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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Lessons from Examining Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence

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Abstract Even though scientific and legal recognition of same-sex relationships has increased, same-sex intimate partner violence (IPV) has not been included in the core conceptualization of the research and theorizing about IPV. Because of its inherent disjuncture from the patriarchal and hetero-normative marriage model, battering in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered community needs a much closer examination. Examining the violence that occurs in same-sex relationships allows us to reframe how we look at IPV and scrutinize the ideological frameworks, cultural narratives, and stereotypes that have been set forth as well investigate further the predictors of violence and the use of scales created. This article reviews the research on same-sex IPV primarily within the United States. In placing the lessons of same-sex IPV in the foreground, we are able to uncover some common truths about IPV in general. Viewing IPV through a same-sex lens removes gender-based assumptions about the manifestations of IPV, enabling us to see how other cultural and systemic factors may contribute to IPV. At the same time, incorporating the experience of same-sex couples facilitates viewing gender as a marker for variables requiring further study rather than as an explanation. When we change our focus of IPV in such a way, we discover it is a function of a complex interaction of culture, social structures, social status, and interpersonal dynamics.

Keywords Lesbian · Gay · IPV · LGBT · Gender roles · Domestic violence · Partner violence · Same-sex

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Introduction

The research on intimate partner violence (IPV) has mainly focused on domestic violence between men and women (Archer 2000; Hamby 2009). However, there is growing recognition that intimate partner violence in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community is a serious problem (Balsam et al. 2005; Duke and Davidson 2009; Eaton et al. 2008; Hassouneh and Glass 2008; Landolt and Dutton 1997; Lie et al. 1991; Messinger 2011; McClennen 2005; McLaughlin and Rozee 2001; Renzetti 1992; Stanley et al. 2006). This article contributes to the analysis of IPV by including same-sex intimate partner violence in our analysis of IPV as a whole. This conceptual inclusion of same-sex IPV encourages us to examine individually the contributions of factors that are often associated with gendered roles and sex-based biological differences without the implicitly gendered explanations that, we argue, often accompany analyses of interactions between men and women. It also encourages us to examine independently the important effects of culture and historical setting on IPV. The article also stresses the importance of understanding the effects of IPV in same-sex relationship problems as a phenomenon worthy of study in its own right. Failing to appreciate the importance of examining IPV in same-sex relationships is the inevitable corollary of the hetero-normative frame through which IPV has historically been viewed.

Including the analysis of same-sex IPV can be particularly useful in dealing with the prolific and often contentious tension in the IPV literature between what are often referred to as gendered or feminist theories of IPV (Johnson and Ferraro 2000; McHugh et al. 2005; Yllo and Bograd 1988) and what are described as gender-neutral or gender-symmetrical theories (Straus 2010). The analysis presented here suggests that, like many heated debates, the problem is

in the assumptions through which the issue has been framed. When same-sex IPV is included, it is immediately clear that men can be abused and women can be abusers, but that is hardly synonymous with the conclusion that IPV is gender-neutral. Rather than asking if IPV is gendered, we seek to address questions about how gender roles and the factors for which sex and gender are marker variables influence IPV. The vehicle for this analysis is a discussion of IPV when same-sex relationships and the IPV in them is included as part of our conceptual analysis.

The issues in the U.S. legal system regarding same-sex partner abuse and the lack of protection for civil rights of the LGBT community provide a backdrop for reviewing the influence of both law and social change in shaping our understanding of IPV. The roles that laws and law enforcement personnel have on the experience of and the reporting of IPV in the LGBT community are reviewed in later discussion. This includes exploration of how the experience of the LGBT community parallels some of the experiences of ethnic minority and immigrant communities. Because there are complex differences in the legal status of LGBT relationships across countries and continents (Takacs and Kuhar 2011), it is beyond the scope of this article to address the treatment of LGBT IPV across those multiple legal systems. The bulk of the research reviewed is from the United States (US) because most of the published research on same-sex IPV has been done in the US. Where possible, the implications for IPV issues in nations other than the US are addressed.

History of IPV and Gender Issues

When researchers and feminist activists began focusing attention on IPV about fifty years ago, same-sex relationships were not included in the analysis (Schultz 1960; Snell et al. 1964; Martin 1976). This is not surprising. The issue of domestic violence or wife abuse, as it was referred to then, was firmly based in a patriarchal and hetero-normative marriage model. This is reflected by the titles of early works on the topic such as, *The Wife Assaulter* (Schultz 1960), *The Wife Beater's Wife* (Snell et al. 1964), and *Battered Wives* (Martin 1976). Furthermore, when the initial work was done, same-sex intimate relationships were illegal and largely invisible as Knauer documents in her comprehensive work on 20th century history with regard to the legal and psychological status of same-sex relationships and sexual behavior (Knauer 2011). On the rare occasions when same-sex sexual attraction was acknowledged or examined, it was viewed as pathological and those engaged in homosexual behavior were viewed as some mix of sick, sinister, and/or pathetic (Knauer 2011).

