

Intimate Violence in Male Same-Sex Relationships

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Despite findings suggesting a high prevalence of violence in male same-sex relationships, little is known about the characteristics of this violence. This study explored the general nature of male same-sex intimate violence. The sample consisted of 69 gay and bisexual men, chosen from a randomly selected community sample, who reported at least 1 violent episode in an interview exploring their intimate relationships. Men's descriptions of the most severe incident in the most recent violent relationship were coded from the taped interviews. Patterns of intimate violence varied widely, including a range from mild to severe violence, and situations of unidirectional and bidirectional violence. In the vast majority of cases, violence was an escalation of ongoing conflict, involved bidirectional emotional abuse, and was more expressive than instrumental in nature. Difficulties in conflict resolution and attachment fears appeared to better explain the occurrence of violence than did the intent to control one's partner.

KEY WORDS: Family violence; physical abuse; emotional abuse; same-sex relationships; gay men.

Violence in same-sex relationships is a poorly understood phenomenon. Although there is a growing literature on violence in female same-sex relationships (e.g., Lie *et al.*, 1991; Lockhart *et al.*, 1994; Renzetti, 1992), there are few published studies exploring violence in male same-sex relationships. The few available studies suggest that violence occurs in 21–50% of male same-sex partnerships (e.g., Kelly & Warshafsky, 1997; Landolt & Dutton, 1997; Waldener-Haugrud *et al.*, 1997), which is comparable to rates reported in lesbian and heterosexual couples (Burke & Follingstad, 1999). For example, the one study to estimate prevalence rates of violence in male same-sex relationships using a randomly selected sample revealed that 41% of men reported being the recipient of violence from a romantic partner; and 35% reported perpetrating violence toward a romantic partner (Bartholomew *et al.*, 1999). Unfortunately, despite the

apparent prevalence of intimate violence in gay male relationships, there is little knowledge about the patterns of same-sex intimate violence. Without a more thorough understanding, theoretical speculation about the causes of intimate violence in male same-sex relationships and therapeutic efforts to assist those affected may be misguided.

This study was designed to explore the general nature of gay male intimate violence. Several researchers have argued that looking at violent acts and who initiates the physical conflict without considering contextual factors provides an incomplete and possibly misleading picture of intimate violence (e.g., Cascardi & Vivian, 1995; Vivian & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1994). To provide a more complete understanding of the nature of physical and emotional aggression in male same-sex relationships, we examined patterns of violence, the surrounding context, resulting consequences, underlying motives, and reoccurring themes in the violent relationships.

Intimate Abuse

Straus and Gelles (1986) define physical violence as “an act carried out with the intention, or perceived intention, of causing physical pain or injury to another person”

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(p. 467). Whereas physical aggression is relatively easy to define and identify, emotional or psychological aggression is difficult to define and to measure. Despite this obstacle, the inclusion of psychological aggression is important. In studies examining physical abuse in same-sex couples, the vast majority of participants have reported experiencing emotional abuse at rates higher than physical abuse. For example, Turell (2000) reported that 83% of gay men in her sample experienced emotional abuse in their relationships, and Kelly and Warshafsky (1997) reported that 95% of their sample of gays and lesbians acknowledged using verbally abusive tactics. Further, Cruz and Firestone's (1998) qualitative study of gay men's experiences of intimate violence revealed that the participants' definitions of domestic abuse included both physical and psychological aggression. In this study, physical and emotional aggression in male same-sex relationships were examined.

Reciprocity of Violence

Throughout the literature on domestic violence, references are made to victims and perpetrators of violence. However, previous findings do not reflect this clear distinction between victim and perpetrator. Rather, it appears that intimate violence is often bidirectional (e.g., Vivian & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1994). O'Keefe (1997) found that previously receiving violence is the strongest predictor of perpetrating violence for both males and females in heterosexual dating relationships. Additionally, two-thirds of the women in Lie and colleagues study (1991) reported being both the victim of violence and the aggressor in a previous lesbian relationship. Strong associations between partners' reports of perpetrating violence in same-sex relationships also offer evidence of reciprocity (Kelly & Warshafsky, 1997; Landolt & Dutton, 1997). Finally, the gay men in Cruz and Firestone's (1998) qualitative study often referred to themselves as both victim and perpetrator, making it impossible to group them as victim or perpetrator.

Despite the many findings that indicate reciprocal violence in heterosexual and same-sex relationships, several studies have not examined reciprocity (e.g., Turell, 2000), perhaps because researchers have presumed that the victim and perpetrator roles are distinct. For example, Island and Letellier (1991; see also Letellier, 1994) assert that reciprocal gay male intimate violence is not mutual aggression; rather one partner is consistently a primary aggressor. Although they propose that gay men are likely to react violently to aggressive acts perpetrated against them, they oppose the mutual combat label. Island and Letellier's conclusions are based on their experience working

with battered gay men and, therefore, may be inappropriate generalizations from clinical samples to the whole population of gay men in relationships with violence. To address this question, the present study will explore the direction of violence within gay male relationships.

