

**An Examination of Power Differentials and Intimate Partner Violence in Lesbian Relationships**

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## ABSTRACT

Researchers investigating lesbian intimate partner violence (IPV) encourage a movement from the study of prevalence rates to the examination of the complexities of IPV in lesbian relationships (Ristock, 2003). The current study examined power differentials and their associations with reported physical and psychological violence in lesbian relationships. Additionally, the study sought to determine whether power differentials predict physical and psychological violence within the relationship. Secondary data analysis of the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998) was used. Overall the sample ( $N = 80$ ) was primarily White, high school graduates, with an average age of 30.

A preliminary exploratory factor analysis of a measure used in the NVAWS revealed two factors—jealousy and control tactics. These factor scores were used in later analyses. Chi-square tests revealed no significant relationships between income, age, race, employment, health status, or education power differentials and the presence of physical and psychological violence (i.e., verbal attack). Significant associations were found between control tactics and age, as well as education differentials. Finally, significant associations were found between control tactics and psychological violence, as well as control tactics and jealousy. Multiple linear regressions (MLR) were used to determine which power differential discrepancy scores and factor scores (i.e., jealousy, control tactics [predictors]) could be used to predict physical and psychological violence (criteria). No significant predictions could be made for physical violence. Presence of

jealousy and control tactics was found to be a highly significant predictor, accounting for 20% of the variance in psychological violence.

## Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my wonderful family. To my husband and best friend, Luke—I am extremely grateful for your devotion, encouragement and abundant help throughout this process. My life is wonderful because you are a part of it. To my two beautiful daughters, Claudia and Lila—your endless love, giggles, hugs, and kisses are what I live for. I love you both so very much. Also, to my parents, Susan and Danny—I thank you for your unconditional love and support throughout my entire academic career. I would not be where I am without you.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of Problem

Research examining intimate partner violence (IPV) has greatly increased over the last few decades, which has led to an increased knowledge of violence and its effects on those who experience it (McClennen, 2005; West, 2002). This developing body of research focused on heterosexual couples, while ignoring lesbian couples (Elliott, 1996; Renzetti & Hamberger, 1996; McKenry, Serovich, Mason, & Mosack, 2006; Patzel, 2006; West). It was not until 1986 that research concerning IPV in lesbian relationships began to surface (Lobel, 1986).

Current literature gives some insight into the past exclusion of lesbians in the research on intimate partner violence (IPV). Some researchers wish to keep the focus on male violence and fear that a “backlash” against lesbians and feminism will occur (Ristock, 2003; Scherzer, 1998). Ristock (2003) suggests that the feminist community is also hesitant to address this issue because it is thought that the acknowledgement of lesbian IPV will undermine the main feminist analysis of IPV experienced by women, which revolves around male-perpetrated violence against women rooted in patriarchy (Ristock, 1997, 2003). It is believed that doing so might weaken the feminist analysis of gender inequality and its relation to IPV (McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001). Despite the concern some have with addressing IPV within lesbian relationships, it is a phenomenon that occurs and should be addressed (McClennen, 2005; McClennen, Summers, & Daley, 2002; Renzetti, 1992, 1997).

Studies of IPV in the general population of women show incidence estimates from 17% to 32% (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; White & Koss, 1991). The research that does exist regarding lesbian IPV shows prevalence estimates from 17% to 52%, slightly similar to IPV

experienced by women in heterosexual relationships (Renzetti, 2003). Several researchers emphasize the importance of further investigation in the area of lesbian IPV (McClennen et al., 2005; Miller, Greene, Causby, White, & Lockhart, 2001; Scherzer, 1998; West, 2002). More specifically, researchers encourage a movement from examination of prevalence rates to the study of the complexities of IPV in lesbian relationships (e.g., power, control, correlates, dynamics).

### Significance of the Study

Although prevalence rates offer information to researchers and practitioners, lack of knowledge of the complexities and dynamics of lesbian IPV limits research, support and services that can be offered to lesbians experiencing violence in their relationship. Despite the fact that previous literature states that IPV in lesbian relationships occurs at nearly the same rate as IPV in heterosexual couples, limited examination of correlates, dynamics, and help-seeking behaviors exists (McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001; Miller et al., 2001; Renzetti, 1992, 1997; Ristock, 2003, 2005). These studies, though not always, analyze lesbian IPV in comparison to heterosexual IPV (Matthews, Tartaro, & Hughes, 2003; Stahly & Lie, 1995). The very nature of comparative studies sets up a dichotomy of normative and non-normative, which ultimately produces research operating under a heteronormative assumption (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). Heteronormativity is the unstated viewpoint that encompasses heterosexual principles (e.g., traditional gender role adherence, traditional family form, heterosexual orientation; Oswald et al.). It is a system of privilege formed by intersections of the socially-constructed institutions of gender, sexuality, and family.

The traditional vehicle for analyzing and understanding power dynamics and IPV is gender, emphasizing male-oriented power and control (Miller et al., 2001) supported by the

patriarchal society in which we live. Within the literature, it is acknowledged that one source of conflict in lesbian relationships centers around balance of power (Krestan & Bepko, 1980; Renzetti, 1992). Additionally, power differentials between lesbian partners have been identified as one of the major correlates of IPV (Renzetti, 1988). Because of this, examination of power differentials within the context of lesbian IPV is of central concern (McClennen, 2005; McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001; Renzetti, 1989; 1992; Ristock, 2003; Scherzer, 1998; West, 2002).

Power differentials can be defined as differences in potential sources of personal power. Renzetti (1992) suggested that personal power can be constructed according to “social currencies” (p. 43) such as class, race, income, educational achievement, and employment status. Hart (1986) asserted age, physical stature, and health status also can be used to construct personal power. The aforementioned dimensions are situated within and shaped by the contexts of heterosexism, misogyny, racism, classism, and ageism. These institutions produce systems of power (e.g., sexual orientation, gender, race, class, age) that provide the possibility for individuals to experience “simultaneous, multiple, and interlocking oppressions” (Mann & Grimes, 2001, p. 8).

### Purpose of Study

The current study seeks to examine power differentials, defined by differences in potential sources of personal power, and their associations with reported physical and psychological violence in lesbian relationships. Personal power can be constructed within the context of many different social systems of power, which are considered tools that provide power differences in lesbian relationships (McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001; Renzetti, 2003). This study does not seek to categorize certain potential sources of power as superior to or more powerful than others; instead, the current study’s goal is to momentarily unpack certain social

currencies (Renzetti, 1992) from the intersectionality matrix. Additionally, the study sought whether power differentials predicted physical and psychological violence within the relationship. Although past research identifies power differentials as a correlate of IPV in lesbian relationships (e.g., Renzetti, 1992), it is unclear which particular sources of power relate to and possibly predict IPV.

### Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. Is the presence of power differentials within lesbian relationships associated with the occurrence of physical and psychological violence within the relationship?
2. Do particular power differentials predict physical violence and psychological violence within the relationship?
3. Is physical or psychological violence better predicted by particular power differentials?
4. Do factors of power and control predict physical or psychological violence?

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research highlights the importance of investigation of IPV due to the reported frequency of IPV existing in lesbian relationships. This chapter provides an overview of literature concerning lesbian IPV. Incidence rates are presented, as is a working definition of violence. Types of violence occurring in lesbian relationships are examined. Although research does discuss the occurrence of sexual violence in lesbian relationships, this is a body of literature that is quite separate from the current area of interest; therefore, sexual violence is not included in this literature review. Correlates of IPV are presented to highlight the complex dynamics of violence in lesbian relationships. Finally, the theoretical frameworks used in previous research to investigate this area are introduced, as well as the theoretical framework guiding the current study.