The role of the larger cultural sphere, what Bronfenbrenner (1979) called the macrosystem and what critical theorists call the superstructure (Hepburn 2003; Outhwaite 2009, p.5-8) in encouraging or supporting both IPV and the persecution of same-sex relationships was not discussed prior to the 1970s. Just as the U. S. legal system viewed what is now considered unlawful sexual harassment to be a private matter between a man and a woman (MacKinnon 1979), intimate relationships were framed by patriarchal and heterosexual assumptions, including the appeal to the laws of nature. The legal system and law enforcement officers generally treated acts of violence inside the home as private matters between a husband and his subordinate wife. The cultural trope defining a man's home as his castle and the patriarchal framework that gave men authority over women, including the right to control and discipline their wives, framed intimate partner abuse as outside the public policy arena. Spousal abuse was often ignored and marital rape was generally exempted from the legal definition of rape or sexual assault (Koss et al. 1994).

On the other hand, homosexual conduct and same-sex attraction were considered deviant and a departure from "natural" sexuality. Same-sex attraction was defined as reflecting a mental disorder by psychiatry until 1974 and psychology until 1975 (Spitzer 1981). Homosexual activity remained illegal in virtually every state within the U. S. until the 1970s and was not fully decriminalized in the U. S. until 2003 when the U. S. Supreme Court ruled in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003) that laws criminalizing homosexual conduct are unconstitutional (Knauer 2011). In 1975, when the first National Family Violence Survey was conducted in the U.S. (Koss et al. 1994), not only was homosexual conduct illegal in most areas, but also there were no protections for the civil rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgendered (LGBT) people in any part of the United States. In the 1970s, this lack of legality and civil rights for LGBT people existed in virtually every country in the world. Even today in a number of countries homosexuality is still subject to legal sanctions and in many jurisdictions, both in the U. S. and around the world, discrimination against LGBT individuals in employment, housing, and other civil rights remains legal (Herek et al. 1997; Herek 2006, 2009; Takacs and Kuhar 2011).

The feminist-directed focus on IPV stressed IPV as men's violence against women, emphasizing the gendered nature of relationships and the violence within them (Martin 1976; Yllo and Bograd 1988). As noted previously, in this context of exploring men's violence against women, same-sex relationships were not part of the IPV analysis. In fact, if IPV is understood as wife abuse or as men's abuse of women, then same-sex IPV is neither evident nor relevant. Even in the 1990s, when the existence of same-sex IPV was acknowledged, the desire to focus on men's violence against women often left same-sex IPV out of the analysis (Koss et al. 1994). Furthermore, at a time when LGBT individuals were struggling to cast off the public perception of homosexuality as sick or sinful, there was considerable social pressure to

avoid public exposure of problems in same-sex relationships (Lobel 1986; Ristock 2002; Ristock 2003). Not surprisingly, the first anecdotal accounts of intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships did not begin to surface until the early 1980s (Coleman 1990; Lie et al. 1991; Lockhart et al. 1994), with the first book on the topic of lesbian battering appearing in 1986 (Lobel 1986). Studies of abuse in gay men's relationships were even slower to arrive (Letellier 1994), with the first empirical work not showing up until the 1990s (Landolt and Dutton 1997).

Although ignored in the initial discussions of IPV, researchers and theorists have established same-sex IPV as a serious problem (Balsam et al. 2005; Duke and Davidson 2009; Eaton et al. 2008; Hassouneh and Glass 2008; Landolt and Dutton 1997; Lie et al. 1991; McClennen 2005; McLaughlin and Rozee 2001; Renzetti 1992; Stanley et al. 2006). Despite this recognition that IPV in same-sex relationships is an important issue, the analysis of same-sex IPV has not been integrated into the general understanding of IPV. We have not asked, what can we learn about IPV from including same-sex IPV in our analysis?