Motives

Renzetti (1992) proposes that it is not the actual behavior that determines the nature of intimate violence, but rather the motivations underlying these behaviors. Specifically, violence used as self-defense or retaliation is qualitatively different from violence used to control or maintain power over another. Consistent with this viewpoint, Letellier (1994) asserts that the motivation to control one's partner determines who is the perpetrator (or batterer) rather than simply who initiates the violence.

Johnson (2001) agrees that the motive to control one's partner determines the nature of the violence and proposes a typology based upon differences in reciprocity and motivation. *Common Couple Violence* (CCV) describes violent relationships in which neither partner is violent and controlling, but in which one or both partners have been violent. This violence is generally low-level and infrequent, and arises in the course of couple conflicts. *Patriarchal Terrorism* describes relationships in which one partner is violent in order to control and dominate his or her partner. This violence is unidirectional, with a consistent perpetrator and victim, and is typically severe and frequent. Johnson (1995) proposes that CCV is commonly reported in domestic violence surveys, whereas patriarchal terrorism is typically found among clinical samples. He further suggests that patriarchal terrorism arises from men's need to control women. In contrast, *Mutual Violence* occurs when both partners are violent and controlling, and *Violent Resistance* describes relationships in which both partners are violent but only one is controlling (Johnson, 2001). In the latter grouping, women are proposed to be resisting men's violence and attempts to control them through their own use of violence. Although Johnson discusses the roots of violence with regard to men's patriarchal power over women, this typology may be applicable to same-sex couples if only the definitions and not the theorized causes are considered.

In much of the family violence literature, speculation regarding motives falls along gender lines. As reflected in Johnson's typology, it is generally assumed that men's violence is instrumental in nature and is intended to achieve control over women. O'Keefe's (1997) study of high-school students' dating relationships found that although both men and women most commonly reported

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expressing anger as the motivation behind their violence, men were more likely than women to report using violence to gain control over their partners. George (1994) suggests that women's aggression against men can have similar coercive or instrumental motives as men's violence towards women. Based on a sample of couples in therapy, Cascardi and Vivian (1995) found that, although men's violence was more likely than women's to be rated as partially instrumental in nature, both men's and women's violence was often motivated by a combination of instrumental and expressive functions. Given that motivational factors may explain the dynamics underlying intimate violence and that men's and women's violence can serve multifaceted functions, the motives behind gay men's intimate violence merits attention.

Context

The context of violent incidents can offer valuable information about the nature of the violence. Cascardi and Vivian (1995) reported that intimate violence was an outgrowth of conflict in approximately half of their sample of couples in therapy. These findings are in sharp contrast to the stereotype that domestic violence is an unpredictable event. Further, level of relationship conflict is strongly associated with both receiving and perpetrating dating violence (e.g., O'Keefe, 1997). Therefore, we assessed whether the violence reported arose from an escalation of an argument.

Consequences

A repeated criticism of family violence research is the failure to connect acts of physical violence with the consequences of these acts (e.g., Dobash *et al.*, 1992). Because a slap can vary from a playful pat to an open-handed hit with the perpetrator's full body weight behind it, the resulting injury offers more information than simply identifying the act. Vivian and Langhinrichsen-Rohling (1994) propose that in mutually violent conflicts, injuries and psychological impact may determine the victim and perpetrator. Island and Letellier (1991) claim that the choice to harm differentiates batterers from victims. The psychological impact of intimate violence can vary just as widely as the physical injury depending on the nature of the aggressive act. For example, a slap is more terrifying when accompanied by a death threat. Therefore, to allow for a thorough understanding of intimate violence, we examined the physical and emotional consequences resulting from a specific incident of violence.

This Study

The goal of this study was to provide a general description of intimate violence in male same-sex relationships. We examined the direction of both emotional and physical aggression occurring within a specific episode and across the relationship. We also investigated the motives underlying the violent act, whether there was an escalation of ongoing conflict, and the psychological and physical consequences of the violent incident. Given that little is known about violence in male same-sex relationships, we also looked at themes and patterns that emerged in participants' stories of their violent relationships.

This study was designed to maximize our ability to reflect violence in male same-sex relationships. We examined same-sex intimate violence using a semi-structured interview format, which offered the flexibility and responsiveness necessary to explore participants' responses and to ensure the interviewer's understanding of those responses. Following Cascardi and Vivian (1995), our analysis focused on the most severe violent episode from the most recent violent relationship. These authors suggest that discussing the worst episode of intimate violence will evoke the most accurate recall because negative events elicit deeper cognitive processing. Although focusing on a specific event allows for more detailed information about the context and consequences of violence, a specific event may not reflect the general pattern of violence within the relationship. Therefore, violence within the relationship as a whole also was examined.

The few previous studies to examine violence in male same-sex relationships have relied on convenience samples such as respondents to newspaper advertisements and contacts through community groups. As a result, the findings of these studies cannot be applied to the general community of gay and bisexual men. In contrast, participants in this study were drawn from the West End Relationships Project (WERP), which involved random selection of participants from the community.

