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A POSTMODERN APPROACH TO WOMEN'S USE OF VIOLENCE: DEVELOPING MULTIPLE AND COMPLEX CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

Maureen C. McHugh, Nichole A. Livingston, and Amy Ford
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

We review the research on intimate partner abuse and, in particular, the articles in this issue, from within a feminist and postmodern framework. Research on women's use of violence is reviewed in terms of how researchers have constructed and measured violence and have conceptualized intimate partner violence (IPV) and gender. What and how we measure determines what we find (McHugh & Cosgrove, 2005). We call for new conceptualizations of intimate violence and for more complex constructions of gender. We offer a postmodern perspective on gender and IPV arguing that interpersonal violence always involves gender, that approach and method influence results, and that men and women use violence in both similar and different ways.

Women's use of violence and the possibility of gender symmetry in intimate partner violence (IPV) have been repeatedly demonstrated and contested in violence research. Evidence of women's use of violence disputes our representation of interpersonal violence, demonstrates methodological and measurement shortcomings in our research, brings into question the adequacy of our explanatory theories of violence, challenges our notions about men and women, and contests our conceptions of gender (McHugh, 2005). In this article, we address the consequences of acknowledging women's use of violence from a feminist and postmodern framework. Feminist research examines the gendered context of women's lives, exposes gender inequalities, empowers women, advocates for social change, and/or improves the status or material reality of women's lives (McHugh & Cosgrove, 2005). The postmodern perspective suggests that rather than uncovering truths, the methods we use construct and produce knowledge, and thus they privilege certain views and discount or marginalize others (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000, 2002; Gergen, 2001). Both the feminist and the postmodern perspectives share explicit epistemological and methodological appreciation for the fact that context matters, and for the fact that de-contextualizing the individual frequently supports the status quo and potentially defends oppressive conditions (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2002). Consistent with both a feminist and a social constructionist perspective, we call for a more careful consideration of the way we construct and research the concepts of violence, abuse, and aggression, and the way we conceptualize gender. We contend that the methods we employ and the samples we recruit to study violence are influenced by our starting ideological perspectives and the way we construct violence and gender. What we think we are studying and how we choose to study it subsequently influence our interpretations and explanations of violence. We do not espouse a positivist approach that gives researchers a privileged status in which they are implicitly "authorized" by their status as scientists or their use of scientific methods to uncover truths about the violence in participants' lives (Cosgrove, 2004). Rather, we argue against the conceptualization of intimate violence as a single truth or as a debate between polarized positions, and we reject either/or dichotomies as simplistic and not helpful. Accepting either the view that intimate violence is unilateral, that is, men beating women, or the conclusion that interpersonal violence is gender symmetric, that is, equally and reciprocally utilized by men and women, limits our conceptual framework and results in tunnel vision. Rather, we conceptualize interpersonal violence as a complex, multifaceted, and dynamic aspect of human interaction that occurs in multiple forms and patterns. The experience and meaning of violence is viewed as being connected to both the relationship and the larger context in which the violence occurs. Although the articles contained in this issue

Maureen C. McHugh, Nichole A. Livingston, and Amy Ford, Department of Psychology, Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Maureen C. McHugh, Department of Psychology, 204 Uhler Hall, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA 15705. E-mail: mcmchugh@iup.edu

address diverse research questions and offer varied conclusions, an important thread weaves them together. Taken as a whole, all of the articles emphasize the importance of context when studying interpersonal violence. IPV neither exists in a vacuum nor limits itself to easy definitions and simplistic categories. The research reported here attests to the importance of considering the context of intimate violence, including the type of relationship in which violence occurs, the relevant gender roles and norms, and other aspects of the socio-historical context.

IGNORING WOMEN'S USE OF VIOLENCE

As Richardson (2005) points out, we have been slow to recognize or acknowledge that some women use physical aggression against others. Frieze (2005b) has reached a similar conclusion based on a review of her work and the research of others that do not confirm unilateral male-perpetrated violence directed toward women partners as the only or most frequent pattern of interpersonal violence. As a result of the empirical documentation of women's use of violence, Frieze (2000, 2005b) has consistently called attention to the question of women's use of violence, sometimes experiencing resistance and criticism. The focus of this special issue reflects our belief that attending to these phenomena is necessary so as to understand IPV.

Despite continuing evidence that women use violence in their intimate relationships (see reviews by Archer, 2002; Frieze, 2005b), many researchers continue to focus on men's violence against women. Brush (2005) explains feminist reluctance to acknowledge women's violence in relation to the feminist struggle to call public attention to and politicize men's violence; it has taken considerable time and energy to problematize male violence and to view it as rooted in social systems rather than being the result of nature or personality. Despite the challenges raised by women's use of interpersonal violence, there are compelling reasons why, as feminists, we should acknowledge, investigate, and try to understand women's use of violence in their intimate relationships (Emery & Lloyd, 1994). Refusal to recognize and failure to analyze women's use of interpersonal violence can, ultimately, undermine the feminist agenda of addressing male violence against women. The controversy concerning the appropriate focus and methods of research on IPV is viewed as grounded in ideological positions (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1993). Failure to address the question of women's use of violence means that individuals with other ideological and etiological perspectives will be the (only) ones to address the issue. Reluctance to acknowledge women's aggression results in limited theoretical models and ineffective interventions. Researchers can enrich their theoretical perspectives, develop more complex research questions, and create more effective interventions by including or centering on women as aggressors (Brush, 2005). It is for these reasons that this special issue was created.