It is important to answer this question: What can we learn when same-sex IPV is treated as an integral part of our analysis of IPV rather than ignored or treated as an afterthought or footnote? Consistent with the frameworks of critical theorists (Hepburn 2003), we suggest that all relationships, especially intimate partnerships, are strongly influenced by the social and ideological frameworks surrounding gender because people exist within a social cultural framework. There is a tendency to treat the role of factors on which men and women generally differ as being fully explained by that gendered link. That assumptive polarity can cause differences in various factors including size, strength, familiarity-with-fighting, income, emotional awareness, style of emotional expression, and other forms of devalued status to be obscured by or subsumed under the label of gender or sex differences rather than analyzed for their role in IPV. Because same-sex relationships lack the assumptive gender polarity of heterosexual relationships, an examination of IPV in same-sex relationships encourages us to explore the role of those other factors and the relationship dynamics to which they contribute.

At the same time, by examining the differences between the roles these factors play in male-male and female-female IPV, we can also see the ways in which these factors are also imbued with gendered meanings. Thus, although others have argued that the existence of violence in same-sex relationships makes it important to study same-sex relationship violence (Balsam et al. 2005; Landolt and Dutton 1997; Lobel 1986; Ristock 2003), the suggestion here is that through studying the issues of IPV in same-sex relationships we can gain clarity about the processes of IPV more broadly.

Limitations on Same-sex IPV Research

Researchers studying same-sex IPV routinely point to the problems with sampling and definitions, both of which are magnified by the stigmatized nature of same-sex relationships (Balsam and Szymanski 2005; Duke and Davidson 2009). Most large IPV surveys do not ask about sexual orientation or gender of relationship partner (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs 2007), nor are those two questions synonymous. Being involved in a same-sex relationship is a behavior, while identifying as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender person is an identity. Not all individuals engaging in same-sex relationships identify as members of the LGBT community (Knauer 2011). Additionally, even when the questions about sexual orientation and gender or relationship partner are asked, fear of how the information may be used prevents an unknown but likely significant number of individuals involved in same-sex partnerships from answering honestly.

Moradi and her colleagues (Moradi et al. 2009) provide a well-articulated summary and development of these issues for counseling psychologists doing research with LGBT people on any topic. The distinctions made by Moradi and her colleagues about the lack of simple binaries in the categories of sex and gender are particularly thought provoking when applied to the debates about gender symmetry or gender neutrality in IPV. The first warning provided by including same-sex relationships as a core part of our analysis is that we should be careful about assumptions. This may be particularly important for individuals doing survey research in which participants have no opportunity to expand on or clarify their identities. Assuming all men are in relationships with women (and vice versa) or other similar assumptions may be adding considerable confusion to the data collected. There is also some fluidity in people's identification of their sexual orientation (Mock and Eibach 2012) making it unclear, even when sexual orientation is specifically identified, whether past relationships were consistent with current identity. Similarly, assuming all people marking male or female on surveys actually fit in those binary boxes may also be an error.

Another commonly discussed limitation on research with LGBT individuals involves trust and access (Balsam et al. 2005; Moradi et al. 2009). LGBT people may not participate in the same activities or organizations from which samples are drawn. Even when LGBT-identified individuals selected by random surveys, and questions about sexual orientation or gender of partner are included, LGBT individuals may not choose to self-identify. The individual may fear that being anonymous is not really anonymous and the results could be traced back and used against the individual respondent or the results could be used against the respondent's group. This lack of openness may not be random, but rather

may be linked to social and economic vulnerabilities. For example, Knauer (2011) reports that because of their historical experiences, current LGBT elders are less likely to be open about their sexual orientation. Because trust is linked to historical experience and social and economic vulnerability, lack of trust potentially biases results particularly in large anonymous surveys.

In part because of the sampling problems, many of the research studies of LGBT IPV have been conducted on convenience or volunteer samples (Balsam et al. 2005; Moradi et al. 2009). These convenience or volunteer samples perpetuate and amplify the problems of bias, since those most distrustful of authorities and mental health professionals are least likely to volunteer. It is only as a result of the relatively recent advent of legal same-sex marriage, first approved in late 2000 by the government of the Netherlands, that it is possible to randomly sample from an identified population of same-sex couples. Of course the population of same-sex couples deciding to take advantage of the opportunity to marry may differ from the total population of people in same-sex relationships, another sampling issue. Currently there are no easy or clearly understood ways to predict or correct for the differential effects distrust and invisibility may have on the data collected. The existence of limitations does not mean that the research should not be done. However, this does remind us that our data is, at best, only an estimate of a phenomenon.

Trust in authorities is not only relevant to the data collected by specifically designed research studies, but also clouds the prevalence data collected by law enforcement and service agencies. Research on same-sex IPV has highlighted concerns about reporting violence to law enforcement because of fears about bias and stigma (Balsam and Szymanski 2005; Duke and Davidson 2009). As these researchers report, some members of the LGBT communities are reluctant to call for help or make formal complaints because this may reflect negatively on their community. Others are concerned that law enforcement personnel may treat them or their partners in harsh or unfair ways. Additionally, individuals involved in same-sex relationships that do not consider themselves lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and those that are not fully open about their sexuality with family and friends may fear being "outed" by their partner or by the legal process.