#### Incidence Rates

Research shows between 17% and 52% of lesbian couples experience IPV (Elliott, 1996; Renzetti & Hamberger, 1996; McKenry et al., 2006; Patzel, 2006; Renzetti, 1992, 1997; Ristock, 2002; West, 1998). Loulan (1987) found that 17% of the 1,566 lesbians in her study had experienced IPV in a current or previous relationship. It is impossible, however, to accurately predict the prevalence of IPV in lesbian relationships due to many factors (Patzel; Renzetti, 1992; Scherzer, 1998). First, most studies use small nonrepresentative samples (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008; Patzel). Second, underreporting or non-reporting is a common theme present in the literature. It is suggested that the heterosexist society discourages abused lesbians from seeking help for fear that their abuse will be minimized or ignored (Renzetti, 1988). Third, different sampling techniques, measures of violence, and definitions of violence are used throughout the

research on lesbian IPV (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Hassouneh & Glass). For example, IPV in one study might be defined as physical violence, whereas in another study IPV might be defined as psychological and physical violence. Waldner-Haugrud, Gratch and Magruder (1997) suggested that lower rates of violence are reported in studies where victims are asked if they are physically abused or have experienced violence. Conversely, higher rates of violence are reported in studies that use the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979) to measure violence in lesbian relationships (Ristock, 2003). This could be attributed to limited response items. These measurement issues can significantly influence the incidence rates.

#### Defining Intimate Partner Violence in Lesbian Relationships

Although definitions of lesbian IPV vary within the literature, the most widely used definition of lesbian violence is “a pattern of violent or coercive behaviors whereby a lesbian seeks to control the thoughts, beliefs or conduct of an intimate partner or to punish the intimate partner for resisting the perpetrator’s control over her” (Hart, 1986, p.174). The entire range of lesbian IPV, also referred to as lesbian battering by Hart, includes “the pattern of intimidation, coercion, terrorism or violence, the sum of all past acts of violence and promises of future violence, that achieves enhanced power and control for the perpetrator over her partner” (Hart, p. 174). This definition includes many types of violence, including physical violence, property destruction, psychological violence, sexual violence, economic control, and threat of violence (Hart; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2002; West, 2002).

#### Types of Intimate Partner Violence

Violence can come in many forms, as documented in research on IPV (Miller et al., 2001; Renzetti, 1992, 1997; West, 2002). The current study focused on physical and psychological violence.

### *Physical Violence*

Physical violence is reported with the literature on lesbian IPV, although it is reported less often than psychological violence (Brand & Kidd, 1986; Renzetti, 1989, 1992; Scherzer, 1998). Physical violence includes a variety of behaviors. Miller et al. (2001) examined physical violence in lesbian relationships and found that 7.8% of lesbians in their study kicked, bit, or hit their partner and 6.7% hit their partner with something. Ten percent of lesbians reported other physically violent behaviors, such as trying to hit their partner with something, beating up their partner, threatening their partner with a gun or knife, and shooting or cutting their partner with a knife (4.9%, 1.8%, 2.1%, and 1.4%, respectively). Others studies, particularly qualitative studies or quantitative studies with qualitative components (e.g., Scherzer, 1998; Turell, 2000), identified other forms of physical violence not commonly found in studies using standard measures of physical violence (e.g., CTS; Straus, 1979).

Scherzer (1998) used a modified version of the CTS (Straus, 1979), as well as a series of open-ended questions to examine IPV in the lives of 256 lesbians. The CTS was modified to include items related to psychological violence and items specific to lesbian relationships (e.g., threats to “out” partner). Scherzer’s participants reported more common types of physical violence in terms of hitting, biting, and slapping, but also forms of physical violence not picked up by general measures of physical violence. More specifically, respondents reported forced public displays of sexual behavior (4%), driving recklessly to punish or scare (24%), and abusing the other’s children or their own (14%). These forms of physical violence were found due to the use of open-ended questions.

Across the literature, many types of physical violence are reported. Although physical violence is less reported than psychological violence, lesbians in violent relationships are

exposed to a wide range of physically violent behaviors such as: pushing, shoving and having items thrown at them (Lie & Gentlewarrior, 1991; Matthews et al., 2003; Miller, et al., 2001; Ristock, 2002; Renzetti, 1992, 1997); forced to get drunk or high (Renzetti, 1997); violent objects (e.g., guns, knives) placed inside the vagina (Renzetti, 1992); stabbed, shot, sleep or eating patterns disrupted (Scherzer, 1998); and weapons publically displayed (Turell, 2000). A broad list of physically abusive tactics can be found (see Turell), however the most common forms of physical violence documented in research include pushing, shoving, hitting (open hand or with fist), and scratching (Renzetti, 1992).

### *Psychological Violence*

Psychological violence was initially ignored when IPV research began to surface because physical violence was viewed as more pertinent and harmful (Mahoney, Williams, & West, 2001). Psychological violence is reported more often than physical violence, and research shows that psychological violence can have more severe consequences, even when controlling for physical violence (Marshall, 1996). Some researchers use the term emotional violence when speaking of psychological violence, often using the terms interchangeably within articles (Mahoney et al.; Renzetti, 1992, 1997; Scherzer, 1998). Psychological violence was the term used in the current study.

Defining and measuring psychological violence presents many challenges for researchers. As mentioned before, it is not clearly determined whether emotional and psychological violence are interchangeable concepts or are different concepts altogether. A good definition of psychological violence was presented by O'Leary (1999), who defined this type of violence as:

acts of recurring criticism and/or verbal aggression toward a partner. Generally, such actions cause the partner to be fearful of the other or lead the partner to have very low



self-esteem (p. 19).

Psychological violence is used to instill fear or weaken the abused lesbian's sense of self (Mahoney et al., 2001). It can be done both verbally and nonverbally. Also, tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions help add to the overall meaning of what is being expressed to the victim.

Throughout the literature both quantitative and qualitative accounts of this type of violence exists. Percentage rates have been anywhere from 31% (Scherzer, 1998) to 81% (Lie & Gentlewarrier, 1991). Renzetti (1997) found that 70% of the 100 lesbians in her study reported psychological violence. This statistic is similar to the percentage rate found in Turrell's (2000) examination of violence in same-sex relationships. This study included 499 gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals. Eighty-three percent of the sample reported experiencing at least one incidence of psychological violence. In a cross-national examination of Venezuelan and United States lesbian IPV, Burke, Jordan, and Owen (2002) found that 40% of respondents reported psychological violence in the form of humiliation, insults, verbal harassment, and degradation.

The most common forms of psychological violence documented in research include humiliation, threats, interruption of sleeping or eating habits, and being demeaned in public (Renzetti, 1992). Insults (Renzetti, 1992), verbal put downs (Scherzer, 1998), suicide threats, abuse of pets (Turell, 2000), ridicule, and holding children hostage are a few of the many tactics used by those who are psychologically violent. Less common, but still reported, tactics may include withholding of medicine (Turell; Bornstein, Fawcett, Sullivan, Senturia, & Shui-Thornton, 2006), theft or withholding of valuables (Scherzer) and verbal abuse of abused partners' children (Renzetti, 1997).

*Homophobic control.* A form of psychological violence unique to lesbian relationships is homophobic control (Pharr, 1986). Homophobic control is a direct result of the heterosexist and homophobic society we live in (Bornstein et al., 2006; Pharr, 1986). Pharr (1986), in her chapter from the pioneering anthology *Naming the Violence* (Lobel, 1986), discussed how heterosexism and homophobia define the context in which lesbians experience relationship violence:

There is an important difference between the battered lesbian and the battered non-lesbian: the battered non-lesbian experiences violence within the context of a misogynist world; the lesbian experiences violence within the context of a world that is not only woman-hating but is also homophobic. That is a great difference (p. 16).

This context includes the risk of isolation, estrangement of family, and loss of children, employment or housing (Pharr, 1997).

Homophobic control is used by abusive partners as a weapon of control over their partner (Brand & Kidd, 1986). Hart (1986) defines homophobic control as:

threatening to tell family, friends, employer, police, church, community, etc. that the victim is a lesbian...; telling the victim she deserves all that she gets because she is a lesbian; assuring her that no one would believe she has been violated because lesbians are not violent; reminding her that she has no options because the homophobic world will not help her (p. 189).

These tactics can be extremely effective because of the heterosexist, homophobic society lesbians live in (Ristock, 2005).