The tendency of psychological researchers to study physical aggression as the behavior of men has been repeatedly criticized for making gendered assumptions (e.g., McHugh, Koeske, & Frieze, 1986; White & Kowalski, 1994). Even as we realize the ways in which our gendered assumptions interfere with our ability to conduct unbiased research on aggression (Richardson, 2005) and interpersonal violence, our view of interpersonal violence continues to focus on the question of gender differences. All of the articles in this issue call for us to move away from the single conceptualization of interpersonal violence as the male batterer abusing his wife or partner, but also challenge our conceptions of victims and perpetrators and our conceptions of gender. Research demonstrating gender similarities in the use of violence in intimate relationships (as reviewed by Archer, [2002] and Frieze [2005b]) challenges our stereotypic understanding of relationship violence as unilateral and requires us to explore the complexities of interpersonal violence. Here we argue for the development of more complex, contextual, and layered understanding of the problem. Richardson argues for examining the relationship specifically, as relationship is a more important determinant of aggressive behavior than gender. In Richardson's work we see that, although women are not the passive beings they were so long assumed to be, our conceptualization of interpersonal violence does not end when presented with data that evidence equal rates of violence in men and women. Although women are no longer viewed as passive beings incapable of aggression, the issue of gender remains part of the context in which violence is perpetrated, experienced, and observed. In some way, questions about gender underlie each of the articles included in this issue as well as the articles published in the forthcoming special issue of *Sex Roles* (McHugh & Frieze, 2005). Does gender matter in our conceptualizations of interpersonal violence? Although some advocates of the gender symmetry position would argue that gender is not a useful predictor of who may perpetrate interpersonal violence, the articles in this issue argue that gender does matter in how interpersonal violence is constructed, experienced, and explained.

WHAT ARE WE STUDYING?

As we uncover more and more violence perpetrated by different groups of people against their intimate partners in varied contexts and types of relationships, our conceptions of interpersonal violence have been modified (McHugh, 1993; McHugh & Bartoszek, 2000). Our changing understanding of interpersonal violence is reflected in the terms we have developed to describe it. When we identified dating violence as a widespread problem, we abandoned earlier terms such as *wife abuse* and *marital violence*, realizing that violence was not limited to married couples. As we recognized violence in gay and lesbian couples, we acknowledged that neither *family violence* nor *dating violence* was an appropriate term, so some of us began to use the term

intimate partner violence or *intimate partner abuse*. Individuals have challenged the use of labels such as *victim* and *batterer* as the full extent of mutual violence is revealed and because such labels represent only a single dimension of the individual. The labels we use are increasingly recognized as indicating our ideological and methodological biases/perspectives; what we name a phenomenon both reflects and determines how we conceptualize it (McHugh, 1993; McHugh & Bartoszek, 2000). Use of the term *battered women* often indicates an interest in unilateral male-perpetrated heterosexual violence, whereas family violence is a term associated with research describing bilateral couple violence. Battering has been constructed as a pattern of domination, intimidation, and coercive control (Dasgupta, 2002; Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Pence & Paymar, 1993). Straus (1999) considered this definition to be the broad definition of battering, which he contrasted with the more narrowly defined family violence, which refers only to physical assault. Straus acknowledged that the two definitions have different social and political implications and reflect distinct agendas. How we construct and label the phenomena under investigation impacts who we recruit for research, the questions we ask, our interpretation of the data, and what explanatory models we develop.

A concept or a label can help us to organize and articulate our experience. Before the term *stalking* was coined and applied, how did a woman with a partner who engaged in persistent surveillance, spying, monitoring, and insistent phoning label or construct her experience? As an instructor of the Psychology of Women, the first author experienced students who today would be seen as victims of stalking asking her about the experience and whether they should be concerned about their safety. At that time there were no constructs to label the experience and no laws prohibiting it. There was also no research to inform our response to such victims. Our progress in understanding and intervening in these cases depended on the conceptualization of stalking and the conduct of research. In this issue, Williams and Frieze (2005a) address questions of how to define and label stalking and also address the students' question of how such behaviors are related to their physical safety.

Our constructions and operational definitions of the phenomenon under study can also introduce limitations and distortions in women's understanding of their own experiences (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2002). When we speak for women or about women's experience, we may distort or silence women's own voices (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000). When we give a woman a label for her experience, and outline for her the particulars of the phenomenon, we direct her attention and memory and impact her own construction of her experiences. For example, researchers who operationalize initiation of IPV by the question "Who hit first?" are directing the respondents to a (the researchers' own) particular construction of violence—that no matter what has happened previously in terms of psychological abuse or intimidation by threats, the violence "begins" with the first act of physical aggression. In this way, science has claimed the power to name reality and has sometimes challenged the credibility of women to articulate and name their own experiences. Kelly (1988) is the rare researcher who recorded women's own labels for their experience of relationship violence. According to Kelly, how women experienced and labeled their experience changed over the course of the relationship and applying the label "battering" altered their retrospective view of what had happened.

Research on couple violence indicates that when both partners in a dyad are interviewed, partners do not agree about the occurrence of violence within the relationship (Schafer, Caetano, & Clark, 2002; Szinovacz & Egley, 1995), although there is good concordance on the absence of violence. The lack of agreement is demonstrated for both clinical samples and for large-scale representative samples. Although we do not know why partners might disagree, one possibility is that they are constructing and remembering what happened differently. Similarly, there is not always concordance between researchers and respondents. Aggression researchers tend to assume that the phenomenon of violence is clear-cut, but the interpretation of any action is socially constructed (Hamby, 2005; Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999). Self-report surveys such as the Conflicts Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979) tend to measure a broad range of incidents, including some minor incidents that may not be consistently construed as violence or are ambiguously aggressive. Hamby reported on a comparison of CTS reports with other self-report measures of partner violence victimization; one-third of a sample of college women were classified as victims on at least one measure but not on all three (Hamby, Poindexter, & Gray-Little, 1996). Some misclassifications were due to serious incidents, such as being thrown across the room, that are not represented on the CTS. Most misclassifications resulted when respondents reporting being pushed, shoved, or grabbed, but did not identify that behavior as violence on another measure (Hamby, 2005). Debates about definitions and labels are often related to differences in conceptualization and ideology (Kelly & Radford, 1998; McHugh & Bartoszek, 2000) and may indicate ways in which the constructions of the researchers and the respondents differ.