Issues of trust, especially when related to social inequality and the effects of stigma, initially may appear to be relevant only to the study of IPV in same-sex relationships. However, these same concerns about bias and stigma are relevant for other communities, particularly ethnic minority and immigrant communities. The concern about being "outed" that seems at first glance to be unique to the LGBT community has a parallel in the concerns of undocumented immigrants and their partners. In fact, given the somewhat precarious situation of even legal immigrants if convicted of a crime, the costs of reporting an intimate partner are potentially heightened for all non-citizen couples regardless of legal status (Fullerton and Kinigstein 1986). Similarly, the concern that law enforcement bias will result in excessively harsh treatment is relevant for any community that feels targeted by law enforcement. It is also important to remember that there can be pressure to avoid discussing issues that may be viewed negatively by the larger society within all stigmatized communities. Thus, immigrants and members of religious, cultural, racial, and ethnic minority communities, as well as individuals from other groups who are perceived negatively within the dominant culture, may filter their responses to questions about IPV and limit their reporting of IPV. These limitations do not mean that researchers should not attempt to do research with stigmatized and oppressed populations. However, they underscore both the importance of sensitivity in conducting the research and caution in interpretation of the results.

The Importance of the Ecological Approach

Bronfenbrenner (1979) reminded researchers and theorists that complex social problems are best understood using what he called an ecological analysis. Central to an ecological analysis is the principle that phenomenon can only be understood in context and the corollary that context is multilayered and dynamic. These layers of influence start at the overarching assumptions of society and reach down to the individual and her or his personal history, with each level of the analysis being influenced by both relationships at that level and the embedded nature of the entire system. Several important issues immediately become clear when we begin an ecological analysis of IPV with a focus on same-sex IPV.

The first major lesson is that time is an important dimension when studying social phenomenon. It is nearly impossible to imagine conducting the research currently being done with LGBT participants around relationship issues, including IPV, within the framework of the 1960s and early 1970s. The terms homosexual, lesbian, and gay were not part of the common social lexicon. Instead, terms like "crime against nature" and "unspeakable acts" (Knauer 2011, p. 16) were used to refer to same-sex sexual acts. Comparisons of relationship dynamics between married and unmarried same-sex dyads would not have been possible because there was no same-sex marriage. Merely responding to a request to participate in a study of same-sex relationships would have been fraught with risk because homosexual behavior was both illegal and classified as a serious sociopathic disorder (Knauer 2011, p.9). However, the corollary to the point that time matters is the reminder

that better is not the same as resolved. Although the legal prohibitions and social stigma towards same-sex relationships has been reduced in the US and many other countries around the world (Takacs, and Kuhar 2011), problems remain.

Similarly, there can be little doubt the feminist-initiated attention to intimate partner violence over the last 40 plus years has shifted the conversation concerning IPV both within the U. S. and in the global community (Bunch 1990, 1997; Merry 2003; UN General Assembly 1994). However, at the most abstract level of analysis, one inescapable fact is that despite the contemporary challenges and considerable progress, all contemporary relationships remain embedded in a superordinate macrosystem of male supremacy (Baker 2006; Merry 2003). The status of women has improved considerably in many countries and contexts over the last several hundred years, dramatically within the last half century (United Nations Commission on the Status of Women 2010). The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (2010) reports that women have achieved full legal rights in most countries and formal legal equality in many. But, women remain behind men in terms of representation among those in control of economic, social, and political power. Additionally, there are still many cultures and subcultures where women are presumed to be inferior to men and/or appropriately subject to male domination (Merry 2003; UN Commission on Human Rights 2009). As feminists have long pointed out (Bohan 1992; Jagger and Rothenberg 1978; Koss et al. 1994), the ideological framework of male supremacy includes the implicit premises that power equates right, competition is good, and differences should be ranked hierarchically. All of those premises have implications for relationship dynamics.

Gender Matters But It Is Not the Only Thing That Matters

The second lesson that becomes abundantly clear when placing same-sex IPV in the center of our analysis is that there is no simple causal relationship between the ideological framework of male supremacy and specific individual acts of IPV. Although research on same-sex IPV is limited, both the research and the phenomenon exist. Women can be perpetrators and men can be victims. Empirical research conducted in the U.S., Venezuela, Canada, and Australia all indicates that in same-sex relationships, both men and women experience IPV at significant rates (Brand and Kidd 1986; Burke et al. 2002; Eaton et al. 2008; Kay and Jeffries 2010; Kelly and Warshafsky 1997; Landolt and Dutton 1997; Lie et al. 1991; Lockhart et al. 1994; Ristock 2003; Rose 2003). Obviously if only men commit domestic violence and only women are victimized by it, same-sex IPV would be rare to non-existent.