METHOD

Participants

Three hundred gay and bisexual men living in the West-End of Vancouver, who were chosen through a random digit dialing procedure, completed a 15–20 min telephone interview exploring experiences of relationship abuse for the WERP project. For details of study methodology, see Regan *et al.* (2002). Of the 300 men participating in the larger telephone survey, 195 men (65%) participated in a follow-up interview and received a \$20

honorarium for their time. Seventy-six of these men (39% of men interviewed) reported an experience of violence in a romantic relationship. Of these, 3 participants did not provide the detail necessary for coding and 4 reported violence with a female romantic partner, leaving the 69 interviews that comprised the data for this study.

Demographics are provided for the target sample of 69 men. Age ranged from 25 to 63 years, with a mean of 38.6 years ($SD = 8.2$). The ethnic breakdown was: British/Irish/Scottish/Welsh 44.9%, Other European 31.9%, Chinese/East Asian 5.8%, Canadian 4.3%, Other Asian 2.9%, Aboriginal 1.4%, African Canadian 1.4%, Latin 1.4%, West Asian/Arabic/Middle Eastern 1.4%, French Canadian 1.4%, and unidentified 2.9%. Regarding sexual orientation, 75.4% identified as exclusively gay, 20.3% identified as predominately gay, and 4.2% identified with varying degrees of bisexuality. Most participants had some postsecondary education (82.6%), with educational background ranging from grade school (2.9%) to postgraduate university (11.6%). Yearly income ranged from less than \$20,000 to \$50,000 or more with a median income range of \$30,000–\$39,000. Finally, 24.6% were HIV positive, 66.7% were HIV negative, and 8.7% were unaware of their HIV status.

Measures

History of Attachments Interview

The questions relevant to this study were embedded in the History of Attachments Interview (Henderson, 1998). This semi-structured interview is divided into two sections of family attachment relationships and peer attachment relationships (close friendships and romantic relationships). Each interview took approximately 2 hours to complete. Although the entire peer section was listened to for coding purposes, the specific questions pertinent for this study explored the existence and nature of intimate conflict in participants' relationship histories. Specifically, participants who indicated relationship violence were asked to describe a particular instance of physical conflict, including the circumstances leading up to the conflict and the resulting consequences.

Coding

The first author coded all the research interviews. A second trained coder assessed 41 (59%) of the 69 interviews containing descriptions of violence.⁴ However,

⁴The coding system was developed in a group setting. Before work on this project commenced, the two coders established reliability on a group of interviews that were not part of this project.

because of variability in the degree of detail provided by participants and the applicability of the specific variable, the *ns* fluctuate across variables. In addition, variables assessing consequences of violence were only applicable when participants reported receiving violence and variables assessing motives were only applicable when participants reported perpetrating violence. Interrater agreement was assessed using percent agreement and Cohen's kappa for categorical variables and Pearson's correlation coefficient for continuous variables.

Number of violent incidents within the focal relationship was coded and interrater reliability was $r(41) = .97$. Direction of violence was grouped into the categories of perpetration, bidirectional, or receipt for both the specific incident discussed ($\kappa = .88$, 92.5% agreement, $n = 40$) and for all violence in the focal relationship ($\kappa = .77$, 87.5% agreement, $n = 40$). Severity of emotional abuse was rated for both participant and partner and for both the incident and across the whole relationship. Perpetration of emotional abuse was rated on a 9-point scale from 1 (*none*) to 9 (*extreme*). Reliability for ratings of participants' emotionally abusive behaviors in the incident was $r(41) = .79$ and in the relationship was $r(38) = .80$. Reliability for the ratings of the partners' emotionally abusive behaviors (as described by the participant) in the incident was $r(40) = .82$ and in the relationship was $r(38) = .76$.

Motives underlying perpetration of the worst incident discussed in the most recent violent relationship were examined. Reports of perpetration of violence were placed into mutually exclusive categories of initiation, retaliation, or self-defense ($\kappa = .93$, 96% agreement, $n = 25$). Perpetration of violence also was coded for the degree to which the violence appeared to be used to express a thought or emotion (expressive) and to achieve a desired goal (instrumental). Expressive and instrumental motivations were rated on a 1 (*none*) to 9 (*completely*) continuum. Reliability of the expressive coding was $r(23) = .64$, and of the instrumental coding was $r(23) = .75$. Whether the episode was an escalation of ongoing conflict coded on a yes/no basis ($\kappa = .55$, 90.3% agreement, $n = 41$).

Physical injuries were rated only for participants' receipt of violence and varied from 1 (*no injuries*) to 9 (*internal injuries, concussion, or severe injuries requiring hospitalization*). A rating of 5 indicated *receiving markings as a result of the violence that lasted a few days*. Reliability of this rating was $r(30) = .93$. Whether medical attention was required as a result of the conflict was coded on a yes/no basis ($\kappa = 1.00$, 100% agreement, $n = 30$). The emotional impact of the specific violent incident, which was also coded for participants' reports of receipt only, was rated on a 1–9 continuum with the guidelines

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of 1 (*no effect*), 5 (*crying, afraid, quite upset*), and 9 (*devastated, terrified, hysterical*). Reliability of coder ratings was $r(28) = .58$.