Does hitting constitute violence regardless of the experience and meaning it has for the participants? Alternatively, women whose clothes have been destroyed may see this act as more violent than a slap, even though the former act is not included on the scales used to measure partner violence. "How many times did he slap you?" "How many times did you push him?" These may not be the most revealing or insightful questions we might ask in trying to understand the experience of intimate abuse, but these are the behaviors measured by the CTS, which is the most commonly used measure of partner violence.

Richardson (2005) reviews the past two decades of research on gender and aggression. Her conception of aggression, like that of other aggression researchers, includes

both verbal and physical forms. Women are more likely to be aggressive when indirect, relational, or verbal aggression is studied or included in the measure of aggression. The definitions and distinctions made by researchers in aggression research do not necessarily correspond to the way that violence has been constructed in the family violence literature. In the partner violence research, violence typically refers to physical acts of aggression, most typically to the acts of aggression included on the CTS. The CTS does include yelling at your partner, but often researchers discount this item in their counts of acts of aggression.

Others have argued that measurement of physically aggressive acts alone cannot adequately characterize violence in intimate partner relationships (e.g., Dutton, 1996; Yoshihama, 2000). Many researchers consider the larger issue of psychological abuse to be important to our understanding of IPV. Verbal and emotional abuse is often considered by victims to be more problematic than physical abuse (Straus, 1999). A limited number of studies indicate that psychological abuse is associated with more severe mental health consequences than is physical violence (Frieze, 2005b). Gondolf (1998) reviews more than 10 validated and standardized scales that measure partner mistreatment. However, the CTS remains the most frequently used measure of family and relationship violence. Partly as a result of reliance on the CTS, we know less about the effects of psychological and sexual abuse within intimate relationships. Some of the articles in this issue address these topics. The construct of IPV has become reified as the specific acts of violence included on the CTS. In response to criticisms that the CTS did not include sexual coercion or the consequences and injuries resulting from the violence, a second version of the CTS was developed by Straus and his colleagues (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996).

Some version of the CTS was used in each of the empirical studies of relationship violence reported in this issue. However, each of the researchers used a different version of the scale or added or subtracted items to create their own measurement or conception of violence. Graves, Sechrist, White, and Paradise (2005) assessed partner violence using 6 items of the CTS. Balsam and Symanski (2005) employed the revised CTS, which includes injury and sexual coercion. They also added some aggressive tactics that might be particularly used by lesbians against their partners: threatened to tell others she is a lesbian; forced her to display affection in public; and used race, age, or class against her. Rhatigan, Moore, and Stuart (2005) also used the revised CTS; the 78 items were analyzed and the reliability of the four subscales—Physical Aggression, Physical Assault, Sexual Coercion, and Injury—are reported. Sullivan, Meese, Swan, Mazure, and Snow (2005) were interested in studying the physical, sexual, and psychological abuse used by and against women in their relationships; they used both the CTS2 and the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI; Tolman, 1989). The authors explain that they used the PMWI because it assesses coercive control. They argue for assessing psychological abuse using both coercive control and emotional/verbal abuse scales as a more comprehensive and reliable approach (Sullivan et al., 2005). Similarly, Graham-Kevan and Archer (2005) were interested in the issue of coercive control; they used a modified version of the CTS that included the physical aggression items only and assessed control using a 24-item Control Behavior Scale (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003).

Williams and Frieze (2005a) used the CTS2, but also inquired about 24 persistence/stalking behaviors (e.g., trying to scare partner, threats to hurt the partner, threats to self, threats to damage belongings, verbal abuse, following, and spying). Studying a college population, Williams and Frieze found that when a relationship resulted after a period in which some forms of "courtship stalking" had occurred, violence was more likely to occur. Also, when these relationships dissolved, the thwarted partner was likely to utilize these stalking behaviors again. Williams and Frieze argue for consideration of stalking as part of a pattern of violence that originates in courtship.

The widespread use of the CTS, or at least some version of it, allows for some level of comparison among studies and suggests some degree of consensus on the meaning of IPV. However, the use of additional items and scales suggests that most researchers have a broader conception of violence and are interested in interpersonal conflict strategies other than the physical acts included on the CTS. For many IPV researchers, these strategies include various forms of sexual coercion, psychological abuse or maltreatment, humiliation, neglect, stalking, and/or establishing and maintaining control and dominance.

The CTS items do not compare to the descriptions of torture and abuse detailed in the narratives of battered women (Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, & Lewis, 1998; Dobash, Dobash, Wilson, & Daly, 1992). From a postmodern perspective, different conceptualizations of violence and abuse can contribute to a pluralistic, complex, and multilayered conception of intimate partner abuse. Reliance on a single measure that oversimplifies, reduces, or reifies our construction of violence can clearly interfere with our full understanding of these issues.

WHOM ARE WE STUDYING?

Whom we study as victims or perpetrators is critical to our construction of interpersonal violence. Studying wives as victims leads to the construction of wife abuse and the idea that helpless women are victimized by abusive male partners, whereas studying lesbian partners engaged in mutual violence leads to alternative conceptualizations. Others (Hamby, 2005; Johnson, 1995; Saunders, 2000) have argued that sample differences between family conflict and violent crime studies and between clinical and community samples can at least partly explain finding unilateral battering versus retaliatory or mutual abuse (e.g., Johnson & Ferraro, 2000;

Swan & Snow, 2003). The identification and documentation of varied types and patterns of IPV (e.g., Johnson & Leone, 2005; Weston, Temple, & Marshall, in press; Williams & Frieze, 2005b) has been suggested as a way to reconcile inconsistencies in the findings and is consistent with a postmodern acceptance of pluralistic positions. Johnson and Ferraro contend that distinct types of partner assault are uncovered by different sampling techniques. Among the reviewed studies that were based on couples undergoing treatment for marital problems including marital violence and those that were based exclusively on severe victimization samples or crime statistics, husbands were more likely to be the perpetrators of aggression and wives the recipients of partner violence. Use of a community or college sample is likely to limit the patterns of violence reported. College students represent an age and class-limited perspective. Community samples are not likely to include batterers or their partners.