The initial formulation of IPV as men's violence being used to control women did not include same-sex IPV as part of the phenomenon under consideration. That formulation makes it difficult for individuals in same-sex relationships to identify themselves as involved in a relationship with IPV (Brown 2008; Kuehnle, and Sullivan 2003). Research has identified problems created by the men's violence formulation including the failure of treatment providers to believe women could hurt other women (Duke and Davidson 2009) and failure of victims to believe they had experienced IPV because they were not in a relationship with a man (Hassouneh and Glass 2008). There is also evidence that men experiencing IPV have similar difficulties in recognizing themselves as victims and being recognized by others as victims (Kay and Jeffries 2010; Landolt and Dutton 1997; Letellier 1994). Gay male perpetrators have also reported feelings of discomfort in treatment programs of heterosexual men (Stanley et al. 2006).

This obvious lack of a simple causal relationship between IPV and a macrosystem of male dominance or superstructure of male supremacy should not come as a surprise to those who understand an ecological analysis. There is a difference the systemic or ideological frameworks that support, encourage, or make possible particular behaviors and the individual choices of individual people. Patriarchal ideology or a patriarchal macrosystem views the use of power including violence as an acceptable method of dispute resolution and views men as authorized to control the women in their intimate world (Bohan 2002; Jagger and Rothenberg 1978). That doesn't require that every man does so. It only means that such behavior is a sanctioned option. In other words, from a systemic analysis being a man does not cause one to perpetrate IPV nor does being a woman make one a victim of IPV. Instead, such a system legitimizes the control of women by men and the use of force as a means of exercising that control. This means that violence against women is less likely to be viewed as aberrant or criminal, especially when it occurs within the context of a relationship. At the same time, a hetero-normative mental frame is implicit in patriarchal and male supremacist conceptions of relationships rendering same-sex relationships either invisible or deviant.

While neither sex nor gender defines IPV, there is an indication that gender matters even in same-sex partnerships. Some research has suggested slightly lower rates of IPV for lesbians and slightly higher rates for gay men (Bartholomew et al. 2008; Greenwood et al. 2002; Tjaden et al. 1999). Other researchers note that there are some unique characteristics and issues in gay (Kay and Jeffries 2010) and in lesbian (Hassouneh and Glass 2008; Ristock 2003) IPV that relates both to the challenges of the stigmatized status of same-sex partnerships and to the differences that occur as a result of differently gendered dyads. For example, Kurdek (1994, 2003) found evidence that same-

sex couples differ in some ways from heterosexual couples in the types of issues with which they struggle. Finally, Kay and Jeffries (2010) have noted that research on same-sex IPV that groups lesbians and gay men together, can obscure some of the uniquely gendered aspects of same-sex IPV. These findings remind us that it is important to understand the particular manifestations of factors often linked to gender, including social and economic power as well as physical strength, if we hope to understand the dynamics of IPV.

Still other research suggests gendered expectations play a role in same-sex IPV. McKenry and his colleagues (2006) found that higher scores on a scale of masculinity correlated with higher levels of violence among both lesbians and gay men. Additionally, they found childhood socioeconomic status was generally lower for men who used violence in their relationships. However, Balsam and Szymanski (2005) did not find a relationship between women's status on the "butch/femme" scale and the likelihood of perpetrating or being victimized by IPV. They did find the same increased probability for IPV among individuals with lower socioeconomic status. These findings suggest that cultural frames encourage the use of physical methods of problem solving which may increase IPV. The above-cited research suggests that both male sex roles and much of traditional "blue collar" culture may increase the use of violence for problem solving. By contrast, women and those in upper class society may be encouraged to use verbal means of problem solving or even of 'getting even' in interpersonal situations. The suggestion that a disagreement be taken outside and resolved by a fight is more likely to resonate with blue-collar culture than boardroom culture (Baker 1996). To summarize, the corollary to this second lesson from including same-sex relationships in our conceptual analysis is that for IPV gender is not determinant, but it is not irrelevant.