RESULTS

Nature of Intimate Violence

Frequency of violent incidents in the relationship ranged from 1 to approximately 40, with 4 or less violent incidents in 75% ($n = 42$) of the relationships, and just 1 violent incident in 44% ($n = 30$) of the relationships.

See Table I for a breakdown of the direction of violence within the identified incident and within the relationship in general. In 44% of the violent incidents, participants reported that both they and their partners were physically violent. Many participants described themselves and their partners as perpetrating equivalent levels of violence in the same incident, such as mutual pushing or punching. Of the incidents that involved nonreciprocal violence, participants were the sole recipients of violence in 20 cases (29%) and the sole perpetrators of violence in 18 cases (27%).

Reports of all violence in the examined relationship revealed a pattern similar to the direction of violence in the focal incident, with half of participants (50%, $n = 34$) reporting that at some time in their relationship both they and their partners had been physically violent. The majority of participants reporting bidirectional violence ($n = 27$) indicated both partners were typically physically violent in all the incidents of violence. However, for seven of the participants reporting bidirectional violence in their relationships, the violence in the focal incident was unidirectional. For example, in a relationship that involved two violent incidents, the participant slapped his partner in one incident and his partner threw a glass at him in the other incident. In other relationships, men who were initially the sole recipient of violence became physically aggressive in response to their partner's violence. One participant stated, "After the first year I fought back, but at first, I thought it was my place to be abused." Again, reports of unidirectional violence in the relationship were approx-

imately evenly split between perpetration only (22%, $n = 15$) and receipt only (28%, $n = 19$). The direction of violence in the incident and in the relationship were found to be significantly related for those participants reporting more than one incident ($\kappa = .75, p < .001$), indicating that the direction of violence in an incident typically reflects patterns of violence across the whole relationship. However, reports of the direction of violence, in the incident and for the whole relationship, were not related to the number of violent incidents, incident: $F(2, 65) = 0.59, ns$; relationship: $F(2, 65) = 1.59, ns$.

The severity of emotional abuse in the incident was coded for 63 participants, with 6 participants not providing enough information for coders to rate emotional abuse. Only two participants reported perpetrating no emotionally abusive behaviors, whereas all participants reported receiving at least some emotional abuse from their partners. The average rating of participant emotional abuse ($M = 4.10, SD = 1.43$) reflected behaviors such as yelling, using harsh language, or engaging in some passive-aggressive behaviors, with reports ranging from minimal to severe behaviors. An example of severe emotional abuse is an incident in which the participant described yelling, insulting, destroying furniture, and threatening bodily harm with an axe. Participants' descriptions of their partners' emotional abuse were similar to, but slightly higher than, their reports of their own behaviors ($M = 4.62, SD = 1.56$), with a broad range of severity. Participants' descriptions of their own and their partners' emotionally aggressive behaviors in the focal incident were related, $r(61) = .37, p < .01$, indicating that as one partner's emotionally abusive behaviors escalated, their partner typically reciprocated in kind.

Participants' reports of their own emotionally abusive behaviors in the incident were significantly correlated with their descriptions of their emotionally abusive behaviors in the relationship, $r(58) = .63, p < .001$. For example, the participant in the previous case, who described severe emotional abuse in the focal incident, also described a relationship characterized by mutual extreme jealousy, constant belittling, controlling behaviors, discouraging friendships, and serious threats of bodily harm, including setting fire to the bathroom door when his partner was inside. Descriptions of partners' behavior in the incident and for the relationship in general were also related, $r(59) = .70, p < .001$. Similar to the focal incident, reciprocity of emotionally aggressive behaviors was found in participants' descriptions of their interpersonal conflicts with their partners, $r(57) = .53, p < .001$.

There was a strong association between physical and emotional abuse. Both victim and perpetrator reports revealed that those who acted violently towards their part-

Table I Direction of Violence in the Incident and in the Relationship

	Receipt only	Bidirectional	Perpetration only
Incident (%)	29	44	27
Relationship (%)	28	50	22

Note. $N = 68$

ners, regardless of whether their partners were violent, also perpetrated more emotionally abusive behaviors than those who did not perpetrate violence, recipient reports: $F(2, 59) = 3.15, p < .05$; perpetrator reports: $F(2, 59) = 8.11, p < .001$. Furthermore, participants who described their partners as engaging in higher levels of emotional abuse in the incident reported more severe physical, $r(47) = .62, p < .001$, and emotional consequences, $r(43) = .50, p < .001$. In addition, those who reported seeking medical attention for their injuries described experiencing higher levels of emotionally abusive behaviors from their partners than those who did not seek medical attention, $t(45) = 3.42, p < .001$. Thus, it appears that physical abuse typically involved emotional abuse and that as the severity of physical violence increased, so did the severity of emotional abuse.