As evidenced by Graves and colleagues (2005) and Williams and Frieze (2005a) it is important to consider couples who are dating as well as married and cohabiting couples. The prevalence rates reported by Graves and colleagues indicate that it is not only long-term, stable relationships in which violence occurs. Considerable investment in the form of marriage vows, children, home ownership, etc., is not a prerequisite for relationship violence. However, these investments may increase the likelihood of the abused partner remaining in the violent relationship (Rhatigan et al., 2005).

It is vital to expand our definition not only beyond the young married couple, but also beyond the heterosexual couple. Balsam and Szymanski (2005) examine relationship aggression in lesbian couples. The phenomenon of lesbian couple violence not only focuses our attention on a neglected population of perpetrators, but challenges our understanding of intimate relationships, power, and violence and suggests inadequacies in our social policy and programs for batterers (Lobel, 1986; Renzetti, 1992).

Research has sometimes marginalized the experiences of women from certain ethnic backgrounds while privileging other women's experiences (Goodwin, McHugh, & Touster, 2004). We need to recruit diverse samples of women and to consider the impact of ethnicity and other identity statuses on their experience, without making comparisons that "normalize" the experiences of White middle-class women. One important contribution of this special issue is the inclusion of very diverse samples. Sullivan and her colleagues (2005) enrolled a predominantly African American sample from clinics, agencies, and family court. Similarly, an ethnically diverse and poor sample of adolescent mothers from clinics was recruited by Milan, Lewis, Ethier, Kershaw, and Ickovics (2005). Although their sample of 108 women is ethnically diverse, and represents some diversity in terms of age, only 17% were over 40 years old. The 60 women who were court-referred and responded to Rhatigan and colleagues' (2005) request to participate in research were predominantly White and were from economically deprived backgrounds. These participants were very different from the lesbians recruited by Balsam and Szymanski (2005), not only in sexual orientation, but also in economic and social status. The lesbian respondents in Balsam and Szymanski's study were not only predominantly European American, but 30% of the sample were professionals. Courtship is typically studied among the young, and the 326 undergraduates in the Williams and Frieze (2005a) study of stalking in courtship are typical of these types of samples. The respondents from the other samples tended to be older and by design, fewer of them had attended college. Would a study of stalking among mature or senior adults or among working-class youth produce different outcomes? Would a study of working-class lesbians have resulted in different results than those reported by Balsam and Szymanski? Are the experiences and decisions of White and affluent teenage mothers in violent relationships different from the young mothers in the research by Milan and colleagues (2005)?

No sample is perfectly representative, and each sample can contribute to our understanding of interpersonal violence. Yet, we need to continually question the degree to which the intimate violence patterns found might be connected to the type of people and relationships sampled. Further, we need to carefully consider which populations of people are neglected by our research and why. One sample characteristic we have not attended to carefully in this issue is age. Much of the existing research on relationship violence, including the studies included in this special issue, overrepresents young adults. There are reasons to believe that interpersonal violence is influenced by age and life span development (Frieze, 2005a). Seniors are one example of a neglected population not only in this issue, but in violence research generally. Perhaps this neglect is explained by a lack of violence among seniors. However, this is the same type of rationale (that certain individuals do not perpetrate violence) that kept us from studying violence in women for years (Richardson, 2005). To the extent that senior couples are less violent (Bookwala, Sobin, & Zdaniuk, 2005), the study of them may indicate important insights about nonviolent conflict resolution in intimate relationships.

The patterns of violence may be affected not only by the composition of the research sample, but also by the larger socio-historical context of the research. The respondents live in a particular time and place. Young people differ from older individuals, not only by age, but also in the socio-historical context in which they were socialized. For example, young men and women in the United States today were raised in an era of violent television programming and video games that were not a part of the childhoods of people who are today over 50 years old. Research has documented that exposure to media violence impacts the acceptability and use of violence, and yet this understanding is rarely raised as a factor in the literature on relationship violence. We often fail to connect intimate violence with other forms of violence, even though the studies reported here indicate

that as our experience of violence increases, so does the likelihood of our using violence (Fagan & Wexler, 1987; Sullivan et al., 2005; Tifft, 1993). Social norms about violence, particularly about gender and violence change over time, and may differ by region and culture.

One sample limitation of this special issue is that all of the research reported is on samples from the United States. Our understanding of intimate violence and its relation to gender can be enhanced by examining interpersonal violence in the global context. Cross-cultural research can assist us in recognizing the impact of cultural context on behavior but often introduces the problem of heterogeneous approaches to the construction and measurement of the phenomenon. Research methods vary from culture to culture in terms of what questions are asked, and findings are impacted by these variations (Krahe, Bienak, & Moller, 2005). Although standardized measures appear to make cross-cultural comparisons easier, holding different cultural groups to a (U.S.) standard measurement or method can erase or obscure cultural differences in how violence is constructed and experienced in that culture.

WHAT METHODS DO WE USE?

