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An Exploration of Predictors for Perpetration of Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence in a Community Sample of Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals

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Intimate partner violence (IPV) has been defined as actions or behaviors that occur within the context of an intimate/romantic relationship that involve psychological, physical, and/or sexual abuses. These behaviors are intended to inflict pain and suffering on a victim and involve a wide range of actions including: physical aggression, sexual coercion, verbally abusive and controlling acts and more (Heise & Garcia-Moreno 2002). Some recent estimates have illustrated that IPV continues to be a serious public health concern with 3 in 10 women and 1 in 10 men having been victimized at some point in their life (Black, Basile, Breiding, Smith et al. 2011; Centers for Disease Control 2012). While the literature on IPV has focused predominately on heterosexual relationships, in recent decades more studies have illustrated that IPV affects the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community (Burke & Follingstad 1999; Owen & Burke 2004). While probability-based prevalence rates of same-sex IPV measures are rare, it is generally accepted that rates of same-sex IPV are at least comparable to those of heterosexual rates; between 20 and 30% (McCarry, Hester, & Donovan 2008; Renzetti 1992; West 2002).

Explaining Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration

Early theories that developed during the 1970s violence against women movement pushed a political agenda that would recognize men's violence against women as a significant social problem (Dobash & Dobash 1992). Under the scrutiny of the public, the movement shaped the notion of a deserving victim or "battered woman" and a violent male perpetrator (Loseke 2005). As a result, much of the early theorization on IPV largely ignored the issue of violence in same-sex relationships. In their explanations of violence, same-sex IPV research challenged some basic assumptions behind traditional paradigms. As feminist scholars had previously framed domestic violence as a phenomenon linked to the patriarchal power structure and gender inequality, same-sex IPV remained relatively out of the theorization. The debate ensued around whether battering was simply an individual pathology or whether gender had anything at all to do with same-sex IPV (Island & Letellier 1991; Merrill 1996; Renzetti 1992; Ristock 2002).

Developments in the research into same-sex IPV revealed various similarities and differences when compared to heterosexual relationships. Among the similarities across heterosexual and same-sex IPV, scholars have highlighted the influence of substance abuse, power dynamics, traditional gender ideologies, and violence in the family of origin as correlative factors to the perpetration of IPV (Burke & Follingstad 1999; Farley 1996, Island & Leteiller 1991; Renzetti 1992, 1996, 1998; West 1998, 2002). While these findings have not been consistent, there is enough support to propose that these correlates are strong predictors for perpetration across sexual orientations. Among the differences between heterosexual and same-sex IPV are the structural realities of heterosexism and homophobia (Burke & Follingstad 1999; Hart 1986; Lie et al. 1991; Lockhart et al. 1994; McCarry, Hester, & Donovan 2008; Renzetti 1992, 1996, 1998; Ristock 2001, 2011; Turell 2000; Waldner-Haugrud et al. 1997). Heterosexism and homophobia are used by perpetrators and further isolates victims; a unique aspect of IPV experienced in the context of a same-sex abusive relationship. As a result of these developments, the intervention implications became readily apparent; as they stood, the services, laws, and policies in place for battered heterosexual women would not accommodate same-sex IPV victims (Renzetti 1992).

While no single theory is used to explain same-sex IPV, social psychological frameworks provide strong explanations that encompass both cultural and social contexts with psychological attributes. One of these explanations was proposed by Merrill (1996) who argued that IPV could be seen as a gendered phenomenon while also acknowledging that gender was only one of many social factors involved. For batterers, having the opportunity to abuse and learning what one could get away with are gendered. Here, men are particularly at risk to be abusers due to the same gender socialization factors sociocultural feminist researchers emphasize. Not only are men more likely to be encouraged to be violent but they also learn that this violence is often normalized. Further race, class, and sexual orientation all contextualize the abusers opportunity and choice to abuse. As Merrill (1996:15) stated this context "is enforced by friends, family members, hospital workers, mental health providers and the criminal justice system; contributing to an environment in which an abusive partner can batter without intervention or consequence."

Intimate Partner Violence in Same-Sex Relationships and Perpetration

In terms of defining abuse among same-sex relationships, researchers have generally adopted similar definitions used for opposite-sex relationships that encompass physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. Renzetti (1998:118) stated: "as defined, violence in same-sex relationships is, in many ways, similar to violence in heterosexual relationships". For example, regardless of sexual orientation, IPV victims report physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuses (Messinger 2011). Additionally, these studies also show that verbal, emotional, and psychological abuses have much higher prevalence rates than physical and sexual violence across all sexual orientations (Freedner et al. 2002; Halpern et al. 2004; Lie et al. 1991; Lockhart, White, Causby, & Isaac 1994; Messinger 2011; Renzetti 1988, 1989; Turell 2000).