Although this is an issue present in lesbian IPV, few articles directly examine the occurrence of homophobic control. The research that does exist shows that the use of homophobic control in lesbian relationships occurs. Renzetti (1992) found that 21% of lesbians

experienced the threat of being “outed” to those who did not know their sexual orientation. In a study of 499 gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals, 24% reported that their partner used their sexual orientation against them, 12% were accused of not being a real lesbian or gay man, and 14% threatened to tell their sexual orientation (i.e. “out”) to someone who did not know their sexual orientation (Turell, 2000). Other demonstrations of this type of violence can include threats to endanger custody of children or immigration processes, as well as revealing the HIV/AIDS status of a partner (Ristock, 2005).

### Correlates of Lesbian Intimate Partner Violence

Renzetti (1992) offered the first examination of correlates of violence in lesbian relationships. She identified dependency, jealousy, power imbalance, substance abuse, and intergenerational transmission of violence as significant correlates of IPV. Renzetti (1996) later added internalized homophobia and personality disorders to the list. Renzetti (1992, 1996) was able to demonstrate significant relationships between these factors and violence, and identified power imbalance as the most significant of these major correlates (McClennen et al., 2002; Renzetti, 1996). Internalized homophobia also strongly contributes to IPV in lesbian relationships.

Dependency consistently has been found to be associated with lesbian IPV. Violent lesbian partners are found to be the more dependent member in the relationship (Renzetti, 1992, 1988, 1996) and higher dependency levels are associated with increased levels of violence (Waldner-Haugrud et al., 1997). Jealousy often has been combined into the concept of fusion. Fusion, or merger, is where boundary lines are combined and/or blurred, ultimately becoming nonexistent, with the lesbian couple embracing the overall value of togetherness and emotional closeness (Ossana, 2000; Miller et al., 2001). This is an area of research that has subsided over

the years. The intergenerational transmission of violence and its influence on lesbian IPV has found some support within the literature. Lie, Schilit, Bush, Montagne, and Reyes, (1991) found a correlation between lesbians witnessing violence in their family of origin and violence within their relationship. Substance abuse and personality disorders often are not examined in great detail when related to IPV in lesbian relationships, although substance abuse has been found to be highly related to IPV for lesbian couples. Some have argued that it is harder to tap into this issue because victims will dismiss the violence because drugs and/or alcohol were involved (Renzetti, 1988).

Power imbalance has been noted as a principal correlate attributed to violence in lesbian relationships (Renzetti, 1992, 1996; Ristock, 2002; see also Margolies & Leeder, 1994; McClennen, 2005; Morrow, 1994; Scherzer, 1998), yet researchers find it difficult to directly identify *which* imbalances contribute most to violence. Critical examinations of power within lesbian relationships are scarce. More specifically, researchers often focus on equality and ignore the possibility of differential levels of power and control within lesbian couples (Eldridge & Gilbert, 1990; Kurdek, 1998). Possible sources of imbalance have been identified as (a) personal characteristics (e.g., decisive, taker), (b) feelings and patterns of interaction (e.g., division of household labor, sexual initiation), (c) sources of conflict or strain in the relationship (e.g., money, intelligence, attractiveness), (d) and status differentials (e.g., age, education level; Hart, 1986; Renzetti, 1992, 1996; Scherzer; McClennen).

Ristock (2002) suggested that power within lesbian relationships and what contributes to power imbalance is less predictable. More specifically, women in her qualitative examination of lesbian IPV stated that because of the same-sex nature of their relationship, certain aspects of power change. Ristock (2003) emphasized that a better understanding of what power and control

*mean* within a relationship is needed. Upon further study, Ristock (2003) identified being “out” for a longer period of time, being the older partner, or being more known in the lesbian community as additional sources of power. Being a partner in an interracial lesbian relationship can offer sources of power (i.e., the abusing partner might deliver racial slurs to her partner). Also mentioned are class differences, which create an imbalance in a lesbian relationship, possibly leading to violence (Renzetti, 1989). It is challenging to gather complex and informational data on sources of power and corresponding imbalances and because of this, this area is rarely researched (McClennen, 2005; Ristock, 2003).

Internalized homophobia is defined as an internalization of society’s negative views and perceptions of lesbians (also applies to gay, bisexual, and transgendered individuals), ultimately leading to self-hatred (Pharr, 1986; Ristock, 2005). It has been suggested that internalized homophobia may lead to a sense of loss of control (Schilit, Lie, Bush, Montagne, & Reyes, 1991) and that violence might be a way to regain control (Schilit et al.). Renzetti (1996) echoed this by identifying internalized homophobia as a correlate of violence in lesbian relationships. Ristock (2002) proposed that it is not so much self-hatred from internalized homophobia that correlates to violence, but rather the abuser’s use of homophobic control, combined with the victim’s internalized homophobia and fear of exposure to homophobia that correlate with violence. Ristock argued that in order to better understand the issue of internalized homophobia one must understand the context(s) of homophobia in general. Empirical research on internalized homophobia and its effect on lesbian IPV is limited.

## Theoretical Frameworks Guiding Research on Lesbian Intimate Partner Violence

Theoretical perspectives influence the way research is conducted, particularly the questions asked. Given that researchers have ignored lesbian IPV for many decades, most theorists and researchers have borrowed from theoretical frameworks previously used to understand violence in heterosexual relationships in order to explain violence occurring in lesbian relationships. The most commonly used theoretical perspectives in previous research on lesbian IPV are social learning theory, feminist theory, psychological, and social-psychological theory. The current study, however, used conflict theory, as well as relative resource theory.

### *Past Research*

The main theoretical perspectives guiding research on IPV in lesbian relationships are social learning, feminist, psychological, and social-psychological perspectives. Social learning theory posits that violence is used as a coping mechanism learned through previous exposure to violence (Lie & Gentlewarrier, 1991). Of importance to this theoretical perspective is the reinforcement of violent behavior. When violence produces desired results, the abuser is more likely to repeat the violent behaviors (Pagelow, 1984). The notion of intergenerational transmission of violence comes from a social learning theoretical perspective (Coleman, 1994). Some research on lesbian IPV supports this idea in that a history of family violence as a child is found in the histories of abusive lesbians (Farley, 1996; Lie et al., 1991). The majority of research on lesbian IPV does not support this theory.

The feminist perspective focuses on gender, where violence is used as an instrument of patriarchy which keeps women in subordinate positions (Merrill, 1996). This perspective can be used to explain violence within not only lesbian relationships, but gay and heterosexual

relationships as well (Renzetti, 2002). Despite the possibility for widespread analysis using this theory, some researchers have argued that using feminist theory presents challenges for explaining lesbian IPV. For example, Merrill suggests that feminist theory alone cannot explain violence within lesbian relationships and argues that it treats lesbian IPV as an exception. Feminist theory focuses on gender and the patriarchal control used by men against women (Letellier, 1994; Merrill; Ristock, 2003). Letellier argues that the feminist perspective is heterosexist and has helped render lesbians invisible in regards to their experiences of IPV because it precludes the opportunity for there to be a female victimizer. Since the primary focus on gender exists within feminist theory, some have argued for the use of a psychological perspective.

The psychological perspective emphasizes gender-neutrality (Island & Letellier, 1991) and focuses on the batterer's psychological state. Island and Letellier created this psychological framework with the foundational idea that feminist theory is heterosexist and that intimate partner violence is not a "gender issue" (p. 255). More specifically, they developed diagnostic materials to identify batterers, regardless of their gender. A main tenant of this theory is that batterers should be acknowledged and classified by their behavior, not gender.

Merrill (1996), fully acknowledging the weaknesses of both feminist and psychological frameworks, developed the social-psychological perspective to examine sociological and psychological components simultaneously. In this theoretical framework, the cause of violence was defined as three separate factors—learning to abuse, having opportunity to abuse, and choosing to abuse. Merrill stressed that individuals choose to use violence in their relationship and that they are singularly responsible for such behavior.

### *Current Study*

The current study used conflict theory and resource theory to understand and explain IPV in lesbian relationships. Conflict theory and resource theory, an extension of exchange theory, have long been used in the field of family studies (Farrington & Chertok, 1993; Sabatelli & Shehan, 1993).