We are increasingly realizing that our initial perspective influences what questions we ask of whom (Richardson, 2005). For example, Johnson (2000) and others (e.g., Frieze, 2005b; McHugh & Bartoszek, 2000) have suggested that the observed phenomena labeled "battered women" and "gender symmetry" result from different methodological approaches. Research that documents a pattern of unilateral, chronic, serious, and escalating violence perpetrated by men on their intimate partners has typically employed more open-ended questions in interviews with women who have sought refuge in shelters. Research that suggests more gender symmetry is based on community or college samples in which respondents complete a version of the CTS. Each of these approaches has revealed some truth or reality about interpersonal violence, and yet each method also limits and thus distorts our view of violence in intimate relationships. We are like the proverbial blind persons stationed around an elephant trying to understand the phenomenon by focusing on different parts (McHugh, 2005). While one investigates the tail, another claims that the ears or the tusks are the identifying characteristics. Where we are standing impacts how and what we understand about the elephant/phenomenon.

In this sense, repeated applications of the CTS to relatively similar samples can be seen as standing in one position and studying the same part of the elephant using a single tool. Although the CTS is a reliable and valid measure of intimate violence, it offers a limited and thus also distorted perspective on intimate violence. Others have argued that the CTS does not provide the context that is necessary for comprehending violence in couples (e.g., Kimmel, 2002; Renzetti, 1999). For example, Dutton and Goodman (2005) find fault with current scales of psychological abuse and abusive acts that fail to consider the ability to control the partner. Critics of the CTS argue that this measure of partner violence, though widely used, is problematic in that it does not address motives for violence, the temporal sequencing of receiving and using violence, or the larger context of gender inequality (Currie, 1998; Dasgupta, 2002; Dobash et al., 1992; Kimmel, 2002; Kurz, 1993). To develop theoretical models of intimate abuse, it is necessary to understand the use of violence in the context of the relationship and within cultural and social systems (Dutton, 1996; Edelson & Tolman, 1992).

Rather than continuing to argue over whether interpersonal violence is best understood as battering of women partners by men, or as men and/or women engaged in mutual combat, we can move toward an understanding of interpersonal violence that includes all the available evidence. Collectively, we can try to develop a more complex and complete picture. Some researchers have moved in this direction by positing different patterns of intimate violence (e.g., Johnson & Leone, 2005; Weston et al., in press; Williams & Frieze, 2005b). Further, both gender differences and similarities in IPV may be obscured when between-group differences are examined without adequate consideration of within-group differences. For example, other authors (Archer, 2002; Kimmel, 2002) have suggested that age and relationship status are important factors, meaning that young adult dating relationships entail a different population than middle-age long-term relationships.

The ways in which the methods used both reflect and contribute to one's limited understanding of a phenomenon are addressed by postmodern theory. Adopting a postmodern perspective might help us to develop a more complex and multilayered perspective on interpersonal violence. Unlike the logical positivism position that contends that there is a single right or best way to reveal the truth (to adopt the stance of an objective, unbiased, and disinterested observer), from a postmodern perspective, research is seen as always involving limitations and does not privilege any particular research strategy (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2002).

Barad (2003) and Cosgrove (2004) have examined the implications of recent epistemological and methodological understanding from physics. The uncertainty principle refers to the fact that position and momentum are *not* inherent attributes of independently existing objects. Position and momentum are ideas that acquire meaning only in context; there is an inseparability to the object (e.g., position) being observed and the agency or method of observation (Barad, 2003; Cosgrove, 2004). Just as the same phenomena can be studied as a wave or as a particle in physics, our method or approach in psychological research can determine what we find. If we are investigating marital violence and define violence as acts of physical aggression, then we might quantify the acts of wives and husbands. However, if we interview battered women about their experiences as victims, then we might understand violence as including multiple forms of abusive behavior including

sexual coercion, humiliation, social isolation, control over finances, and threats to the safety of our pets. To oversimplify a bit, what we measure determines what we find. For this reason, we encourage the development and application of more varied approaches to the study of IPV in all its myriad forms. Most important, we encourage future researchers to develop conceptualizations of intimate abuse as they occur in a relationship, in time, and in a larger socio-historical context.

Not only is it necessary to consider the relationship context in which the violence has occurred, but the temporal context of the violence as well. Graves and her colleagues (2005) obtained a large and diverse sample of adolescent women and traced them through the college years. In their longitudinal study, Graves and colleagues saw the use of physical aggression against an intimate partner decrease not only from adolescence to the first year of college, but also through the college years. Students showed progressively lower frequencies of relational violence as they proceeded through their schooling. Longitudinal studies can help us to distinguish precursors of violence from consequences of violence. For example, longitudinal research indicates that components of poor relationship quality such as low relationship satisfaction can be a consequence of experiencing domestic violence (Testa & Leonard, 2001).

CONCEPTUALIZING IPV

The "discovery" of new forms and perpetrators of relationship violence challenges many of our theoretical explanations for IPV (McHugh & Bartoszek, 2000). Theoretical explanations that focus on the characteristics or psychopathology of individuals are not sufficient to explain the documented prevalence (McHugh, Frieze, & Browne, 1993). Models that cite the institution of marriage do not explain dating violence. Explaining violence in relation to male dominance and female subordination does not adequately explain lesbian and gay male intimate violence. Research documenting women's use of violence in their dating, committed, and marital relationships requires us to rethink our understanding of both the reasons for IPV and our conceptualizations of gender. It is crucial to progress toward more evolved and complex models of interpersonal violence that explain the literature reviewed by Archer (2002) and other data that documents the violence of women. Societal responses to violence, including those of the criminal justice and the mental health systems, depend upon our understanding of intimate violence (Dasgupta, 2002).