This conclusion is completely consistent with the research that routinely finds the gender of the perpetrator and the gender of the victim are extremely important when analyzing the severity of the injuries experienced in IPV (Black et al. 2011; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). This finding is usually described in terms of the victim, with the statement being that women are much more likely than men to suffer serious injuries as a result of IPV (Straus 2010). However, because the research is overwhelmingly conducted with heterosexual couples, the finding is equally true in reverse, with the emphasis on the gender of the perpetrator. In other words, men are more likely to inflict serious injuries on their intimate partner. Both may, in fact, be important. But, because IPV has generally been thought about inside the heterosexual frame, the factors that contribute to the differences in injuries have not been more carefully examined. This contributes to the erroneous conclusion that violence in relationships between two women is not serious while discouraging what may be an important analysis of what factors make injuries more likely to occur (Hamby and Jackson 2010). For example, men are, on average, larger and stronger than women. Yet there is little data that evaluates the levels of injury sustained in IPV based on the size and strength differential between the specific partners.

There are common gendered differences in size and strength, on average men are bigger and stronger compared to women (Maughan et al. 1983). In addition, the 2012 addition of women's boxing as an Olympic sport notwithstanding, it is probable that women generally are less skilled at defending themselves while men are more often trained to fight and more comfortable with physical violence. Some research with same-sex couples suggests gay men engage in more mutual combat or bi-directional violence within their relationships (Bartholomew et al. 2008), perhaps because both partners are accustomed to using combat as a means of dispute resolution or because of greater congruence between violence and male roles. But, again, most likely because the research generally has taken place within a heterosexual framework, there is little research that examines injuries or even relationship violence as a function of differential levels of comfort or experience with violence as a means of problem solving.

To date, the research on same-sex IPV does not allow for the clear answers about the relative importance of perpetrator or victim gender in the level of injuries sustained. More importantly, the research to date on IPV with any population does not unpack the factors associated with being a man or a woman. Such examination would include exploration of the relative contributions of differences between partners in strength or comfort with violence as a dispute resolution tool to either violence or injury. This sort of data cannot be easily gathered in large surveys. But, such research could be quite useful. It is also possible that the social trends towards greater participation in sports and higher levels of training in self-defense methods will alter the gendered nature of injuries in IPV.

Culture Matters

Systems in an ecological analysis exist and operate at multiple levels. Underneath the broad mantel of overarching ideologies, various national, regional, ethnic, and other frameworks operate. These embedded systems provide important context. For example, Black feminist theorists have consistently pointed to the role that racism and the history of slavery and segregation, as well as economic status, plays in shaping the experiences of IPV in communities of color (Lipsky et al. 2006; Nash 2005).

Some of the standards defined by these system frameworks include expectations about decision-making authority

within a relationship and relationship fidelity. Such standards are often gendered, they also exist at the assumptive level, as things that are understood without being named (Hepburn 2003). For example, within a general expectation of fidelity, male sexual dalliances may be expected or at least tolerated while female infidelity is categorically unacceptable; the image of men killing their wives lover (or their unfaithful wife) seems more prevalent than the reverse. This difference is also consistent with research on attitudes towards infidelity (Shackelford et al. 2002). Thus, what is expected and what is acceptable for individuals can vary based on gender. Furthermore, within these various frameworks gender is intertwined with other aspects of identity including the effects of racism, socio-economic status, and religious views. These macrosystems also include norms about the acceptability of violence as a conflict resolution strategy and practices concerning the participation of males and females in physical activity including fighting. For example, consider the likely reaction to a request from one party to another at a faculty meeting that a conflict be "taken outside and settled by a fight," compared to that same request on a construction site. While both might be ill advised and have employment consequences in the current environment, the first is more likely to be seen a bizarre behavior than the second. There are also cultural narratives, such as the frail or hapless female futilely pounding the chest of her stronger mate or the long-suffering male who finally strikes back at the harping shrew that shape behavior and expectation.

When studying same-sex relationships, the importance of these various national, regional, racial, ethnic, and religious cultural frames becomes immediately apparent. Within a context of increasing support for same-sex relationships, there are significant differences in the acceptance of same-sex relationships among different cultures (Takacs and Kuhar 2011). These differences in social acceptance create the context for relationships and the support provided to assist in dealing with relationship problems. Turell (2000) found differences in rates of reported abuse within same-sex relationships by gender and ethnic groups, suggesting that research and analysis must be multi-dimensional. Without simultaneous attention to multiple factors and dimensions, the particular ways that gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, and culture intertwine to create different experiences is invisible.