*Conflict theory.* Conflict theory states that the tendency toward conflict is a basic element of human nature (Farrington & Chertok, 1993). This theory assumes that conflict exists because people are motivated to behave according to their own interests, needs, values, goals, and resources that they feel are important (Farrington & Chertok). Each person differs in what they find important and what they need, value, and desire. According to this theory, there are two roads that lead to conflict: (1) different people or groups want different things and (2) different people or groups want the same thing, yet there is a limited supply of the thing they want. Conflict theorists define families as social systems characterized by power, defined as the ability to “define and control circumstances and events so that one can influence things to go in the direction of one’s interests” (Rorty, 1992, p. 2). Power is something that exists in all families (Sprey, 1999). It is always potential (Sprey, 1999; Szinovacz, 1987) and can be either individual (i.e., power to do something) or social (i.e., power to make someone do something). Power exists and is defined by the larger social structure’s norms and values (Farrington & Chertok).

Conflict theory provides a way for researchers to examine inequality within relationship and how it relates to inequality within society. Power differentials exist within the family, particularly in regard to age, race, gender, and class. These structural inequalities are assumed to lead to conflict. Conflict theorists mainly look at the ways in which family deal with conflict (e.g., Straus, 1979). Sprey (1999) suggested that the presence of physical or nonviolent coercive



tactics is greatly dependent on a variety of different factors (e.g., degree of symmetry between resources, relative levels of dependence). Other research on lesbian relationship issues confirms this (see Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Lie & Gentlewarrier, 1991; Renzetti, 1992).

Conflict within husband-wife relationships (Glick & Gross, 1975) and intrafamily relationships (Straus, 1979) is examined using this theory; however, conflict theory is not explicitly used in existing research on IPV in lesbian relationships. For the current study, this theory helps to understand how power differentials influence and determine the use of violence. Because power is determined according to the larger social structure, power differentials are influenced by heterosexism, racism, sexism, ageism, and classism. Additionally, this theory would suggest that higher sum totals of power differentials (also called structural inequalities) would relate to higher levels of violence (Sprey, 1999).

*Resource theory.* Resource theory, a variation of exchange theory, is another theoretical perspective that may be helpful when examining IPV. Some studies use exchange theory models, which is related to resource theory, for understanding lesbian relationships (Kurdek, 1991; Beals, Impett, & Peplau, 2002; Gottman et al., 2003). Despite the long relationship between the field of family studies and resource theory, no research has been published explicitly using a resource theoretical lens for understanding IPV in lesbian relationships.

Although never used in research on lesbian IPV, it has been used for examination of heterosexual IPV (e.g., Atkinson, Greenstein, & Lang, 2005; Fox, Benson, DeMaris, & Wyk, 2002). Blood and Wolfe's (1960) macrosystemic approach to family power examined the links between power inside the family and outside the family. According to this approach, power was defined in terms of the relative resources contributed by both the husband and the wife (Blood & Wolfe). Resources examined were occupational prestige, income, and education level. Early

criticisms highlighted the possibility for other sources of resources. For example, Foa and Foa (1980) proposed the concept of intangible resources (e.g., intelligence, physical attractiveness) to add to tangible resources (e.g., income, education level, occupational prestige). In general, when using resource theory men's absolute level of resources is emphasized, however some researchers modify the theory to examine *relative* resources of both men and women (Macmillan & Gartner, 1999; McCloskey, 1996). This is known as relative resource theory.

Like exchange theory, resource theory has found support in the field of family studies. For example, Blumenstein and Schwartz (1983) found that when men earned more than their wives they were more likely to have high levels of control of financial decisions, compared to husbands and wives who had similar incomes. When examining lesbian couples, research findings are conflicting. Caldwell and Peplau (1984) found that income was a resource contributing to power in the relationships, whereas Blumenstein and Schwartz found no relationship between income and power. Research on lesbian IPV explicitly using resource theory, just like exchange theory, is non-existent.

The current study used components of both conflict theory and relative resource theory to form the theoretical framework for examination of IPV in lesbian relationships, ultimately desiring to break free from heteronormative assumptions (Oswald et al., 2006). Conflict theory suggests that dependence and power are conversely related and that resources and power are positively related. Relative resource theory examines the level of both partners' resources relative to one another. The concept of relative differences was used to define power differentials as imbalances in resources. This allowed for the examination of how power differentials related to the occurrence of violence in a lesbian relationship. For instance, different types of resources reported, the relative differences in resources between partners, and whether or not this was

associated with violence in the relationship was examined. The current study identified particular power differentials existing between couples and attempted to distinguish if they were associated with or predicted IPV.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine power differentials within lesbian relationships and how these differentials might be associated with the occurrence of violence within the relationship. I used secondary data analysis of The National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998) to examine whether or not certain sources of power (e.g., levels of education, race) were associated with relationship violence. This chapter explains the original research study, highlights advantages and disadvantages of secondary data analysis, defines the sample for the current study, and states the research questions. I also discuss the plan of analysis.

#### The Original Research Study

The NVAWS was jointly sponsored by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC), and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to further understand violence against women (Award # 93-IJ-CX-0012; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Interviews were conducted between 1994 to 1996 with 8,000 women and 8,005 men 18 years of age and older. For purposes of the current study, only female respondents were considered.

When the NVAWS was conceptualized, the investigators were curious about issues that had not been investigated in great detail. For example, minority women's experiences of violence and the relationship between childhood victimization and adult relationship violence were understudied at the time of project development (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). The principal investigators, Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, had eight goals for the project. They wanted to (1) provide estimates of prevalence and incidence of different types of violence against

women; (2) provide descriptive data on both victims and perpetrators; (3) provide descriptive data on effects of violence; (4) examine relationships between threat of violence and actual violence; (5) understand links between victimization, fear of violence, and coping techniques; (6) understand how women respond to certain types of violence; (7) gather information on violence in same-sex relationships; and (8) obtain information of men's experiences of violence for comparisons with women's experiences of violence.

The sample was obtained using random-digit dialing to households with telephones in the United States Census Region (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Participants were interviewed using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing system (Tjaden & Thoennes). The interview was comprised of 14 sections that contained questions related to the eight goals outlined above. If respondents indicated being a victim of relationship violence, they were asked detailed questions about the violence they experienced. Seventy-two percent of women and 69% of men participated in the study.

### Secondary Data Analysis

Secondary data analysis involves the use of data collected and documented by others (Kiecolt & Nathan, 1985) for a specific research goal. This data is available for the public to use in future research, although the research goal might not be what the data was collected and documented for (Israel, 1993). There are benefits and disadvantages to secondary data analysis (Kiecolt & Nathan) which must be weighed when considering its use. The benefits outweighed the disadvantages for the current study.

Secondary data analysis has many advantages. The main advantage noted is the low cost and time requirements (Kiecolt & Nathan, 1985). The only costs required is downloading data, uploading it into a statistical software package, and use of computer for data. With the increase

in data available for free through certain sources (e.g., Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research [ICPSR]), many see this as a great advantage. Many researchers like the option of having access to nationally representative samples, which can encourage them to pursue secondary data analysis (Kiecolt & Nathan). This type of analysis is convenient to some because data is already collected, coded, informed consent requirements are waived, and no participant contact is required (Rosenberg, Greenfield, & Dimick, 2005).

There are disadvantages of secondary data analysis as well. Variables of interest might not be represented in the data acquired (Israel, 1993). On the other hand, there may be so many variables that one could become overwhelmed with the observation possibilities. Another disadvantage is that researchers may find data with items related to the subject of interest; however they secondary data's measures might have been constructed oppositely to how the current researcher wishes to approach the topic (Israel). This lack of control over the collection and framing of the data is a major problem posed to researchers (Rosenberg et al., 2005). Finally, errors in data input could exist and might not be detected by a secondary observer (Kiecolt & Nathan, 1985).

