

EXPLORING THE VARIATION WITHIN SITUATIONAL COUPLE VIOLENCE

BY

SAMANTHA NIELSEN

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in Human and Community Development
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012

Urbana, Illinois

Advisers:

Professor Jennifer L. Hardesty, Chair
Professor Marcela Raffaelli, Second Reader

Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV) happens at an alarming rate in the United States; more than one in three women have experienced IPV in their lifetime (Black et al., 2010). Johnson (2008) has indicated that there are different types of IPV with violent coercive control and situational couple violence being the most prominent. There are approximately 6 million cases of situational couple violence each year, and yet this type of violence is mostly understood in comparison to the other types. As researchers differentiate between different types of violence, it is important to consider the variation *within* types of violence as well. A subsample of 18 divorcing mothers, (from a larger sample of 108) who experienced situational couple violence during marriage, is analyzed using qualitative case analysis and quantitative group analyses. This study examines the variations of frequency and severity of violence, levels of fear during marriage, use of protective strategies during marriage, and harassment experienced after separation among mothers who reported situational couple violence. Group comparison between situational couple violence and violent coercive control and no violence and no control are also analyzed. This study illustrates that there are a wide range of experiences among mothers who report situational couple violence (e.g. minor severity and infrequent violence to severe and frequent violence), and these experiences result in different dynamics and effects for mothers.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: Methods	5
Chapter Three: Results	11
Chapter Four: Discussion	19
References	22

Chapter One: Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to physical and/or sexual assault of one's partner (Campbell & Boyd, 2000). Currently in the US, more than one in three women (35.6%) has experienced IPV, and 33% of all women murdered in the US are killed by their intimate partner (Black et al., 2010). Recent research has focused on two main types of IPV, violent coercive control (i.e., where violence is used as one tactic, among many, to control one's partner) and situational couple violence (i.e., where violence occurs in the context of conflict, without an overall motive to control one's partner; Johnson, 2008). Johnson (2008) estimates that there are approximately 2 million cases each year of violent coercive control, while situational couple violence, the more prevalent of the two, accounts for 6 million cases each year. Although researchers have examined differences in extent, dynamics, and use of protective strategies between the two types, little attention has been paid to differences *within* these types, particularly situational couple violence (Leone, Johnson, & Cohan, 2007). To address this gap, this study provides an exploratory descriptive analysis of 18 mothers' experiences of situational couple violence during marriage and after separation as well as descriptive comparisons to mothers who report coercive controlling violence or no violence and no control.

Types of Intimate Partner Violence

Johnson (2008) has identified two main types of IPV: violent coercive control (also referred to as intimate terrorism) and situational couple violence. Studies indicate that these two types of IPV are qualitatively different. The distinguishing factor between these types is the context in which the violence occurs. Specifically violent coercive control is rooted in the motive to control one's partner, while situational couple violence takes place when an argument escalates to violence with no general pattern of coercive control (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Johnson, 2011; Johnson, Leone, & Xu, 2008). Violent coercive control is studied primarily by feminist theorists who have found that IPV is perpetrated primarily by men (87% - 97%; Frye, Manganello, Campbell, Walton-Moss, & Wilt,

2006; Johnson, 2008) and reinforced by a patriarchal society (Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003; Johnson, 2008). Situational couple violence is studied primarily by family violence theorists who posit that all couples experience conflict and those that experience chronic conflict are also more likely to resort to violence, with the context of the violence being conflict rather than control (Gelles & Straus, 1988; Johnson, 2008).

In addition to qualitatively different contexts, the two types of IPV differ in their extent, nature, and consequences. Violent coercive control is characterized by at least one act of violence combined with various non-violent tactics used to control one's partner, such as intimidation, isolation, and coercion and threats (Johnson, 2008; Johnson, 2011). Violent coercive control is generally more frequent, severe, and injurious than situational couple violence (Anderson, 2008; Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003; Johnson & Leone, 2005; Kelly & Johnson, 2008). Also, women subjected to violent coercive control exhibit more posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms (Anderson, 2008; Johnson & Leone, 2005; Johnson, Leone, & Cohan, 2007) and experience higher levels of fear (Johnson, 2008; Johnson, Leone, & Cohan, 2007) than women who experience situational couple violence. Lastly, women experiencing violent coercive control have been shown to engage in more formal help-seeking behaviors (Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2008), such as calling the police, staying in a shelter, and contacting medical service (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Krishnan, Hilbert, & VanLeeuwen, 2001) than women experiencing situational couple violence.