Challenging Gender Symmetry

Conceptualizing counts of men and women's violent acts as gender symmetry has been challenged. Even when the counts of violent acts are equal, the consequences of the violence are not. In violent couples, more women are likely to sustain injuries than men, and women receive more severe injuries from partner violence than do men (Archer, 2002). Some researchers contend the conclusion of gender symmetry involves a confusion between mutuality and symmetry (Weston et al., in press; Williams & Frieze, 2005b). Although much research has pointed toward mutuality, the data has not necessarily indicated symmetry. Furthermore, equal frequencies of aggressive behavior in men and women are not akin to equal meaning. Interpersonal violence exists in the context of societal hierarchies and power structures built upon gender roles (Kimmel, 2002; Pence & Paymar, 1993). As Williams and Frieze show, symmetrical violence does not lead to symmetrical effects because both the gender of the individual performing aggression and the gender of the target colors its meaning and outcomes. Arguments regarding gender symmetry have typically failed to examine the motives or the relationship context of the aggressive acts (Dasgupta, 2002; DeKeseredy, Saunders, Schwartz, & Alvi, 1997; Kimmel, 2002). Within such research, acts that are self-defensive are not differentiated from ones that constitute instrumental aggression or explosions of anger (Kimmel, 2002; Renzetti, 1999). In studies utilizing the CTS, slaps are equal to slaps regardless of whether one breaks the partner's jaw and the other's slap leaves only a slight redness. Some researchers (e.g., Marshal, 1992a, 1992b; Weston et al., in press) have argued that subjectively, male slaps and female slaps are not the same and have empirically derived weights to adjust the aggressive acts of women and men. As we continue to examine the mutuality of physical aggression in relationships and assess the degree of symmetry, examination of the frequency and severity of the violence, the gender of the perpetrator, and the temporal sequencing of the violence is important in organizing our theories and conceptualizations of interpersonal violence.

Patterns of Violence

One approach to IPV is the identification of theoretically or empirically based patterns to classify violent couple relationships (e.g., Frieze, 2005b; Johnson, 1995; Johnson & Leone, 2005; Swan & Snow, 2002; Weston et al., in press; Williams & Frieze, 2005b). Men and women may perpetuate different patterns of violence, or they may experience violence as victims differently even when the violent actions are the same. For example, Johnson posits a typology of common couple violence and patriarchal terrorism to explain conflicting data on intimate abuse. The more gender-balanced violence found in community samples may fit into the pattern of common couple violence, which is typically mild in nature. The more severe, and commonly male-perpetrated, violence epitomized by the battered woman and evidenced in clinical samples may fit the patriarchal terrorism pattern. Johnson's patterns emphasize the importance of distinguishing between overlapping but distinct phenomena. Similarly, using community samples, Williams and Frieze and Weston and colleagues have identified several patterns or types of couple violence based on frequency and severity of the violence. Weston

and colleagues demonstrate that among women who were involved in mutual violence, the most commonly reported pattern was for their male partners to be the primary perpetrator based on frequency and severity descriptions. However, these patterns and typologies are only templates. A postmodern perspective argues for viewing these patterns as neither finite nor solitary. As evidenced in all of these articles, interpersonal violence functions inside a larger societal structure which imbues aggressive acts with meaning and consequences unique to the relationship context in which that violence occurs.

Victims as Perpetrators

Our understanding of women who use violence has often been connected to their status as victims; their use of violence is related to their previous experiences of being victimized. Women's use of violence has been linked to their ongoing experiences of being victimized by their partner (Dasgupta, 1999; Dobash et al., 1992; Straus, 1999) and has also been linked to having been victimized during childhood (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Neidig, & Thorn, 1995; Lewis & Fremouw, 2001). Using a longitudinal design and a structural equation model, Graves and her colleagues (2005) examined the relationship of being physically and sexually victimized during childhood to aggression during adolescence and to the role of these women both as victims and as perpetrators in the college years. Graves and colleagues found that there was an important temporal order in predicting being victimized by IPV; more recent influences were of greater significance than distal abuse. Having been victimized during adolescence was a more salient predictor of being victimized during college than was childhood abuse. Although childhood physical abuse was not linked to levels of IPV perpetration in college, being physically victimized was strongly and positively linked with IPV perpetration at the same point in time (within the same year). Within intimate relationships during the college years, an immediate cycle of violent retaliation between partners was evident, which supports the argument of reciprocal relationship aggression.

Sullivan and colleagues (2005) are also concerned with the consequences of having been victimized and perpetration of violence, specifically in regard to the employment of avoidance coping and the presentation of depressive and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Results indicated that women's use of violence was not related to their use of avoidance coping; however avoidance coping was indirectly related to being victimized. The researchers (Sullivan et al., 2005) report that higher levels of childhood abuse were directly and significantly related to the expression of psychological symptoms of depression and posttraumatic stress. Higher childhood abuse levels were also important predictors for women's perpetration of violence but not their experiences of being victimized. The research by Sullivan and her colleagues argues persuasively for the inclusion of questions about having been victimized in studies of perpetration and vice versa. Their data indicate that women's use of violence is significantly and positively associated with higher levels of depression and posttraumatic stress symptoms in a violence-only model. However, when violence was examined in a model including experiences of being victimized, the use of violence was not related to symptoms of distress; with violence and experiences of being victimized considered in the same equation, it was women's experiences of being victimized that was predictive of symptoms.

Sullivan and colleagues (2005) and Graves and colleagues (2005) have called our attention to the importance of having been victimized and the relationship of prior abuse, both physical and sexual, to mental health and current and future use of violence. We can more easily understand women in the role of perpetrator if we see their use of violence as tied to their own experiences of being victimized. From this perspective, women remain victims and using violence is one of their reactions to their victimization. These findings have resulted in concerns about appropriate interventions for women who use violence. It is important that we consider women's status as both victim and perpetrator when creating our interventions (Leisring, Dowd, & Rosenbaum, 2003).