### Sample

As noted earlier, this thesis only used only a sample of women. The purpose of this study was to examine lesbian IPV. A subsample of lesbians was created by selecting women who had identified currently living as a couple with a non-spouse and only had women over 18 living in the household. This produced a sample of 80 lesbians, which is the same number of lesbians identified in the final report of the NVAWS by Tjaden and Thoennes (2000).

Sample characteristics are presented in Table 1. Many studies examining IPV within lesbian relationships contain samples that are primarily middle-age, White participants with high

education and income levels (Burke et al., 2002; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2002). A main goal of the study was to obtain a more diverse sample, with increased variations in age, race, level of educational attainment and income. The sample had a wide variation in participant age, ranging from 18 to 58 years of age. The average age for the current sample is 30.7 years of age. Although more than half of the sample was White (65%), participants in this study reported a wider range of education and income level than typically found. The current sample had lower education and income levels than other studies investigating lesbian IPV. More than half of the sample (63.7%) reported a yearly income less than or equal to \$15,000 and a little over half (57.4%) reported an education level of a high school degree or less.

## Measures

### *Demographic Information*

Demographic variables including age, employment status, education, income, race, and health status are used to describe the sample (see Table 1). Identical demographic data about the respondent's partner were obtained and are presented.

### *Power, Control, and Psychological Violence*

Eleven items were collected to assess power, control, and psychological violence. The questions were adapted from the Canadian Violence Against Women Survey (see Appendix A). Respondents answered "Yes" or "No" to questions about power, control, and psychological violence. Lower scores indicated lower levels of power, control, and psychological violence. Presence of psychological violence within the relationship was measured by creating a composite variable (i.e., psychological violence present IF psychological violence summed score greater than or equal to 1). Since no validity has been established for this measure, an exploratory factor

analysis (EFA) was conducted to determine the factor structure Power, Control, and Psychological Violence Scale. Factor scores from the EFA were used.

Two items were collected to assess Verbal Attack, which is under the overall category of psychological violence. Participants answered “Yes” or “No” to the following questions: “Does your partner call you names or put you down in front of others?” and “Does your partner shout or swear at you?” An alpha reliability test was conducted (see results chapter).

### *Physical Violence*

Physical violence questions were adapted from the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979). Reliability and validity for the CTS is widely documented, as it is one of the most widely used instrument used in research of IPV ( $\alpha = .79$  to  $.94$ ; Medina & Scherzer, 1993; Straus, 1979, 2007). Respondents were asked to answer “Yes” or “No” to whether or not objects had been thrown at them, they had been hit, slapped, pushed, grabbed, shoved, punched, bitten, had their hair pulled, choked, experienced an attempted drowning, been threatened with a gun or knife, and had a gun or knife used on them (See Appendix B). Magnitude of physical violence was determined by creating a composite variable of summed scores for the physical violence questions. Lower scores indicated lower levels of violence, with a possible range of 0 to 12. Presence of violence within the relationship was measured by creating a variable defined as “physical violence present (1) IF physical violence summed score greater than or equal to 1.”

### *Power Differentials*

The power differentials of interest in this study were income, education, race, age, employment and health level differences. Power differentials were determined by creating composite variables to examine reported level differences. This composite variable was computed by comparing participant level of sources of power with partner level of sources of



power (e.g., age difference exists = yes (1) IF participant age  $\neq$  partner age). Power differential discrepancy scores were computed to measure the degree of difference in levels of power differentials (e.g., income level participant – income level partner).

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions were explored: (1) Is the presence of power differentials within lesbian relationships associated with the occurrence of physical violence or psychological violence within the relationship?; (2) Do particular power differentials predict physical or psychological violence within the relationship?; (3) Is physical or psychological violence better predicted by particular power differentials?; and (4) Do factors of the power, control and psychological abuse violence predict physical or psychological violence?

Hypotheses for the current study were:

H1: Power differentials within the relationship are significantly associated physical violence.

H2: Power differentials within the relationship are significantly associated with psychological abuse (i.e., report of verbal attack).

H3: Power differentials significantly predict physical violence.

H4: Obtained factor scores from the Power, Control, and Psychological Violence Scale will significantly predict physical violence.

H5: Power differentials significantly predict psychological abuse (i.e., report of verbal attack).

H6: Obtained factor scores from the Power, Control, and Psychological Violence Scale will significantly predict psychological violence (i.e., verbal attack).

### Data Analysis Plan

SPSS 16.0 was used to analyze the data discussed above. All significance tests were set at the .05 level. Preliminary analyses were conducted, as well as alpha reliability estimates for measures used (i.e., Physical Violence; Power, Control, and Psychological Violence). An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to determine the factor structure of the Power, Control, and Psychological Violence Scale, as no tests for validity exist for the measure.

To answer the question of whether or not the presence of power differentials within the relationship was associated with the occurrence of physical or psychological violence within the relationship, several Chi-square tests were done. This test is performed when attempting to determine the relationship between a categorical independent and dependent variable (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). Finally, multiple linear regressions (MLR) were completed to determine (1) whether or not particular power differentials predicted physical or psychological violence within the relationship and (2) if power differential discrepancy scores or factors scores better predicted which type of violence was present (i.e., physical, psychological). Factor scores and power differential discrepancy scores for age, income, race, education, employment, and health status were the independent variables and summed physical violence and summed psychological violence scores were the dependent variables entered into the regression equation.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics and correlations for variables of interest are presented in Table 2.

The variables of interest were analyzed to determine normality of distributions and skewness and kurtosis values were evaluated. A normal distribution has a skewness and kurtosis value of zero and as values digress from zero, skewness and kurtosis become of concern for researchers.

Skewness is a measure of the asymmetry of the distribution (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991) and is measured positively and negatively. A positively skewed distribution has a long right tail and a negatively skewed distribution has a long left tail. Kurtosis is a measure of the extent to which data values cluster around a central point. Leptokurtosis, or positive kurtosis, indicate that data cluster together more and have longer tail when compared with the normal distribution. On the other hand, platykurtosis, or negative kurtosis, indicates less clustering of the data and shorter tails compared with the normal distribution. Several of the variables displayed very high skewness and kurtosis statistics. For example, several questions in the Power, Control, and Psychological Violence measure had a kurtosis statistic of 39. This could be attributed to the way in which the variable is measured (1 = yes; 2 = no). Due to the several high kurtosis and skewness values, the assumption of normality was not met.

Alpha reliability estimates were conducted for the Physical Violence, Power, Control, and Psychological Violence, and the Verbal Attack scales. The Physical Violence scale was derived from the CTS, which has strong reliability estimates ( $\alpha = .79$  to  $.94$ ). For the current sample, a reliability test produced an alpha score of  $.88$ . The Power, Control, and Psychological Violence scale was comprised of items from the Canadian Violence Against Women Survey. No

reliability estimates could be found. A reliability test for the current sample developed an alpha score of .89. The reliability test for the Verbal Attack scale produced an alpha score of .67. In order to further determine the validity of the Power, Control, and Psychological Violence scale, an EFA was conducted.

### Exploratory Factor Analysis

Table 3 presents factor loadings for all variables assessed. The factorability of the 11 items used to measure Power, Control, and Psychological Violence was examined. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test for sampling adequacy was .892, and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity score was significant  $\chi^2(55, N = 80) = 455.536, p = .000$ . Finally, the communalities were all above .3, confirming that each item shared some common variance with other items. Together, these indicate that the sample and data are suitable for factor analysis.

Due to the high kurtosis values within the data, a generalized least squares extraction with a varimax rotation was used (Costello & Osborne, 2005). The initial eigen values showed that the first factor explained 54% of the variance, and the second factor 9% of the variance. This solution explained 63% of the variance.

A two factor solution was selected for theoretical reasons, as well as after examination of the eigen values on the scree plot. The nine items loading on the first factor were labeled "Control Tactics" and the two items loading on the second factor were labeled "Jealousy." The item questions theoretically supported the factor labels. Internal consistency for each of the scales was examined using Cronbach's alpha. The alphas were acceptable: .89 for Control Tactics (9 items), and .72 for Jealousy (2 items). No substantial increases in alpha for any of the scales could have been achieved by eliminating more items. Factor scores were created using the Anderson-Rubin method (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991) for use in a multiple linear regression.

