers, judges, and therapists by saying the right thing	Feels like a victim and believes wife is the perpetrator
Justifies battering wife to teach her that he has control	Feels some guilt, but blames wife for making him lose his temper
Gains control by ferocious abuse or explosive anger	Gains control by isolation and mind control; denies the woman's experience of reality until she doubts her own sanity
Control means being left alone and not being told what to do by a woman	Control means taking control of a woman's life, monitoring her activities, and turning her into a puppet
Resists household rules and intimate involvement; refuses to make personal changes	Demands change from their partners, but are never satisfied with partners no matter how hard they try; avoids change in themselves
Very frightening, but captivating and charming; highly effective tactics of control and intimidation	Charming; Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personality; uses violence and entrapment to control
Feels superior to other people and above the law	Feels like a victim; frequently depressed; rationalizes his actions by blaming others
Violence is generally more severe, involving weapons and death threats	Capable of chronic and savage brutality
More emotionally abusive initially	Becomes emotionally abusive as they become more enraged
Traumatic background involving violence from more than one family member	Some violence in the home, with the father frequently being a batterer
More severely violent in active relationship	More severely violent after relationship is ended by separation or divorce
Very rarely, if never, helped through therapy or programs for abusers	Sometimes helped through therapy and programs for abusers