In contrast situational couple violence is characterized by at least one incident of violence that occurs when an argument escalates to one partner using violence against the other partner but is not accompanied by such control tactics as intimidation and isolation (Johnson, 2008). Although this type of IPV has been generally associated with minor acts of violence it can still escalate to severe and even homicidal acts (Johnson, 2008; Stith et al., 2011). In contrast to violent coercive control, situational couple violence is perpetrated somewhat equally by both men (estimated at 55% - 56%;

Johnson, 2008) and women (estimated at 44% - 45%; Johnson, 2008). Because this type of violence can be equally perpetrated by both men and women, there is a misconception that women are as violent as men (Archer, 2002; Straus, 2011). While men and women may both initiate situational couple violence, the acts themselves and their consequences differ (Johnson, 2008). Research indicates that men use more severe acts of violence than women (e.g. choking, kicking, hitting versus slapping, pushing, shoving), and women are more likely to experience negative consequences such as physical injury, fear for safety, and negative psychological outcomes (Johnson, 2008; Kimmel, 2002; Ross & Babcock, 2009; Straus, 2011). Although situational couple violence is characteristically less severe and frequent than violent coercive control, women experiencing situational couple violence still seek help (Johnson, 2008). However, they are more likely to seek informal (e.g. contacting family and friends) versus formal support (Leone, Johnson, & Cohan, 2007).

Studies also indicate differences between the types of IPV and post separation experiences. For example, women who leave violent coercive controlling relationships often face continued risk for violence, lethality, stalking, and intrusion (DeKeseredy, Rogness, & Shwartz, 2004; Johnson, 2006; Nicolaidis et al., 2003), particularly when custody and child support agreements require continued contact (Davies, Ford-Gilboe, & Hammerton, 2009; Hardesty & Ganong, 2006; Haselschwerdt, Hardesty, & Hans, 2011). Studies have found that women may experience ongoing control from their abusive former partners via coparenting arrangements (Hardesty, Khaw, Chung, & Martin, 2008). In contrast, women who experienced situational couple violence generally do not report violence continuing after separation (Johnson, 2008).

In sum, research to date demonstrates qualitative differences in the extent, nature, and dynamics of violent coercive control compared to situational couple violence. Numerous studies have also examined the distinct dynamics of violent coercive control in and of itself (Anderson, 2008; Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, Rehman, & Stuart, 2003; Leone, Johnson, & Cohan, 2007). Situational couple violence, however, has been studied mostly in comparison to violent coercive

control with limited attention to its unique characteristics. Given that situational couple violence is the most common form of IPV (Johnson, 2008), research is needed to better understand its complexity and variability (Johnson, 2008).

Situational couple violence can range from one act of violence over the course of a relationship to frequent and chronic violence. As a result of the variability in the nature and frequency of the violence, the effect that situational couple violence has on physical and psychological well-being also varies. Many couples who experience situational couple violence report that the violence is infrequent and minor, and they still report relatively high relationship satisfaction (Johnson, 2008; Simpson, Doss, Wheeler, & Christensen, 2007). Thus for these couples, violence may not be central to the relationship and they may not perceive themselves as being in a “violent relationship” (Johnson, 2008). Studies have found that relationships in which situational couple violence is less severe and less frequent are comparable to nonviolent relationships in their psychological and physical effects (Johnson, 2008). However, as situational couple violence escalates in severity (Stith et al., 2011) and becomes more frequent, the effects on psychological and physical health may appear more similar to the effects of violent coercive control, including physical injury, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Johnson & Leone, 2005; Ross & Babcock, 2009).

The variability within situational couple violence cannot be captured in one simple definition. Although the IPV literature does provide some insight on situational couple violence in comparison to violent coercive control, a lack of understanding of situational couple violence as it stands alone prevents drawing accurate conclusions about its nature and effects (Johnson, 2008; Johnson & Leone, 2005; Leone, Johnson, & Cohan, 2007). This study addresses this gap by examining divorcing mothers who experienced situational couple violence with their partner during their relationship, with a specific focus on the variation within this type of violence.

Chapter Two: Methods

Sample

The current sample was derived from a larger longitudinal study focused on mothers' coparenting experiences during and after divorce. Women with children were identified using public divorce records from a county in one Midwestern state. Within 12 weeks of filing for divorce, a letter was sent inviting the mothers to participate in the study if they met the following criteria: they had at least one child under the age of 18 with their former partner, they had custody of that child at least 25% of the time, and they were living apart or separated from their former partner for less than two years. If the mothers did not respond to the initial letter within 10 days, another letter was sent. If still no response a third letter was sent to her and her attorney (if she had one) 14 days after the second letter, and a fourth letter was sent 20 days after the third. Mothers were considered eligible to participate if they responded within four months of their divorce filing. From 1,408 divorces filed, 537 women had children and a mailing address. Of those women 151 (28.1%) mothers expressed interest in our study. Of those 151, 108 women qualified and completed the first of five interviews lasting 60-90 minutes and were paid \$35. Interviews were held in public locations or in the participant's home. Only Time 1 interviews were used in the current study.