Additionally, a composite variable was created to determine whether or not control tactics reported by participants (1 = control tactics present IF one tactic reported) were associated with physical or psychological violence.

#### Chi-Square Test of Independence

Several chi-square tests of independence were performed to examine the association between power differentials and presence of physical violence (H1), verbal attack, jealousy and control tactics. The power differentials that were examined were age, income, education, race, employment, and health status. Differences in types of violence based on presence of jealousy and control tactics were examined.

No significant associations between physical violence and age differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 80] = .105, p > .05$ ), income differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 80] = .065, p > .05$ ), education differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 80] = 1.251, p > .05$ ), race differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 80] = 2.296, p > .05$ ), employment differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 80] = 1.270, p > .05$ ), or health status differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 80] = .051, p > .05$ ) were found. Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

No significant associations between psychological violence (i.e., verbal attack) and age differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 80] = 1.037, p > .05$ ), income differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 80] = .117, p > .05$ ), education differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 80] = .657, p > .05$ ), race differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 80] = .018, p > .05$ ), employment differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 80] = .167, p > .05$ ), or health status differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 80] = .259, p > .05$ ) were found. Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Significant associations between control tactics and age differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 78] = .4.770, p = .029$ ), as well as education differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 78] = 5.031, p = .025$ ) were found. No significant associations were found for income differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 78] = 1.294, p > .05$ ),

race differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 78] = .042, p > .05$ ), employment differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 78] = .763, p > .05$ ) or health status differentials ( $\chi^2[1, N = 78] = .001, p > .05$ ).

Significant associations between control tactics and psychological violence (i.e., verbal attack) were found ( $\chi^2[1, N = 78] = 4.523, p = .033$ ), as well as a significant association between jealousy and psychological violence (i.e., verbal attack;  $\chi^2[1, N = 78] = 4.996, p = .025$ ). No significant relationships were found between control tactics of physical abuse ( $\chi^2[1, N = 80] = .450, p > .05$ ) or jealousy and physical abuse ( $\chi^2[1, N = 80] = 1.398, p > .05$ ).

#### Multiple Linear Regression

Multiple linear regressions (MLR) were used to determine which power differential discrepancy scores and factor scores (i.e., Jealousy, Control Tactics [predictors]) could be used to predict physical and psychological violence (criteria). Initially, correlations between power differential discrepancy scores and factor scores were examined (see Table 2). All correlations were small or moderate. These correlations suggest that multicollinearity is most likely not an issue.

Due to the small number of cases, an enter method was used in the analyses (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). Physical violence summed score was regressed on the six power differential discrepancy scores. This produced a non-significant model,  $F(6,70) = .1.254, p > .05$ , for the prediction of physical violence. Power differential discrepancy scores only accounted for 9.7% of the variance ( $R^2 = .097$ ) in physical violence. Hypothesis 3 was not supported and power differentials were removed from the model. The addition of jealousy factor scores and control tactics factor scores did not change the significance of the model,  $F(8, 68) = .956, p > .05$ , and only accounted for 10% of the variance ( $R^2 = .101$ ) in physical violence summed scores. Hypothesis 4 was not supported (See Table 4).

Another MLR was conducted to see if Power Differentials, Control Tactics factor scores, and Jealousy factor scores predicted psychological abuse (i.e., Verbal Attack). Verbal Attack summed score was regressed on the six power differential discrepancy scores. This also produced a non-significant model,  $F(6,69) = .1.301, p > .05$ , for the prediction of psychological violence. Power differential discrepancy scores only accounted for 10.2% of the variance ( $R^2 = .102$ ) in psychological violence and were removed from the model. Hypothesis 5 was rejected. The second model added jealousy factor scores as a predictor. This produced a significant model,  $F(1,76) = .153, p > .05$ . Finally, control tactics factor scores was entered as a predictor and produced a highly significant model,  $F(2,75) = 9.183, p = .000$ . Control tactics and jealousy factor scores accounted for 24% of the variance in psychological violence ( $R^2 = .243$ ). Hypothesis 6 was supported (See Table 5).

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The overall purpose of the current study was to give insight into those who are at the margins of research on IPV by gaining an understanding of power differentials and how these differences contribute to and influence IPV in lesbian relationships. The association between power differentials and physical and psychological violence was examined. Additionally, the current study sought to identify predictors of physical and psychological violence by focusing on power differential discrepancy scores, jealousy factor scores, and control tactic factors scores.

The current sample was more varied than expected for some variables, yet not as varied as hoped for others. For instance, age range was more widespread and income levels were much lower than traditionally reported. Additionally, many samples used in previous research have highly educated participants (i.e., college graduate or postgraduate). For the current sample, only 11% had either an undergraduate or graduate degree. This is a valuable contribution, as it provides insight into a group not generally represented in research due to the lack of sample diversity within this body of literature.

While 40 participants reported physical violence in their relationship, 40 participants also reported no physical violence in the relationship. It is interesting to note 50% of the sample reported physical violence as being present in their relationship which is on the higher end of the previously reported incidence rates. This could be attributed to the use of the CTS (Strauss, 1979). Other researchers point out that higher rates of physical violence are found when the CTS is used to assess physical violence (Medina & Scherzer, 1993; Ristock, 2003). Fifty-two percent of participants reported some form of psychological violence (i.e., verbal attack or control tactics, 16% and 49%, respectively). This percentage is consistent with past reports of



psychological violence reported in violent lesbian relationships (e.g., Scherzer, 1998; Renzetti, 1992). It is possible that this rate would have been higher had more questions been a part of the survey and had a wider range of psychologically violent behaviors been surveyed. Past research indicates that psychological violence is more often reported than physical violence (Elliott, 1990; McClennen et al., 2002; Renzetti, 1992). Once again, the similar rates of reported physical and psychological abuse can most likely be attributed to the use of the CTS and inflation of physical violence reports.

Power differentials were the main focus of the current study, as power imbalance is regarded as the principle correlate of IPV in lesbian relationships (Renzetti, 1992). Each participant in the current study had at least one power differential within their relationship, with age and income showing the most frequently reported differential. This could be attributed to the previously reported overall variations in age and income levels of the sample. Despite the fact that each participant was in a relationship with asymmetrical power distributions, the current study did not find any significant associations between physical or psychological violence and power differentials. This lack of variability in reported presence of physical violence could have prevented any significant associations from emerging.

Although past researchers have mentioned power differentials, the contexts that create them and their importance in relation to IPV, little research focuses on these issues. Power, which is dispositional (Sprey, 1999), and control, defined as power that is exercised (Szinovacz, 1987), all occur in and are defined by the societal context and sociostructural conditions (Szinovacz) in which individuals live. Social contexts of interlocking systems of privilege and oppression and how they contribute to IPV in lesbian relationship must be better analyzed. This can begin by looking at power differentials and their association with IPV and types of violence

used, temporarily teasing apart intersectionalities while still acknowledging the overall effect of interlocking oppressions.

The current study obtained factor scores through an EFA seeking to understand the factor structure of a previously developed scale titled Power, Control, and Psychological Abuse. The factor analysis ultimately revealed a two factor structure defined as jealousy and control tactics. Jealousy has been identified as a correlate of lesbian IPV (Biaggio, Coan, & Adams, 2002; Renzetti, 1992). Using the factor scores, it was established that control tactics were associated with age and education differentials. This mirrors results presented by Turell (2000), who found age to be significantly associated with control or coercive tactics. According to relative resource theory, these findings support the concept that access to particular sources of power increases the possibility for control (Farrington & Chertok, 1993). Similarly, conflict theory is aligned with this finding in that power and resources are positively related. For participants in this study, age differences and education differences provided the context for power to be exercised (i.e., control to exist; Sprey, 1999). Although it would be expected that jealousy and power differentials would be associated, as both are correlates of IPV, (Renzetti, 1992) this was not found.