Motives

Forty-five participants reported perpetrating violence in the focal incident. Of these, 28 (62%) initiated the violence, 13 (29%) responded to their partner's initiation of violence with violence of their own, and 4 (9%) described their violence as self-defense. An example of initiation is a participant's description of his partner "picking and picking at me" until "I just snapped and hit him across his back so hard, it was like an explosion." An example of retaliation involved a participant's partner pushing him and the participant pushing back. As his partner was later leaving for work, the participant slammed the door, hitting his partner's foot. His partner retaliated by grabbing an iron and throwing it at the participant. An example of self-defense was when one man's partner came at him with a knife and the participant responded by grabbing his partner and flipping him onto the floor.

We also assessed the degree to which participants' violence served an instrumental or expressive function. The four participants who reported using violence in self-defense were excluded from these analyses because their motive was to protect themselves. The average degree to which violence served an instrumental function ($M = 2.83, SD = 2.24$) indicated that violence typically involved a slight degree of wanting to influence the partner in some way. An example of a typical rating of 3 on the instrumental scale is a participant hitting his partner mostly out of frustration and anger, but also to "get through" to his partner and to make his partner listen to him. The range of violence serving an instrumental function was 1–8, with 42% ($n = 17$) of violent acts rated as serving no instrumental purpose. Only four participants (10%) described violent acts primarily intended to control or influence their partner, which were rated as a 7 or above on

the scale. Examples of high instrumentality were grabbing and shaking a partner to calm him down and to "snap him out of his hysterical fit," and pushing a partner in order to stop him from his "trance-like" channel surfing and to get some attention. All incidents rated as 5 or higher on the instrumental scale ($n = 9$) were examined by the primary author, and none of these violence incidents appeared to be part of a pattern of systematic control by the perpetrator.

In contrast, all participants' descriptions of perpetrating violence were rated as serving some degree of expressive purpose. The mean expressive rating was 6.22 ($SD = 1.93$), indicating that aggressive acts typically involved a moderately strong expressive component, most often anger or frustration toward a partner. Over 70% ($n = 30$) of violent acts were rated as 6 or higher. Participants at the higher end of the scale typically described "pent up frustration," "seeing red," or that their "blood was boiling." For example, a man who walked in on his partner in bed with another man reported feeling shocked and hurt; he punched his partner and ran away. Although we did not assume that instrumental and expressive motivations were mutually exclusive, ratings were negatively related, $r(41) = -.56, p < .001$.

Although several researchers (e.g., Island & Letellier, 1991; Renzetti, 1992) believe that the motive to control one's partner through the use of physical and emotional aggression (i.e., instrumental motives) determines the perpetrator (versus victim) in bidirectional violence, we did not find a clear and meaningful pattern of association between motives and aggression. There were no significant differences in instrumental or expressive motives between men who initiated violence and those who retaliated, instrumental: $t(38) = 1.47, ns$; expressive: $t(38) = 0.97, ns$. In addition, neither instrumental nor expressive ratings were found to be significantly associated with emotional abuse. In sum, the function of violence did not clearly differentiate participants into victim and perpetrator roles.

Context

The vast majority of incidents (88%, $n = 61$) appeared to be an escalation of an argument, with just 12% ($n = 8$) not being described as precipitated by ongoing conflict. Participants typically described an argument in which the perpetrator reached a certain point of frustration or anger and lashed out physically. Of the eight violent incidents that did not occur in a conflict context, four were physical reactions by the perpetrators to comments made by their partners. For example, one participant related that he felt "picked on" by his partner and he perceived his

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partner as “being in [his] face,” so he punched his partner. Three of the eight violent situations not preceded by conflict were related to the perpetrators’ jealousy in response to actual or perceived infidelity. The final physical incident that was not an escalation of conflict occurred when the perpetrator came home intoxicated and attempted to forcefully initiate sex.

Consequences

Forty-nine participants reported receiving violence and provided enough detail to allow for the coding of physical consequences. The average injuries were of a superficial nature, typically consisting of minor bruises or marks ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 2.26$). Thirty-three percent of participants ($n = 16$) indicated that no physical consequences occurred as a result of their partner’s violence, 45% ($n = 22$) reported minor physical injuries, and 22% ($n = 11$) reported more serious injuries, ranging from severe bruising to broken bones. Only 12% of participants ($n = 6$) reported receiving medical attention for their injuries. An example of severe physical consequences involved one participant waking up in a pool of his own blood after his partner hit him in the head with a dumbbell. A second example was a man reporting bruises, a swollen lip, a sprained finger, and a deep defensive knife wound in his hand after his partner beat and attempted to stab him.

Emotional consequences experienced as a result of receiving physical violence were rated on 44 participants’ descriptions of the focal incident. Participants typically reported a mild to moderate emotional response ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.53$), including feeling mildly afraid, hurt, or angry as a result of the violence. Twenty-three percent ($n = 10$) indicated a strong emotional response to their partners’ violence, including feeling “terrified.” For example, one man locked himself in the bathroom and “was scared for [his] life.”