A significant portion of the literature on same-sex IPV has focused on prevalence, dynamics, and victimization. This is in contrast to work that addresses predictors for perpetration of same-sex IPV. Predictors, or risk factors, for perpetration can be understood as either social or psychological characteristics of individuals that may increase the likelihood of committing an act of IPV (Riggs, Caulfield, and Street 2000). To date, there are no solidly established factors that contribute to the risk of perpetration of same-sex IPV but several studies have indicated some common patterns among perpetrators.

Among these prominent factors, violence in the family of origin, substance abuse, relationship satisfaction, and rigid masculine ideology are common risk factors for IPV perpetration across all sexual orientations. Gardener's (1989) study was the first to compare a sample of gay, lesbian, and heterosexual men and women together. In this study, Gardener (1989) used a wide range of measurements including the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), Relationship Views Questionnaire, and other scales assessing power, alcoholism, control, and homophobia on a sample of 43 heterosexual, 43 lesbian, and 39 gay male couples. The results showed that

alcohol abuse and relationship dissatisfaction were strong predictors of IPV perpetration across all sexual orientations. Farley (1996) also found high rates of alcohol abuse and themes of relationship dissatisfaction in his qualitative study of 288 gay and lesbian perpetrators. Alcohol abuse and relationship dissatisfaction are correlated with IPV perpetration in many other heterosexual studies (Caetano, Schafer, & Cunradi 2001; Coleman & Straus 1979; Field and Caetano 2004; Gortner, Gollan, & Jacobson 1997; Henning & Holdford 2003; Kantor and Straus 1987, 1989; Miller 1990; Straus, Gelles, & Smith 1995; Stuart et al. 2003; White & Chen 2002).

Violence in the family origin is another prominent correlate to IPV across all sexual orientations. The intergenerational violence argument proposes that having experienced violence in the family origin increases ones likelihood of both IPV victimization and perpetration. Some early lesbian IPV studies found that having experienced family violence as a child significantly increased respondent's chances of perpetrating IPV (Lie et al. 1991; Lockhart et al. 1994). In the Farley 1996 study of both gays and lesbians, he reported that among his sample of perpetrators, 93% of the men and 88% of the women had reported experiencing family violence as a child. Further, childhood sexual abuse was reported by 67% of the men and 94% of the females. In examining intergenerational abuse patterns, Farley (1996) asked respondents whether they knew if their parents had also experienced family violence as children. He found that 80% of the men and 81% of the women reported that their parents or main guardians had experienced family violence as children. These correlations between previous family violence history and IPV victimization or perpetration are also found in heterosexual samples (Cappell & Heiner 1990; Delsol & Margolin 2004; Gover, Kaukinen, & Fox 2008; Heyman, & Slep 2002; Kalmuss 1984; Straus et al. 1980). However, while these correlates have been found to be similar in gay and lesbian samples, it is important to note that there have been some same-sex studies that have not found significant relationships to either victimization or perpetration (Coleman 1990; Kelly & Warshafsky 1987; Renzetti 1992).

Recent research has also looked at the role of masculinity in same-sex IPV among gay men (Oringher & Samuelson 2011). It has been argued that our cultural constructs of masculinity socialize men to be more aggressive

and prone to violence (Anderson 1997; Cruz 2000; Dobash & Dobash 1979 1992 1999; O'Neil 1981; Stark 2009). Similar to those studies among heterosexual men that found correlations between beliefs in rigid masculinity and increased probability of IPV perpetration, Oringher & Samuelson (2011) assessed a sample of 117 gay and bisexual men for levels of masculine behavior utilizing the Conformity Scale of Nabavi and Green's Masculinity Attitudes Stress Conformity Scale. This examined conformity to masculine norms such as suppressing emotional vulnerability, avoiding dependency on others, aggressiveness, traditional views on sex, striving for dominance, and willingness to sacrifice relationships to succeed at work. They also measured violence through the CTS second edition. The study results illustrated that those who reported higher levels of masculine behaviors were significantly more likely to report physical and sexual violence in their same-sex intimate relationships. The authors claimed that this was the first study to examine the role of masculinity as a predictive factor for IPV perpetration. Other studies have previously claimed that gay men were more sexually and physically violent than lesbian women but they did not measure adherence to masculine behaviors (Tjaden, Thoennes, & Allison 1999; Waldner-Haugrud & Gratch 1997). Conversely, others have found that lesbians were more sexually and/or physically violent when compared to gay men (Turell 2000; Waldner-Haugrud, Gratch, & Magruder 1997).