These differences also influence the degree to which partners in same-sex relationships experience stigma and discrimination. A variety of researchers and theoreticians have suggested that the stigma still associated with homosexuality may increase the IPV in same-sex relationships (Balsam and Szymanski 2005; Kay and Jeffries 2010). There is support for this view in Messinger's (2011) recently published secondary analysis of the National Violence Against Women Survey. Although there are sufficient limitations in the data that Messinger himself calls the study exploratory (p.2231), he reports that LGB individuals were more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to experience all forms of IPV. He also reports provocative differences among the forms of IPV based on gender and, in the case of sexual IPV, also sexual orientation. Overall, his findings were consistent with the study on life-time prevalence rates for violence by Balsam and colleagues, including their report that bisexuals were at the greatest risk for sexual IPV (Balsam et al. 2005). Additionally, research with LGBT youth suggests the experience of minority stigma is gendered, with males experiencing greater levels of stigma specifically among the Dutch-speaking people of Belgium (Berghe et al. 2010).

Although some research reflects awareness of the importance of investigating the effects of these various systems and cultures (Burke et al. 2002; Kay and Jeffries 2010), there is a need for more culturally informed research on same-sex IPV. The lesson emphasized by including same-sex relationships in our conceptual analysis is the importance of understanding the dynamics of the relationships in which violence occurs. To understand those dynamics it is important to understand the cultural contexts of the relationship and the ways those contexts are intertwined with gender, ethnicity, and other aspects of identity. Once again, assumptions about how gender differences frame relationship dynamics can appear to provide answers and explanations when the experiences of same-sex couples are not included in the analysis.

Gender as A Marker

Finally, we reach the level of the dyadic relationships and the individuals in them. Interestingly, this is the level at which Straus (2010) begins his analysis despite describing his perspective as a systems theory. The various larger cultural narratives outlined previously influence some of the issues at the dyadic level. Others are shaped by the history of the couple; what experiences, problems, and shared understandings exist for the dyad. Still other issues are shaped by the personal histories, attachment styles, coping styles, communications skills, and physical attributes of the individuals in the dyad. The connection between personal factors and the larger social and cultural contexts raises questions about the ability of survey questions to adequately explore connections. For example, personal factors include substance use and abuse, but substance use can be influenced by experiences of trauma, discrimination, and stigma (McDevitt-Murphy et al. 2010).

Even when dealing with individual or dyadic issues, context factors are important. Size is a good example.

Although individual women can be larger than individual men, within intimate partner relationships social expectations dictate that size is a gendered variable, with men being bigger than their female partners. In a mixed method study of same-sex IPV involving women that included depth interviews, Hassouneh and Glass (2008) found evidence that when police are called they tend to assume the larger person, or less traditionally feminine individual, is the perpetrator. However, participants in that study also reported that these stereotyped conclusions could be grossly inaccurate as a result of factors such as experience or training in physical fighting or the use of weapons. Interestingly, within heterosexual pairings, being male is generally a signifier for all of those context factors. Social expectations suggest that compared to their female partners, men are usually bigger, have more experience or training with fighting, have greater comfort with the use of violence to settle disputes, and are more comfortable with and have more experience with weapons. This serves to underscore the initial point about the importance of studying same-sex IPV, that there are many factors for which gender serves as a marker variable. These factors include social and economic power as well as issues related to physical abilities and comfort with violence. Through the study of same-sex IPV, especially with qualitative methods either alone or as adjuncts to quantitative methods, it may be possible to gain a better understanding of the roles these factors play, not only in same-sex IPV but in IPV more generally.

Gender may also serve as a marker for understanding or ascribing meaning to the terms of standardized forms. For example, the term hurt may have different meanings to individuals, often women, who do not think of solving disputes by "taking it outside" than it does to an individual accustomed to physically violent games and fights. To the first person, a slap may be interpreted as "hurting" while to the second, only something causing injury qualifies as "hurting." These differences in meaning are likely to provide systematic bias because they intertwine with gender, class, and other cultural variables.

Engaging in Significant Levels of IPV Reflects Psychological Problems

Data from research on same-sex IPV has consistently indicated a variety of individual factors increase the risk of either perpetrating or experiencing IPV. Balsam and Szymanski (2005) found that internalized homophobia increased the likelihood of IPV victimization but not perpetration, while class and education were predictive of perpetration and victimization. They also found that trauma history predicted higher levels of IPV. These findings suggest that limited psychological or economic resources are associated with higher levels of IPV, as is living in communities or cultures where violence is an acceptable method of problem solving. Others have found that alcohol use is associated with IPV (Klostermann et al. 2011) as are a variety of psychological problems (Coleman 1994), and that engaging in IPV is related to lower psychological well being (McKenry et al. 2006).