Physical and emotional consequences were significantly related, $r(44) = .45$, $p < .01$, indicating that the more serious the injury, the stronger the emotional impact of a violent incident. However, the severity of the violent act was not necessarily related to the emotional consequences. Many men described emotional reactions to the violence that seemed subdued, whereas others reported emotional reactions other than upset or fear. For example

It wasn’t violence in the sense that he felt threatened or I felt threatened. I care about you, so I am going to push you. He punched me, I cried, he apologized, we made love. It wasn’t a victimizing thing. Even when he pulled out his gun. It wasn’t loaded. I knew it wasn’t threatening. It was just very unhealthy, just ridiculous.

Another man, who required medical treatment for a broken finger, reported feeling embarrassed by his and his partner’s violence, but did not indicate other emotional reactions. A few participants stated that they were physically stronger than their partners and therefore were not afraid of their partners’ violence. Several others expressed indignation regarding their partners’ actions. They commented that they thought, “how dare you” in response to their partners’ violence.

Emotional consequence ratings were based on the results of physical aggression only, and some men clearly felt more upset by the problems in their relationship or the demise of their relationship than they did about the physical aggression. For example, a man who encountered his partner “necking with someone” only discussed his offence at the public nature of his partner’s infidelity and did not indicate any emotional response to the fact that his partner initiated violence during the incident. In addition, many of the incidents occurred some time ago and therefore the emotions associated with the experience may have become less intense with time.

Eighty-four percent ($n = 58$) of these relationships had ended; however, the end of these relationships was not typically a consequence of the violence. One man, who was the recipient of at least two violent acts a week for 5 months, stated, “the violence did not influence the break up.” The few participants who did report leaving the relationship as a result of the violence tended to fall at the extreme ends of the violence spectrum. At one end were those who did not tolerate any violence, such as a man who said he “abhorred violence” and ended his relationship immediately after his partner pushed him. On the other end of the violence spectrum were a few men who left their relationships because of extreme violence. An example is a man with a long history of violence in his relationship. After the last violent incident, during which he received two black eyes, two broken ribs, stitches in his head, and a fractured arm, he left all his belongings, quit work, and moved to a different city in order to escape his violent partner.

Themes

After completing the coding of various aspects of the violent incidents and relationships, we reexamined the interviews for any consistent themes. We considered potential themes discussed in the violence literature, while remaining open to new themes that might emerge.

Participants’ descriptions of their relationship dynamics were compared with Johnson’s typology of violent relationships. The grouping of common couple violence (CCV), in which one or both members of a

couple are violent, but neither is controlling, described 47 of the 69 relationships (68%). CCV seemed to serve as a catchall grouping because neither perpetrators nor recipients tended to describe the violence or their relationships in terms of control. As previously discussed, findings on motivational factors indicated that violence appeared to be motivated by expressive purposes rather than instrumental or controlling purposes. The violence in the CCV grouping varied widely and the relationships did not appear similar enough to form a coherent group. For instance, within the CCV grouping, the number of violent incidents ranged from 1 to more than 40 and the severity of violence ranged from no injury to severe injury. Of the 47 relationships classified as CCV, 20 had unidirectional violence and 27 had bidirectional violence. In addition, 25 involved only one violent incident, commonly described as a “one time explosion” or an “emotional blowout.” These participants viewed the violence as an isolated incident often resulting from frustrated communication and poor conflict-solving skills. One participant stated, “I had a violent moment where my anger got out of control . . . but it’s not an issue where this is a regular pattern.”

It is commonly suggested that domestic violence is motivated by a desire to control one’s partner (e.g., Dobash *et al.*, 1992). However, the concept of control and domination appeared central for only 6 of the 69 relationships. In terms of Johnson’s typology, the grouping of patriarchal terrorism, which encompasses relationships with one violent and controlling partner, described only two relationships (3%). Both involved moderately severe violence as indicated by injuries, but in neither of these relationships did the violence occur frequently (one participant reported approximately four incidents and the other reported approximately seven incidents). Violent resistance, relationships in which both partners are violent but only one is controlling, described three relationships (4%). Within this grouping, the frequency of violent incidents ranged from 1 to more than 20 and the physical injury reports ranged from mild to severe. One relationship fit the description of mutual violence: It involved frequent violence by both partners, and both partners seemed to engage in controlling or dominating behaviors.

Several problems with applying Johnson’s typology to this sample were noted. First, there was considerable variation within the groups specified by the typology. Further, 16 participants’ descriptions (23%) of their relationships could not be classified using Johnson’s typology. In six of these cases, the primary recipient of the violence was described as controlling. For example, one participant described instigating the violent incidents emotionally as part of a general pattern of manipulation

and control of his partner. Defining the groupings based on control offered little discriminative value. Only six relationships fell into the three groupings involving a controlling violent partner, equivalent to the number of relationships that involved a controlling victim of violence.