While these studies have examined gendered beliefs and attitudes in relation to IPV perpetration, studies on same-sex IPV have not focused on similarly gendered, heterosexist perceptions of IPV. For example, while scholars have previously mentioned that heterosexist assumptions of IPV such as the belief that IPV only occurs in heterosexual relationships, with a woman always being the victim of a male perpetrator, a measure of these beliefs has not been used to predict perpetration (Merrill & Wolfe 2000; Merrill 1996; Renzetti 1998). These gendered and heterosexist assumptions of IPV may contribute to the perpetration and silencing of same-sex IPV in the LGB community.

As little research has yet to develop a better understanding of predictors for perpetration of same-sex IPV, the goal of the current study was to explore the influence of several social characteristics and beliefs of a

community sample on the likelihood of having perpetrated same-sex IPV. Grounded in the literature, previous findings, and our available secondary data set, we explored the influence of family of origin and beliefs that IPV was either not a problem in the LGB community or did not have priority as an issue to address. We argued that the latter beliefs measure some aspect of a rigid gender ideology that assumes IPV is not a problem in same-sex relationships. These beliefs may be characterized as heterosexist; assuming that IPV is a rigidly gendered phenomenon in which men perpetrate and women are the victims.

We hypothesized the following:

H1: Those LGB who report having experienced abuse in the family of origin are more likely than those who did not report experiencing this abuse to have perpetrated an act of same-sex IPV.

H2: Those LGB who believe that IPV is not a problem in the LGB community are more likely than those who do believe it is a problem to have perpetrated an act of same-sex IPV.

H3: Those LGB who believe that addressing IPV in the LGB community should not be a priority are more likely than those who do believe it should be a priority to have perpetrated an act of same-sex IPV.

Methodology

This study utilized an existing data set collected by an IPV awareness initiative in the southeast United States. The use of this data set was found exempt from review by an Institutional Review Board. The survey was constructed through a community participatory action model in which researchers, activists and members of the community shared input on what aspects of same-sex IPV were essential to gauge within the LGB community. This included prevalence of victimization and perpetration as well as perceptions of the law, police and myths. Inspired largely by the Virginia Anti-Violence Project (VAVP) community violence survey, the members assembled a survey that consisted of four separate sections. Part

I assessed basic sociodemographics, Part II gauged participants' perceptions of domestic violence, Part III and IV assessed participants' experiences with IPV and/or the perpetration of IPV. The survey was made available online, was voluntary and confidential, and took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Ideal probability based sampling techniques were not considered to be a practical possibility while examining studies on the LGB population (Owen & Burke 2004). The sample was sought through avenues frequented by LGB identified individuals; targeted sampling allowed for the distribution and marketing of the survey in areas, organizations, and businesses that had a LGB clientele base. Additionally, the participating LGB organizations marketed the online survey link through existing e-mail listservs. Furthermore, utilizing marketing materials (i.e. flyers and promotional products) and program and event agenda time for word-of-mouth engagement around the initiative allowed researchers to effectively seek out LGB identified participants for this survey. Eligibility for the survey was determined with the following question: "Do you identify yourself as having a non-heterosexual sexual orientation or gender identity or expression not traditionally associated with your birth sex (Or, do you identify somewhere along the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Queer spectrum?)" Only respondents that selected "yes" to this question were included in the data for analysis. The final sample size used for analyses was 335.

Measures

The dependent variable utilized for analyses involved a checklist question that asked participants to select from a list of behaviors that were considered abusive which they had perpetrated in the context of a same-sex relationship. This list included several behaviors that measured various aspects physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuses. If participants checked at least one of these abusive behaviors, they were considered as having perpetrated same-sex IPV.