We have not typically designed interventions for male batterers that include any consideration of their status as victims. Most existing intervention programs for adults are based on a "male batterer–female victim" model (Gondolf, 1985). Even so, males who use violence often have a history of having been victimized. Exposure to violence as a child is a predictor of adult males' use of violence against both strangers and family members (Fagan & Wexler, 1987). White and Widom (2003) reported that, for both men and women, a history of physical abuse prior to the age of 12 significantly increased the likelihood of IPV in young adulthood. Men who use violence in intimate relationships are likely to be the target of violence as well. Our understanding of intergenerational transmission and reciprocity of violence has not prompted us to treat violent men as victims, which indicates that gender roles underlie our reactions not only to men and women who use violence, but also to men and women as recipients of violence.

Intergenerational transmission of violence has been explained as the result of learning. Children learn that violent or aggressive behavior is an acceptable way to deal with anger and conflict and learn that a benefit of violence is control and dominance (e.g., Fagan & Wexler, 1987; Pagelow, 1984). Perhaps what is more difficult to explain is why some women (and men) experience and observe violence as children and teens and yet do not resort to violence in their intimate relationships.

Motives as Explanations

The experience and meaning of violent acts may differ depending on our understanding of the motives of the person

using violence. Possible motivations for violence include a need to control others, self-defense, affective expression, and instrumentality, which is essentially the use of coercion or force to get what one wants from another person (Kimmel, 2002; Saunders, 2000). Previous research has suggested that men use violence in relationships as instrumental aggression; they get what they want by violent means (e.g., Frieze & McHugh, 1992). To date we have not developed similar conclusions about women's use of violence. Rather, we view men as more inclined to use violence to gain power and control than women (Taylor & Sorenson, in press). Dutton and Goodman (2005) argue that greater attention to the role of coercive control, as a motive and an outcome, is needed to understand gender differences in the nature of topographically similar acts. Coercive control may also differentiate types of violence in terms of the effects of violence on victims' psychological well-being and future behavior (Dutton & Goodman, 2005).

Some researchers have argued that men and women's motives for using violence differ, and to the extent that they do, men and women's violence is not the same (Dasgupta, 1999; Emery & Lloyd, 1994; Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991; Kimmel, 2002; Hamberger & Guse, 2002). Women's motives for using violence have included: self-defense, retaliation, expression of anger, attempts to gain attention, and reactions to frustration or stress (Dasgupta, 1999, 2002; Straus, 1999). Research has suggested that women's use of violence is more likely to be in self-defense or in retaliation than to control their partners (Swan & Snow, 2003). Other motives reported by women who use violence include: jealousy, depression, and loss of control (Emery & Lloyd, 1994; Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991; Olson & Lloyd, in press).

Graham-Kevan and Archer (2005) investigated three motive/explanations for women's physical aggression to their partners: (a) that it is associated with fear for their physical safety, (b) that it is part of a reciprocal pattern, and (c) that it is coercive. Similarly to other research (e.g., Riggs, 1993; Vivian & Langhinrichsen, 1994) Graham-Kevan and Archer found considerable correspondence between the acts of aggression women used and the aggressive acts directed toward them. This data is interpreted as "strong evidence of reciprocity," but their research does not address questions of initiation and/or defense, revenge, and retaliation. The authors provide some evidence that fear and women's use of minor forms of physical aggression are weakly correlated, and women's fear was associated with their partners' physical aggression. The authors also report strong associations between women's use of controlling behaviors and both minor and severe physical aggression. The authors conclude that "the three explanations supported by these data are not mutually exclusive, and the evidence suggests that all three may operate to some extent" (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2005).

Reaction to Stress

A reaction to stress has been suggested as a source of aggression in early models of family violence (see Tifft, 1993). In their examination of interpersonal violence in lesbian couples, Balsam and Szymanski (2005) found that stress in the relationship, such as internalized homophobia and experiences of discrimination, predicted violence. In their study of adolescent mothers, Rhatigan and colleagues (2005) also found that stress increased the incidence of interpersonal violence. We must, therefore, in addition to considering different types of relationships in which violence occurs, also consider the unique milieu of that relationship and the types of stress that accompany those relationships specifically. As we develop more complete models to explain and predict couples' violence, stress may re-emerge as an important factor in the equation. Just as couples experience various forms of stress, men and women experience stress differently and have been taught different responses to stress.

Recent reviews (Brush, 2005; Frieze, 2005b; McHugh, 2005) suggest that despite several decades of research on IPV, we have not made substantive progress in developing theories or models that explain men and women's use of violence. Sorenson and Taylor (2005) conclude that the question of "assailant gender in heterosexual intimate partner violence goes beyond the epidemiological questions of who does what, with what frequency, and with what outcomes?" (p. 95). The continuation or escalation of violence is evidence of our inability to prevent couples' violence and indirectly speaks to our ability to understand intimate violence. Anderson (2005) and Brush contend that explanatory models of intimate violence are restricted by the inadequacy of our understanding of gender.

HOW DO WE CONCEPTUALIZE GENDER?

Research measuring gender differences or symmetry in intimate violence has relied on gender as a characteristic of individuals and as a two-category system of classifying individuals. McHugh and Cosgrove (Cosgrove, 2004; Cosgrove & McHugh, 2002; McHugh & Cosgrove, 2002, 2005) present a feminist critique challenging the construction of gender as a dichotomous category or as the essential nature of women and men. Challenging dichotomous thinking, feminists have called for a critical examination of what is meant by "sex" and "gender." Research on individuals who are outside traditional sex/gender categories argues against gender as a dichotomous category (e.g., Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Sex and gender are increasingly seen, not as naturally occurring dichotomies but as socially constructed and limiting categories into which individuals are forced. Sex and gender are both seen as continuous rather than dichotomous variables, and gender is viewed as a dependent rather than an independent variable (Unger, 1998). However, in the psychological research on violence, dichotomous

portrayals of men and women result from the dominant research paradigm in psychology (Thorne, 1990). The sexually dimorphic view influences the way questions are raised, the methods of data collection, and the interpretation of data within psychology and other disciplines (McHugh & Cosgrove, 2002). By viewing gender as both inherent and polarized, we have created the sense that the dynamics of domination and subordination are natural and have subsequently supported the status quo of gender inequality (Bohan, 1993; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990, 1994).