A theme evident in 36% ($n = 25$) of participants’ stories was that a demand/withdraw interaction was present in the conflict that became physical and/or was characteristic of the communication style in the relationship. This dynamic indicates an interaction pattern in which one partner withdraws, whereas the other partner makes requests/demands and engages more overtly in the interaction (Berns *et al.*, 1999; Christensen & Heavey, 1990). Those in the demanding role seek greater closeness and may be more invested in the relationship, whereas those in the withdrawing role seek less intimacy and greater separateness and therefore appear less emotionally involved. In 18 interactions, the initial perpetrator was in the demanding role and the recipient was in the withdrawing role. For example, one participant was “tired of being pushed aside and ignored emotionally” by his withdrawing partner during a discussion, so he tried to make his partner listen by physically holding him in one spot. Another participant, who went into another room to avoid the conflict, was followed by his partner and then strangled. Typically, the men in the demanding role felt their attempts to communicate and get their emotional need met were thwarted by their partners’ unavailability, and when their emotional needs were not met, they reacted violently.

The other seven men describing a demand–withdraw interaction indicated that the recipient of the initial violent act was in the demanding role and the perpetrator was in the withdrawing role. For example, a participant reported bashing down a door when his partner withdrew into another room and repeatedly asking, “What are you doing? Why won’t you talk to me?” His partner repeatedly yelled, “go away!” and eventually reacted violently. Another man tried to leave during an argument, when his partner commented, “Oh sure, abandon me just like your father did.” This man said about his violent actions, “I think it happened because I felt totally cornered.” A commonality in these cases was the withdrawing perpetrators having “buttons pushed,” feeling trapped, and becoming violent when their attempts to remove themselves from the conflict situation failed. Thus, these men described their violence as being provoked by their partners’ emotional abuse or as a reaction when they perceived no other course of action was available. Conversely, the demanding victims in these situations commonly described making repeated communication attempts and relentlessly pursuing their partners during conflict. For example, a

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participant stated, "I pushed him [emotionally]. I wanted him to respond. I kept coming at him."

Nineteen men (28%) described relationship dynamics in which one partner was more emotionally invested in the relationship than his partner, with the more invested partner tending to be the initiator of violence. For example, one man, who had acted violently, was frustrated and angry that his partner was unwilling to commit to the relationship and would not spend as much time with him as he would like. Several men explained that their partners wanted an open relationship and therefore less commitment, whereas they wanted a monogamous relationship.

Infidelity was another common theme found in 14 (20%) of the interviews. Several violent incidents occurred when one partner encountered the other engaging in an extra-relationship sexual encounter. Others reported that they were arguing about infidelity when the conflict escalated into physical aggression. The negotiation of a mutually agreeable relationship structure specifying the degree of monogamy or openness appeared to be especially important for these male same-sex relationships.

The final theme was that the violence often occurred for the first time as the relationship was in the process of ending. Sixteen men (23%) reported violence as it was becoming obvious that the relationship had run its course, during the break-up, or shortly after the break-up when there was still some degree of connection between the men. For example, a couple of men explained their partners' initiation of physical aggression as a result of their anger over the participants' attempts to end the relationship.

DISCUSSION

These results provide a general picture of violence in male same-sex relationships. The majority of men reported that violence occurred infrequently in their relationships, with 44% reporting that it occurred only once. In most cases, the physical and emotional consequences of the violence were mild. However, a sizable minority of participants described severe and frequent violence. Physical violence co-occurred with emotional abuse in all of the violent incidents, and, as reports of emotional abuse increased, so did the severity of physical and emotional impact. Although physical and emotional abuse involve distinct behaviors, we question whether they should be considered separate entities. Emotionally abusive tactics can influence the impact of physical aggression; some tactics, such as threats of bodily harm to self or others, can induce recipients to fear for their physical safety re-

gardless of whether physical violence occurs. We agree with the participants in Cruz and Firestone's (1998) study who defined intimate abuse as involving both physical and emotional components.

There was strong evidence for some degree of reciprocity of violence in most of the relationships described. In a large proportion of violent incidents and the relationships as a whole, both members of the couple acted violently. In many of the incidents, the men appeared to perpetrate approximately equal levels of violence, whereas others perpetrated equal levels of violence but in separate instances of unidirectional violence. Reciprocity of emotional abuse was especially strong, with reciprocal emotional abuse described in almost all violent incidents. These findings are consistent with Stacey *et al.*'s (1994) observation that aggressive couples often seem to psychologically and physically assault each other, eventually limiting their conflicts within pathways of violence. It seemed that as the participants' interpersonal conflicts escalated to emotional and physical aggression, their ability to solve their conflicts constructively diminished. However, it should also be noted that a sizable minority of participants described incidents and relationships in which the abuse was primarily unidirectional.

Participants commonly described their violence as motivated by anger and frustration. These findings are in strong contrast to the suggestion that violence is used to establish and maintain power and control over a partner (e.g., Letellier, 1994). Rather, participants who perpetrated violence often expressed feeling a lack of control in their relationships, as well as feelings of anger and frustration stemming from the current condition of their relationships. When we examined these relationships more closely, we found that the vast majority did not involve a controlling partner. Further, there were as many relationships with a nonviolent controlling partner as with a violent controlling partner.