The independent variables of race and gender were dichotomized. Race was recoded into white (0) and non-white (1) (Asian, Black, Hispanic & Other races). The original survey item included male, female, and transgender. Gender had to be dichotomized to only male (0) and female

(1) as there were only eight transgender responses in this sample; these eight responses were dropped from the sample. The income variable was recoded to midpoints of income categories transforming it from a categorical variable into a continuous one. Furthermore, the education variable was recoded from a categorical variable to a continuous measure in years of education ranging from 9 to 18 years where 12 years of education indicated high school graduate, 14 years was associate degree, etc. Participants reported age as a continuous measure and this remained unaltered.

Two variables assessed beliefs regarding same-sex IPV. The first question asked respondents if they believed IPV was a problem in the LGBTQ community. The second, asked participants if they believed addressing IPV in the LGBTQ community was a priority. The response options ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree on a Likert scale ranging from 5 to 1 with strongly agree valued at 5 and strongly disagree valued at 1.

Finally, two variables assessed previous violent experiences. The first asked respondents if they had been a victim of violence by a family member; this included relationships such as mother, father, siblings, and step-parents. If the respondent selected at least one of the relationships in which they had experienced violence from, they were counted as having experienced family violence. This variable was recoded into a binary variable valued at 0 for "no" and 1 for "yes" to having experienced family violence. The second asked participants if they themselves had experienced IPV within the context of a same-sex relationship. Specifically, this section of the survey asked respondents about previous victimization. This remained a binary variable valued at (0) no and (1) yes.

Analytic Strategy

The goal of these analyses was to predict whether or not same-sex IPV was perpetrated utilizing the demographic variables of race, gender, income, age, and education years in addition to beliefs regarding IPV and previous experience with violence. As the dependent variable of IPV perpetration was recoded into a (0) no and (1) yes variable, we used binary logistic regression to explore any relationships between the aforementioned independent variables and having self-reported IPV

perpetration within the context of a same-sex relationship. We conducted one binary logistic regression model in which all of the variables were included. All assumptions regarding logistic regression including colinearity and tolerance checks were performed and fell within the required measures.

Results

Table 1
Means and Counts of Variables (N=355)

Dependent Variable	Mean	SD
Perpetrated IPV	0.22	
Independent Variables		
Non-white	0.33	
Female	.0.56	
Age in Years	38.50	13.0
Income in \$	43.068	32,154
Education in Years (9-18)	15.00	2.23
IPV Victim	0.52	
Family Violence	0.46	
Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence Problem Strongly Agree or Agree	0.74	
Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence Priority Strong Agree or Agree	.085	

Table 1 describes the sample used for analyses. Overall, in terms of race and gender, the sample was relatively diverse with 33% of respondents identifying as non-white and 56% identifying as women. The average respondent had completed 15 years of education, was 38 years old, and reported a mean income of approximately \$43,000. Regarding violence, 22% of the sample reported having perpetrated IPV, 52% reported having experienced IPV, and 46% reported having experienced family violence. The majority of respondents, 74%, either strongly agreed or agreed that

IPV is a problem in the LGBTQ community; further, 85% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that addressing IPV in the LGBTQ community should be a priority.

Table 2
Binary Logistic Regression Predicting Same-Sex IPV Perpetration (N=335)

Variables	Odds Ratio	SE	Beta
Non-White	1.10	0.33	0.07
Female	0.91	0.27	-0.09
Age (in Years)	0.97*	0.01	-0.03*
Income (in dollars)	0	0	0
Education in Years (9-18)	1.10	0.09	0.12
IPV Victim	3.95***	1.23	1.37***
Family Violence	3.82***	1.15	1.34***
Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence Problem, Strongly Agree/Agree	0.92	0.16	-0.09
Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence Priority, Strongly Agree/Agree	0.81	0.12	-0.22

*p<.05, ***p<.001

Log likelihood =-153.23; df=9; chisquare=47.33; Pseudo rsquare=0.13

Table 2 illustrates the logistic regression findings utilizing odds ratios in predicting the perpetration of IPV within the context of a same-sex relationship. The model was significant at $p<.000$ $\chi^2=47.33$ with a log likelihood of -153.23. One of the most influential relationships found in the model supports the first hypothesis that stated that those LGB who report having experienced abuse in the family of origin would be more likely than those who did not report experiencing this abuse to have perpetrated an act of same-sex IPV. Those who reported having experienced family violence were 3.82 ($p<.000$) times more likely to have perpetrated an act of same-sex IPV than those who did not report experiencing family violence. The relationships between beliefs regarding same-sex IPV, whether it was a problem or whether it was a priority in addressing, were not found to be significant. Therefore, hypotheses two and three were not supported. However, as participants' age increased in the model, the

likelihood of having reported perpetrating an act of same-sex IPV decreased by 0.97 ($p < .05$) times. Additionally, those who reported having experienced same-sex IPV were 3.95 ($p < .000$) times more likely to report having perpetrated an act of same-sex as compared to those who did not report experiencing same-sex IPV. None of the demographic variables illustrated significant relationships in predicting the likelihood of same-sex IPV perpetration.