Mothers were 20 to 52 years old ($M = 34.8$) and predominantly white ($n = 83, 76.9\%$). Thirteen mothers (12 %) identified as Black or African American and six mothers (5.6 %) identified as Asian or Asian American. Average annual income ranged from less than \$6,000 to over \$60,000 ($M = \$21,000$) and 79.6 % ($n = 86$) of mothers were employed at least part-time. They had between one and four children ($M = 1.8$), ages less than 1 year to 17 years old ($M = 12.9$ years). Mothers had been physically separated or living apart from their former partner for less than 1 month to 27 months ($M = 8.2$ months). The demographics for the entire sample are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic and Background Variables by Group

Variable	Situational Couple Violence (<i>n</i> = 18)	Violent Coercive Control (<i>n</i> = 44)	No Violence and No Control (<i>n</i> = 27)
Age, in years (<i>M</i> / <i>SD</i>)	34.1 / 7.9	34.3 / 6.6	35.7 / 6.8
Ethnicity (<i>n</i> / %)			
White	10 / 55.6	38 / 86.4	19 / 70.4
Black or African American	4 / 22.2	1 / 2.3	7 / 25.9
Asian or Asian American	3 / 16.7	2 / 4.5	0 / 0
Other	1 / 5.6	3 / 6.8	1 / 3.7
Employment status (<i>n</i> / %)			
Employed, at least part-time	13 / 72.2	37 / 84.1	22 / 81.5
Unemployed	5 / 27.8	7 / 15.9	5 / 18.5
Income			
≤ \$29,999 (<i>n</i> / %)	14 / 77.8	27 / 61.4	13 / 48.1
\$30,000 – 59,999 (<i>n</i> / %)	3 / 16.7	12 / 27.3	10 / 37.0
≤ \$60,000 (<i>n</i> / %)	1 / 5.6	5 / 11.4	4 / 14.8
Number of children (<i>M</i> / <i>SD</i>)	2.1 / .99	1.75 / .69	1.5 / .7
Age of children, in years (<i>M</i> / <i>SD</i>)	14.4 / 12.5	13.7 / 13.5	10.7 / 8.6
Time since separation, in months (<i>M</i> / <i>SD</i>)	9.6 / 7.0	7.6 / 6.6	7.3 / 4.9

Measures

Demographics. Demographic and other background information on mothers and their former partners was collected (e.g. age, race/ethnicity, country of origin, education, employment status, occupation, income, date married, date separated, who filed and date filed for divorce, current divorce status, and custody and child support agreements).

Violence. Several measures were used to classify the type of violence women experienced. To determine the presence or absence of physical violence during marriage mothers indicated *yes* or *no* whether they experienced any of 13 acts of violence (e.g. he pushed or shoved me, he punched or hit me with something that could hurt) on the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, Sugarman, 1996). This scale has good reliability (alphas = .79 to .95) and has construct and discriminant validity (Straus et al., 1996). The CTS2 scoring guidelines were also used to distinguish between minor (e.g. he grabbed me) and severe acts (e.g. he choked me) of violence.

Coercive control. The level of coercive control was measured using the Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI) – short form (Tolman, 1992). Mothers rated their experiences during the last year of their marriage on seven items (e.g. he was jealous or suspicious of my friends) using a scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). If a participant answered “never” for any of the seven items, they were asked if the event *ever* occurred during their marriage. This scale is widely used to measure coercive control (Johnson, 2008) and has good discriminant validity and reliability (alpha = .91; Bell, Goodman, & Dutton, 2007).

Fear. Mothers’ degree of fear of their former partner during the last year before they physically separated was measured using the Women’s Experience of Battering (WEB) scale (Smith, Earp, & DeVillis, 1995; Smith, Smith, & Earp, 1999). The WEB has 10 items (e.g. I felt like I was programmed to react a certain way to him). One item that asked about fear after separation was excluded. Mother indicated the degree to which they agree with each item on a scale of 1 (*agree strongly*) to 6 (*disagree strongly*). As in prior research (Smith et al., 1999), this study used scores

greater than 19 as the cutoff score to indicate the women experienced high levels of fear. This scale has good construct validity, and internal consistency (Smith, Thornton, DeVellis, Earp, & Coker, 2002).

Harassment. The Harassment in Abusive Relationships: A Self-Report Scale (HARASS) was used to measure the frequency of harassment and coercive control after separation. Participants indicate how often 23 behaviors have occurred since separation (e.g. he keeps showing up wherever I am) on a scale of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very frequently*). The responses on each question were added together to compute the overall frequency total. Mothers with higher total scores on the harass scale experienced more frequent acts of harassment overall. The total number of different harassing behaviors was also analyzed; these behaviors were summed. Sonis and Langer (2008) reported high internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .86).