Our difficulties applying the construct of control illustrate problems with describing violent relationships using broad generalizations. The nature of same-sex intimate violence can vary widely and it is necessary to assess multiple aspects of the violence and the relationship to accurately reflect the diverse forms of intimate violence. When we attempted to fit participants' stories into a narrowly defined typology, we found that the stories within a grouping varied widely and that 23% of the stories did not fit into a grouping. Given these difficulties, we concluded that no simple typology of relationships would adequately explain intimate violence in this sample. We found it more useful to document the multiple forms of intimate violence by considering several continuous variables and examining patterns of relationship dynamics.

Using continuous variables, such as emotional and physical consequences, number of incidents, and the degree to which the violence served instrumental and expressive functions, we were able to reflect the diversity of violence we observed. By identifying the themes in participants' stories, we revealed underlying dynamics that may help to explain why, in some relationships, conflict escalates into violence.

The most consistent themes in participants' stories involved unmet or threatened emotional needs: incompatible needs for closeness versus autonomy, frustrated desires for commitment and monogamy, and loss of the relationships. Therefore, attachment theory may be a useful perspective from which to view these findings. Bowlby (1984) suggested that relationship violence may be an adult form of protest behavior—a maladaptive attempt to maintain closeness to a loved one when a relationship is threatened. Attachment, particularly the underlying dimension of anxiety over abandonment, has been consistently associated with relationship violence (e.g., Bartholomew *et al.*, 2001). Roberts and Noller (1998) found that intimate violence was particularly likely when a person high in anxiety over abandonment was partnered with someone avoidant of closeness—a pattern similar to the demand-withdrawal dynamic present in this sample. These authors' suggestion that violence can be used as a pursuing or distancing tactic fits with our findings that both demanding and withdrawing partners perpetrated violence. Awareness of a partner's infidelity, perceiving one's partner as less emotionally invested, or being threatened with the loss of a partner all contribute to attachment anxiety and may activate attachment protest behaviors.

The patterns of relationship violence observed in this community sample cannot be generalized to clinical samples, which may involve more severe violence and different patterns of violence (Johnson, 1995; Straus, 1993). Although the majority of this sample reported low to moderate levels of violence, some participants did report violence as extreme as that found in clinical samples. Additional characteristics of the sample limit its generalizability. Participants were selected from a large urban area and were willing to publicly acknowledge their sexual orientation. Gay or bisexual men living in rural areas or those who would not identify themselves as gay or bisexual were not represented in this sample. Also, the diversity of ethnic background is limited in this study. Finally, younger (under 30) and older (over 60) men were underrepresented in this sample (see Regan *et al.*, 2002).

Many of our findings are inconsistent with accounts of violence in the domestic violence literature. First, par-

ticipants described diverse experiences that varied along several dimensions and that did not fit into any simple typology. Second, contrary to the assumption of distinct victim and perpetrator roles in abusive relationships, differentiating a clear victim and perpetrator was often not possible. The interconnections between emotional and physical abuse, and the high reciprocity of emotional and physical abuse in many of our participants' relationships, indicates the difficulty in identifying a clear victim and perpetrator in many abusive relationships.

Third, because few relationships ended because of the violence and the physical and emotional impact of the violence was often moderate, we cannot assume that men perceive intimate violence as a problem or as detrimental to their relationships. We therefore caution mental health care providers against preconceptions about the nature of same-sex violent relationships. In particular, we are concerned that educational materials, if inconsistent with some individuals' experiences, may reduce the likelihood of men accessing available services. For example, a man experiencing one time, low-level violence, likely involving bidirectional emotional abuse, may be hesitant to adopt the label of a victim of abuse. Services specifically designed for men who experience abuse in a same-sex relationship are needed. One man's comment that he felt like a "gay guinea pig" when he participated in a domestic violence program for husbands indicates the inadequacy of applying treatments used for heterosexual men to gay men. Considering that the vast majority of violent incidents were an escalation of an ongoing conflict and that frustration and anger were the most common impetuses for violence, improving conflict solving and communication skills may be an effective intervention strategy for many men in same-sex relationships involving violence.

In conclusion, the gay and bisexual men in this sample described diverse experiences of intimate violence, as well as diverse reactions to violence. The majority of the violence reported was mild and infrequent, but situations of severe violence were also revealed. Violence typically erupted during relationship conflict, and participants often discussed the violence in the context of threatened emotional needs. Further, most violence was expressive in nature, and destructive conflict tactics, such as yelling, criticism, and withdrawal, were present in virtually all violent incidents. Thus, therapeutic and research efforts should be directed toward understanding the conflict from which violence arises. Particular attention should be paid to developing constructive communication skills that facilitate both the expression and satisfaction of emotional needs. Our findings also highlight the relationship context in which abusive interaction patterns develop.

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