No research exists that determines the predictability of power differentials on physical or psychological violence. The format of the data was not structured to best conduct tests of power differential's predictability on IPV, an issue that is part of the downfalls of using secondary data for analysis. Power differential discrepancy scores were computed and entered in to the regression equation. Although no significant results emerged, perhaps future studies using more qualified data would find predictive equations. Jealousy, another correlate of lesbian IPV, was also found to be a non-significant predictor of physical violence, yet was moderately significant in its prediction on psychological violence.

Control tactics were significant predictors of psychological violence (i.e., verbal attack), but not for physical violence. Lack of variability in responses could explain the non-significant finding for physical violence. Conversely, perhaps this exists because psychological violence is more often found in lesbian relationships (when compared to physical violence; McClennen et al., 2002; Ristock, 2003; Renzetti, 1992; Scherzer, 1998; Turell, 2000). As control is defined as exercised power, it makes sense that this predicted psychological violence. Conflict theorists would assume that the presence of control tactics signifies an underlying power imbalance, which gives room to violence in a relationship (Sprey, 1999). Renzetti (1992) and Turell (2000) highlight this in their findings of the relationship between control and verbal attacks.

#### Limitations of the Study

Although the current study provides some insight into the dynamics of power and control in the context of lesbian IPV, it does have limitations. Because this study utilized secondary data analysis, the survey could not be manipulated to provide supplementary or more in-depth responses than what were already provided by the participants. Variables that would have been of interest (e.g., homophobic control, internalized homophobia, dependency levels) were not included in the dataset. There were various flaws in the survey construction of the original NVAWS. For instance, income categories overlapped and if this had not been detected, variable computation and further analyses would have been compromised.

Missing data was a large problem in the current dataset. Many participants refused to answer specific questions regarding abuse and all but one refused to identify their current partner as participating in ongoing violent behaviors within the relationship. Further analyses indicate that this transcends sexual orientation, as heterosexual women refused to answer the same

question. This highlights another downfall to using secondary data analysis, as control over data collection is nonexistent.

Another limitation is the single-method approach to a topic that needs mixed-method or qualitative research. Using only a quantitative method in a study that was interested on contexts and complexities within lesbian relationship IPV was a major limitation in that it did not provide for an in-depth way of understanding these issues. Ultimately, both a quantitative and qualitative method with more variables and more complex and differently-framed questions would generate more information in which to investigate IPV in lesbian relationships. The current study lacked appropriate levels of power for specific statistical procedures. This increased the possibility of committing a Type II error (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991).

The sample was predominately White, which did not meet the study goal of obtaining more racial diversity. It is important to note that a major gap in the literature is the absence of lesbians' of color experiences of IPV within their relationships. Diverse samples are hard to obtain for many reasons—reasons which also affect sample recruitment in general. One issue relates to the interiority of the lesbian community and the challenge that presents obtaining a sample. Lesbians may be unwilling or nervous to report violence within the community for fear that others may somehow find out she discussed such issues (McClennen, 2005; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2002). Also, lesbians are part of an already stigmatized social group. They are being asked to confirm negative events taking place within the group—something that could possibly add “fuel to the fire” and create more stigma associated with lesbian relationships (Ristock).

Despite this, researchers must think out of the box in regard to their sampling strategies, combined with methodology (i.e., qualitative), in order to bring these experiences out in the literature. For example, Moorefield and Proulx (2003) suggest that Internet methodology could

produce more diverse samples, which in turn could provide more insight into issues previously unexplored or undiscovered. There are probably unique aspects and experiences within this group that are waiting to be uncovered given the correct approach to research.

### Conclusion

Power differentials have been found in previous research to be an important factor in violence within lesbian relationships (e.g., Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2003). This was not supported in the current study, as power differentials were not significantly associated with or did not significantly predict physical or psychological violence. This is most likely due to limitations mentioned (e.g., measurement issues, missing data, lack of variability in responses). Given the limitations, the current study provided confirmation of various findings documented in past research on lesbian IPV. A little over half of the sample reported psychological violence, which mirrors previous reports of this type of violence in lesbian relationships (e.g., Scherzer, 1998; Renzetti, 1992). Presence of control tactics was associated with age and education differentials, which is similar to previous findings where control tactics were significantly associated age (Turell, 2000). These findings support the concept that access to particular sources of power (i.e., age, education) increases the possibility for control within the relationship. Jealousy and control tactics were significant predictors of psychological violence but not for physical violence. The significant prediction of psychological violence mirrors previous research that identifies jealousy and control as significant correlates of IPV.

Ristock (2002) describes the need for more research examining the contexts in which violence occurs. Very rarely do you gain insight into contextual factors, which can be contributed to the lack of qualitative research in this area. More qualitative studies would allow for this important insight, as well as add richness to already known factors (e.g., power

imbalance, internalized homophobia). Using conflict theory in these proposed studies would allow for a broader understanding of power, conflict, and inequality. For instance, qualitative data analysis from a conflict theory perspective could have examined more closely why women refused to answer particular questions. Questions could have been rephrased or asked in ways that might contribute to the participant answering the difficult question.

Examinations of help-seeking behaviors, interventions, and presence of children within violent relationships are scarce. Research on help-seeking behaviors might provide more information about lesbian IPV, specifically about the experiences lesbians have in leaving violent relationships. Lesbians dealing with IPV face challenges when seeking formal help for their situation (Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2002). This could be influenced by limited access to support resources, which are influenced by socioeconomic status and education levels (Arditti & Few, 2006). Little is known about lesbian IPV and the presence of residential children. In fact, a recent presentation about lesbian IPV and the presence of children in the home (Oswald, Hardesty, Chung, Khaw, & Fonseca, 2006) is the only known examination of issues relating to lesbians with children and their experience of relationship violence.

Hart (1986) suggested that lesbians seeking help often question whether or not others will see their experiences as true violence or just mutual violence. Research focusing on help-seeking behaviors (Renzetti; Ristock) finds that lesbians have trouble seeking help because of strong levels of commitment, shame, fear of the homophobic treatment they will encounter in various settings with various people (e.g., shelters, police), or have a belief in the myth of mutual battering (e.g., because I fought back or stood up to my partner, I battered my partner as well; Hart). Most lesbians in abusive relationship primarily reach out to family and friends for help (Hart, 1986; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2002). Some lesbians face difficulties when seeking friends

and family for help with psychological abuse, as it is less obvious as physical abuse (Hart; Ristock). Formal support options are helpful, although this support is limited in its response to the violence they experience. When seeking formal support, lesbians most often seek out counselors for help, yet many practitioners acknowledge that the skills and resources they have for helping these women is limited (McClennen, 2005). Research examining power differentials, power and control dynamics, and the associations and predictions that could be made to IPV is important so that practitioners can better help lesbians in violence relationships.

By examining the contexts of IPV in lesbian relationships, particularly how power is constructed and plays out within relationships, researchers would be able to understand more about violence and how it connects to the overall social contexts in which we live. There are many dimensions, all influenced by the larger social structures organizing our society, which can influence IPV within lesbian relationships. Examining power differentials, and possibly particular constellations of power differentials, can offer a unique way of viewing how cumulative privileged or oppressive social locations and personal power might be associated with IPV.