Discussion

Several interesting implications can be made from the above findings. First, while the sample demonstrated rather high rates of IPV victimization (52%) and experiences with family violence (46%) as compared to other general estimates, it is important to note that these findings are limited to this specific sample which was obtained through non-random methods and therefore may not be generalizable to the larger LGB community. Regarding multivariate findings, this sample further illustrated the significance of having experienced violence in the family of origin as a predictor for future perpetration of IPV. This finding echoes many other studies that emphasize the role of learned violence and the desensitization to violence in intimate relationships (Cappell & Heiner 1990; Delsol & Margolin 2004; Gover, Kaukinen, & Fox 2008; Heyman, & Slep 2002; Kalmus 1984; Lie et al. 1991; Lockhart et al. 1994; Straus et al. 1980).

While beliefs regarding same-sex IPV illustrated no significant relationship in predicting same-sex IPV perpetration, it is important to note that attitudes and perceptions of IPV may still influence perpetration. Overall, the sample illustrated that same-sex IPV is recognized as a problem and one that deserves priority in addressing. Future research should continue to examine the relationships between various perceptions and attitudes towards same-sex IPV and perpetration or victimization risk factors.

As illustrated by the logistic regression model, younger respondents were more likely than older ones to have reported perpetrating same-sex IPV. This may be an indication younger LGB may be quicker to resort to violence in intimate relationships than their more mature counterparts.

While dating violence among younger couples has received more recent attention, outreach and research in this area has primarily focused on opposite-sex relationships. Future research and educational programs should address further address or explore unique factors pertaining to same-sex dating violence.

Finally, the most influential variable illustrated by the logistic regression model was having reported experiencing same-sex IPV in a past relationship. Those who reported experiencing same-sex IPV in the past were nearly four times more likely to also have reported perpetration. While the data are limited by lack of context in which behaviors are reported, it is reasonable to assume that this may be due in part to self-defense. That is, participants may report having experienced IPV but also have checked off a violent behavior that they had committed in a past relationship (perhaps the abusive one) in self-defense. Additionally, this finding may also be an indication of what Johnson (2008) refers to as mutual violent resistance. Johnson (2008) argued that there is a typology of domestic violence and that no single true nature of domestic violence exists but rather that there are various manifestations. Mutual violent resistance refers to when both partners are violent and controlling (Johnson 2008: 6). While Johnson's typology may offer an explanation for this finding, this study did not seek to test these theoretical propositions. Further, it should be noted that Johnson's typology explains heterosexual IPV and is not entirely inclusive of same-sex relationships. Research that utilizes this typology should explore the relevance of its propositions to the context of same-sex IPV.

While the findings of this project offer some insights into perpetration factors in same-sex IPV, several limitations should be noted. First, non-random methods were utilized to collect the sample and therefore, these findings are limited to this sample and may not be generalizable to the larger LGB community. Further, as the survey was marketed as an IPV study, those who have personally experienced IPV may be more inclined to participate in the study and may over inflate the amount of IPV experienced or perpetrated in this sample. The measure of perpetration was constructed utilizing a checklist of abusive behaviors that was agreed upon by scholars and community activists and may not reflect internally or

externally valid measures that have been through psychometric properties or tests. Future research should seek more generalizable and larger samples that include a wider range of social and individual characteristics that were not assessed in this study. These include but are not limited to substance abuse histories, personality characteristics, and gendered ideologies. In addition, transgender inclusive sampling strategies should be a priority in IPV research among LGBT populations as they are highly marginalized in the literature. Although these limitations exist, these findings nonetheless present an exploration into potential risk factors related to the perpetration of IPV. The findings compel applied action in further developing community education and outreach as it relates to same-sex IPV by illustrating some potential significant avenues that may increase perpetration risk. With the recent expansion of the Violence Against Women Act that further promoted LGB inclusive services in domestic violence outreach services, various prevention and intervention programs could benefit from a better understanding of the factors that influence perpetration of same-sex IPV.

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