Traditional conceptions of gender result in a failure to account for the diversity within gender groups. Feminists have argued that it is essentialist and generally invalid to think of women as doing things a certain way in contrast to men's way of doing things. Such thinking results in overemphasizing the differences between men and women and in minimizing the heterogeneity within groups of women and men (McHugh & Cosgrove, 2002). We knew that not all men are batterers, and Gondolf (1988) and others have encouraged us to recognize that men who use violence with their partners are not all alike. Richardson (2005) and other aggression researchers (White & Kowalski, 1994) encouraged us to abandon our perception of women as passive, and feminists generally have encouraged us to recognize the diversity of women and the variations in their behavior.

The sex difference approach to gender (as employed by IPV research) fails to consider the complex ways in which gender operates in social interactions (Anderson, 2005; Bohan, 1993; McHugh & Cosgrove, 2002; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Increasingly, gender is viewed not as a characteristic of the individual but as something we do in interaction with each other (West & Zimmerman, 1987). According to an interactionist construction of gender, gender is a characteristic of social interaction, and aggression may be one means by which to "perform" gender in certain social interactions. For example, gender can be confirmed or constructed through the use of violence. Violence is one means by which men can act out the masculine role (Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Hearn, 1998), whereas for women, acts of violence are incongruent with their prescribed gender role. Individuals may be more likely to use violence against their partners as a result of gender expectations and roles.

Gendered interactions occur in a social context, and that context can impact the behavior of men and women differently. For example, Richardson (2005) reports that when women are provoked, having a silent observer in the room decreased retaliation, suggesting that gender role socialization plays an important role in women's aggressive responding in observed interactions. Furthermore, women's and men's violence is interpreted differently and results in diverse consequences because of the larger structure of gender inequality in which the aggression occurs. This point is empirically documented by the research of Taylor and Sorenson (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005; Taylor & Sorenson, in press) in which the social acceptability and people's attributions of responsibility for men and women's IPV were measured. Marshall (1992a, 1992b) reports that the severity ratings assigned to specific physical acts differed depending on the gender of the perpetrator. Across several studies we see that men may view women's acts of aggression directed toward them as not violent, and women who admit to committing acts of aggression may not report using violence.

Along with Anderson (2005), we call for researchers and theorists to develop more accurate constructions of gender as one path to understanding violence in interpersonal relationships. Both Anderson and Brush (2005) point out that feminist and sociological conceptions of gender have progressed to become more complex and interaction-oriented, but in the research on intimate violence, gender continues to be treated as a dichotomous categorization equivalent to sex and to be seen as an inherent characteristic of individuals.

Although psychology continues to view gender as a dichotomous variable and an essential characteristic, research on gender roles and gender-role attitudes has proliferated in past decades. Frieze and McHugh (1997, 1998) reviewed the multiple measures of gender-role attitudes and presented research employing varied measures of gender roles addressing varied topics in multiple contexts. Unfortunately, instruments that assess masculinity and femininity as variable traits, roles, attitudes, stereotyped behaviors, or ideologies (or a combination of these) are seldom included in surveys on victimization or research on relationships that also measure verbal and physical aggression, violence, or abuse (Anderson, 2005). However, two surveys on violence against women in Canada found that men who adhered more strongly to patriarchal ideology were more likely to abuse their wives (Lenton, 1995; Smith, 1987). Felson (2002) offered an alternative view of traditional men as supportive and protective of women. In their examination of interpersonal violence in lesbian couples, Balsam and Szymanski (2005) found that neither gender-divergent (butch) nor gender-congruent (femme) identity was associated with relational violence. Using scales or measures of gender-role attitudes or ideology is one way in which we might explore how gender matters rather than continuing to count whether the frequency of interpersonal violence differs by sex.

CONCLUSION

The debate over the nature of intimate violence can be best addressed from within a postmodern perspective that encourages multiple, varied, and even inconsistent views of the phenomenon. Rather than distinguishing which patterns are more correct or more common, the postmodern perspective encourages us to accept various conceptions of intimate violence. The postmodern perspective acknowledges the connection between the constructs we

use, the research methods we employ, and the patterns of intimate violence we are most likely to find. Implicitly or explicitly, the research we conduct on intimate violence and our intervention efforts reflect underlying ideological perspectives. The focus of our research, the terms and measures we use, and the intervention strategies we employ both inform and are directed by our theories of intimate violence. The research documenting the prevalence of violence across all forms of intimate relationships, including the research presented here that indicates that women can be perpetrators of violence, requires new theoretical perspectives. Although some of the articles in this issue address explanations for women's use of violence, additional research and new conceptualizations of intimate violence are needed and may require new measures and research approaches. In contrast to traditional psychology, feminist and postmodern psychologists pay special attention to the role that the values, biases, and assumptions of the researcher have on all aspects of the research process. Selection of topics and questions, choice of methods, recruitment of participants, selection of the audience, and the potential uses of the research results are choices made within a sociohistorical context that ultimately influences what we believe we know about a topic or a group of people (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2002; McHugh & Cosgrove, 2002). Postmodernism is a project that reveals the socially constructed nature of reality and the varied interests that are served by particular constructions (Layton, 1998). Situating research within the feminist and postmodern framework encourages us to ask about whose interests are being served by our current models and research approaches and how we can best serve the interests of the women and men whose lives are negatively affected by the violence in their intimate relationships.

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