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## Appendix A: Tables

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 80) in Frequency and Percent*

Variable	N	Percent
<b>Race</b>		
White	52	65.0
African-American	14	17.5
Alaskan Native	3	3.8
Mixed Race	6	7.5
<b>Education</b>		
1 <sup>st</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	1	1.2
Some high school	13	16.2
High school	32	40.0
Some college	25	31.2
4-year college	7	8.8
Postgraduate	2	2.5
<b>Employment</b>		
Full time	35	43.8
Part time	15	18.8
Unemployed	2	2.5
Student	14	17.5
Homemaker	8	10.0
Other	6	7.5
<b>Income</b>		
Under \$5,000	25	31.2
\$5,000 - \$10,000	12	15.0
\$10,000 - \$15,000	14	17.5
\$15,000 - \$20,000	4	5.0
\$20,000 - \$25,000	6	6.2
\$25,000 - \$35,000	5	6.2

\$35,000 - \$50,000	6	7.5
\$50,000 - \$80,000	1	1.2
Health Status		
Excellent	15	18.8
Very good	29	36.2
Good	27	33.8
Fair	6	7.5
Poor	3	3.8
Partner's Race		
White	50	62.5
African-American	18	22.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	2.5
Alaskan Native	3	3.8
Mixed Race	1	1.2
Other	6	7.5
Partner's Education		
1 <sup>st</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup>	4	5.0
Some high school	8	10.0
High school	44	55.0
Some college	10	12.5
4-year college	10	12.5
Postgraduate	2	2.5
Partner's Employment		
Full time	53	66.2
Part time	10	12.5
In the military	2	2.5
Unemployed	3	3.8
Retired	2	2.5
Student	5	6.2
Other	5	6.2
Partner's Income		
Less than \$5,000	8	10.0
\$5,000 - \$10,000	13	16.2
\$10,000 - \$15,000	8	10.0

\$15,000 - \$20,000	9	11.2
\$20,000 - \$25,000	8	10.0
\$25,000 - \$35,000	3	3.8
\$35,000 - \$50,000	4	5.0
\$50,000 - \$80,000	2	2.5
\$100,000+	1	1.2

**Partner's Health Status**

Excellent	28	3.05
Very good	22	27.5
Good	20	25.0
Fair	7	8.8
Poor	3	3.8

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Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables (N = 80)*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. AD-DS	–									
2. ID-DS	-.147	–								
3. RD-DS	-.084	-.222*	–							
4. EDD-DS	.037	.233*	-.154	–						
5. EMD-DS	.250*	-.204	-.194	-.179	–					
6. HSD-DS	.401**	.006	.007	.005	.131	–				
7. PHYSVIOL	.166	.000	.125	.016	-.031	.182	–			
8. PSYCHVIOL	.165	.048	.096	.059	-.147	.170	.309**	–		
9. CFS	-.049	.085	.039	.078	.023	.013	.040	-.332**	–	
10. JFS	.019	-.118	-.132	-.049	-.034	.093	.003	-.045	.000	–
Mean	-1.63	-2.35	.01	.03	1.13	.22	2.05	.23	0	0
SD	5.641	4.323	1.142	1.079	3.095	1.180	2.832	.556	1	1
$\alpha$	--	--	--	--	--	--	.88	.67	.89	.72
Kurtosis	3.644	.052	11.084	5.052	.183	1.036	.284	4.488	41.368	-.408
Skewness	-.182	-.991	.655	-1.105	.109	.592	1.244	2.361	5.286	-.551

Note: AD-DS = Age Differential Discrepancy Score; ID-DS = Income Power Differential Discrepancy Score; RD-DS = Race Power Differential Discrepancy Score; EDD-DS = Education Power Differential Discrepancy Score; EMD-DS = Employment Power Differential Discrepancy Score; HSD-DS = Health Status Power Differential Discrepancy Score; PHYSVIOL = Physical Violence Summed Scale; PSYCHVIOL = Psychological Violence Verbal Attack Scale; CFS = Conflict Tactics Factor Score; JFS = Jealousy Factor Score

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 3

*Summary of Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for Power, Control, and Psychological Violence Scale (N = 80)*

Item	Factor Loadings	
	Control Tactics	Jealousy
Partner has a hard time seeing from my point of view	<b>.56</b>	.09
Partner is jealous or possessive	.20	<b>.98</b>
Partner tries to provoke arguments	<b>.63</b>	.17
Partner tries to limit my contacts	<b>.71</b>	.24
Partner must know who I am with at all times	.41	<b>.50</b>
Partner makes me feel inadequate	<b>.65</b>	.35
Partner is frightened of me	<b>.78</b>	.30
Partner frightens me	<b>.72</b>	.28
Partner prevents access to family income	<b>.59</b>	.35
Partner prevents work outside the home	<b>.79</b>	.29
Partner insists changing residence even though I do not want to or we do not need to	<b>.76</b>	.21
Eigenvalues	5.893	1.014
% of variance	53.57	9.22

*Note:* Factor loadings over .40 appear in bold.

Table 4

*Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Physical Violence (N = 80)*

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
AD-DS	.086	.066	.171	.088	.067	.174
ID-DS	.030	.084	.043	.022	.087	.032
RD-DS	.582	.338	.207	.567	.344	.201
EDD-DS	.080	.315	.031	.066	.320	.026
EMD-DS	-.068	.115	-.074	-.077	.118	-.083
HSD-DS	.279	.302	.116	.285	.308	.119
CFS				.164	.329	.058
JFS				-.094	.344	-.032
$R^2$		.097			.101	
<i>F</i> for change in $R^2$		1.254			.155	

Note: AD-DS = Age Differential Discrepancy Score; ID-DS = Income Power Differential Discrepancy Score; RD-DS = Race Power Differential Discrepancy Score; EDD-DS = Education Power Differential Discrepancy Score; EMD-DS = Employment Power Differential Discrepancy Score; HSD-DS = Health Status Power Differential Discrepancy Score; PHYSVIOL = Physical Violence Summed Scale; PSYCHVIOL = Psychological Violence Verbal Attack Scale; CFS = Conflict Tactics Factor Score; JFS = Jealousy Factor Score



Table 5

*Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Psychological Violence**(N = 80)*

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
AD-DS	.018	.013	.181	.017	.012	.171
ID-DS	.006	.017	.045	.011	.016	.083
RD-DS	.074	.067	.134	.063	.062	.115
EDD-DS	.022	.062	.042	.001	.058	.001
EMD-DS	-.033	.023	-.178	-.021	.022	-.115
HSD-DS	.056	.061	.118	-.003	.059	-.007
CFS				-.528	.152	-.481***
JFS				-.195	.080	-.322*
$R^2$		.102			.243	
<i>F</i> for change in $R^2$		.102			.141**	

Note: AD-DS = Age Differential Discrepancy Score; ID-DS = Income Power Differential Discrepancy Score; RD-DS = Race Power Differential Discrepancy Score; EDD-DS = Education Power Differential Discrepancy Score; EMD-DS = Employment Power Differential Discrepancy Score; HSD-DS = Health Status Power Differential Discrepancy Score; PHYSVIOL = Physical Violence Summed Scale; PSYCHVIOL = Psychological Violence Verbal Attack Scale; CFS = Conflict Tactics Factor Score; JFS = Jealousy Factor Score

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Appendix B: Survey Items

## Power, Control, and Psychological Violence

Thinking about your current husband  
(wife)/partner  
would you say he/she...

Prevents you from working outside  
the home?

1 Yes  
2 No

Has a hard time seeing things from  
your point of view?

Insists on changing residences even  
when you don't need or want to?

1 Yes  
2 No

1 Yes  
2 No

Is jealous or possessive?

1 Yes  
2 No

Tries to provoke arguments?

1 Yes  
2 No

Tries to limit your contact with  
family or friends?

1 Yes  
2 No

Insists on knowing who you are with  
at all times?

1 Yes  
2 No

Makes you feel inadequate?

1 Yes  
2 No

Is frightened of you?

1 Yes  
2 No

Frightens you?

1 Yes  
2 No

Prevents you from knowing about or  
having access to the family income  
even when you  
ask?

1 Yes  
2 No

## Physical Violence

Has your current husband (wife)/  
partner ever...

Throw something at you that could  
hurt you?  
1 Yes  
2 No

Push, grab or shove you?  
1 Yes  
2 No

Pull your hair?  
1 Yes  
2 No

Slap or hit you?  
1 Yes  
2 No

Kick or bite you?  
1 Yes  
2 No

Choke or attempt to drown you?  
1 Yes  
2 No

Hit you with some object?  
1 Yes  
2 No

Beat you up?  
1 Yes  
2 No

Threaten you with a gun?  
1 Yes  
2 No

Threaten you with a knife or other  
weapon besides a gun?  
1 Yes  
2 No

Use a gun on you?  
1 Yes  
2 No

Use a knife or other weapon on you  
besides a gun?  
1 Yes  
2 No