Glass et al. (2004) developed and validated a revised scale to predict risk for re-victimization in lesbian IPV. They found that eight factors, including increasing levels of violence, jealousy by the abuser, substance use by the abuser, the use of weapons, and lack of social support for the victim were highly predictive of future violence. These factors are generally consistent with the research on heterosexual IPV (Gondolf 1988; Johnson 1995).

One intriguing finding is that bisexual women seem to be at greatest risk both in heterosexual relationships (Messinger 2011) and in lesbian relationships (Balsam and Szymanski 2005). It is possible that this finding is related to the role jealousy plays in IPV. Because the partners of bisexual women experience more potential threats, there are more frequent triggers for violence. However, the further implications of these findings have not been explored.

Violence Typologies

Over the years considerable data has been collected using relatively decontextualized scales, most notably the Conflict Tactic Scale (Straus 1979; Straus et al. 1996). This research has found that there is a considerable amount of violence in intimate relationships and that both men and women engage in violence in relatively equal numbers. One problem with the data collected by these scales is that it is incapable of distinguishing between the use of violent tactics to attack or control and the use of violent tactics in self-defense (Ristock 2003; Stark 2007). Even more importantly, such scales are totally incapable of distinguishing between violence that was more symbolic, such as a small person not trained in martial arts slapping a much larger person trained in martial arts to communicate distress, from the response of a larger person delivering a skilled blow. At the same time, empirical data has also consistently demonstrated, as was noted previously, that women are substantially more likely to suffer serious injury from IPV than men.

In part to explain these seemingly inconsistent findings, Johnson and Ferraro (2000) proposed that violent relationships fall into four types: common couple violence, intimate terrorism, violent resistance, and mutual violent control. Their typology suggested that control was the motive for violence only in the intimate terrorism group. Research on the utility of these typologies has been relatively limited.

Research by Graham-Kevan and Archer (2008), applying Johnson's typologies, found some correlation for all of the typology-based groups between control and use of violence. However, the group labeled intimate terrorists was high on all areas of control as well as on severity of violence.

Reviewing the research on same-sex IPV through an ecological lens suggests some additional ways to think about typologies and IPV. Rather than one-dimensional typologies, it may be useful to think of multiple dynamic levels of influence. At the macrosystem level there is cultural permission to engage in violent behavior. This can include multiple macrosystems and includes the cultural permission for men, also known as dominate partners, to discipline and control errant or misbehaving women, also known as subordinate partners. As well, this includes the cultural permission to settle a dispute through a physical confrontation. Put simply, when the cultural frame is that violence is acceptable or expected, there will be higher levels of violence. At the dyadic and individual level, there are factors related to comfort with and success in the use of physical force or violence including size, fighting skill and experience, as well as comfort with and success in the use of non-violent tools for communications and problem solving that may predict the use of violence by one or both of the members of a couple. Finally there are individual factors such as disinhibition, often associated with substance use and abuse, and emotional dysregulation, often associated with problematic emotional adjustment that may predict the use of violence. In terms of these factors, only the last level, which could be called individual psychopathology, is relatively neutral in terms of gender. The research and analysis needed to expand or test this multidimensional, interactive framework would of necessity attend to context and frequently include qualitative inquiry.

Including same-sex IPV as a core part of our analysis does help to make visible those factors generally treated as being simply about being male or female. Instead, it may also be useful to think of gender, particularly at the individual level, as being less a property of the individual and more a signifier of cultural permissions and expectation, gender linked characteristics, and gender role linked experiences. For example, because men are generally stronger, bigger, more likely to have grown up routinely engaging in physical fights, more likely to have been given formal training in physical combat, and more likely to be comfortable using firearms, all of these items tend to be treated as part of being male rather than analyzed as independent factors. When treated as separate factors, these items may help explain women's greater risk for injury in IPV.

Summary

Including the experiences of same-sex couples in the analysis and conceptual understanding of IPV provides important lessons. One lesson is that all experience is contextualized by time and culture. Thus, our research must be understood in the context of the times and cultures in which it was conducted and revisited as change occurs. Another lesson is that our research is, at best, imperfect and may be distorted by potentially systematic issues related to trust of the participants in the research process and the definitions imposed by the research process. Finally, a better understanding of IPV will be generated if we use gender as a way of identifying issues that require further study rather than as an explanation. By focusing on the role played in IPV by factors such as strength or verbal skill, which may be linked to gender in the aggregate but vary from individual to individual, we can gain a better understanding of ways to both predict and reduce IPV. By focusing on the ways that gendered roles influence the manifestation of personal and relationship dynamics, we can gain a better understanding of how to intervene in individual violent relationships. By focusing on the ways that ideological or superstructure frames influence laws and those who enforce them, we may learn about the social changes still needed to eliminate IPV.

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