Protective strategies. Mothers' use of protective strategies in response to their former partners' behavior was measured using the IPV Strategies Index (Goodman, Dutton, Weinfurt, & Cook, 2003). This scale includes six subscales reflecting different strategies that women use: Placating (e.g. tried to avoid him), Resisting (e.g. refused to do what he said), Safety Planning (e.g. put a knife, gun or other weapon where you could get to it), Use of Informal Help (e.g. tried to get help from clergy), Use of Formal Help (e.g. talked to a doctor or nurse), and Use of Legal Resources (e.g. called police). Eight items not relevant to divorcing or separated women were removed, and one item was revised from "Ended (or tried to end) relationship" to "Ended (or tried to end) contact with him." There was also a legal item added (sought changes to your visitation or custody agreement). Women indicated *yes* or *no* to whether 32 harassing behaviors occurred to them during the last year before they separated and/or in the time since they physically. The original measure has shown good ecological and convergent validity and interrater reliability (Goodman, Dutton, Weinfurt, & Cook, 2003).

Reasons for divorce. Lastly, mothers were asked to indicate which of 17 reasons (e.g. infidelity or cheating, physical abuse, not meeting obligations to the family) played a role in the decision to file for divorce, whether they or their former partner filed. They were also given the opportunity to list other reasons not included in the list. Respondents could choose multiple reasons but were also asked to indicate the primary reason for the divorce filing.

Analysis

Data analysis consisted of three main steps. First, women's experiences were categorized based on the presence of violence and coercive control. Johnson (2008) recommends a holistic, qualitative analysis of women's experiences to distinguish types of violence. In line with his recommendation, qualitative case analysis of mothers' reports on the CTS2 and PMWI was conducted to classify mothers into four groups: no violence and no control, nonviolent coercive control, violent coercive control, or situational couple violence. First, the CTS2 was used to group the mothers into violence versus no violence groups. Consistent with prior research (Johnson & Leone, 2005), mothers were included in the violence group if they experienced at least one instance of violence as indicated on the CTS2. Three coders independently categorized women into high coercive control versus low or no coercive control based on a holistic analysis of mothers' responses to the PMWI. Thus, violence coupled with high coercive control (i.e., violent coercive control) was distinguished from violence with low or no coercive control (i.e., situational couple violence). As a result of the qualitative case analysis there were 27 (25%) cases of no violence and no control, 44 (40.7%) cases of violent coercive control, and 18 (16.7%) cases of situational couple violence. There was an interrater reliability score of .94 (101/108) among the three coders.

Second, a case study approach was used to provide a qualitative, holistic picture of the subsample of 18 mothers who experienced situational couple violence during marriage. A case study approach involves in-depth analyses of individuals for the purpose of identifying what factors are important for understanding unique experiences, in this case situational couple violence (Glass,

Koziol-McLain, Campbell, & Block, 2004; Yin, 2009). A case study approach is beneficial when the topic of interest has not been studied in depth. Lastly, the use of a case study analysis is appropriate when the goal of research is to explain and understand the topic's complexities while retaining the "holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 2009, p. 4). For the current analysis, a table was created that included descriptive responses (versus scale numbers) for all mothers on each measure. Last, case studies were written that combined the data into narrative forms to tell the mothers' stories. This allows the mothers' quantitative responses to be understood and analyzed in a qualitative way.

Chapter Three: Results

Situational Couple Violence: Case Descriptions

Case analysis of the 18 mothers who experienced situational couple violence indicated a wide range of experiences in severity and frequency of violence, fear, harassment after separation, use of protective strategies, and reasons for divorce. Two of the 18 case studies are presented below to illustrate two different experiences involving situational couple violence.

Case 1. Tamara is a 29 year old black woman with some college who works as a rehabilitation aid. She and her former partner, Levon, have two children ages one and two. Tamara initiated and filed for divorce from her former partner after two years of marriage. The main reason that she filed for divorce was due to her former partner's infidelity.

Tamara reported that Levon used infrequent and mild levels of violence against her in the last year of her marriage. During an argument before they separated, he twisted her arm and hair, pushed or shoved her, and grabbed her twice. During this incident she used physical violence to try and defend herself. As a result she had a sprain, bruise, and small cut. In addition to the violence she reported low levels of fear in that she felt like she was programmed to react a certain way to him, and that she was ashamed of the things that he did to her.

Levon has harassed her in various ways since they physically separated. Tamara reported that he would go to her home when she did not want him there, took things that belonged to her so that she had to see him to get them back, threatened to take the kids away, left threatening messages, used the children as pawns to get her physically close to him, showed up without warning, and sat in his car outside her home. Levon also harassed her at work by trying to get her fired from her job, going to her workplace when she did not want to see him, and sitting in his car outside her workplace.

Tamara engaged in a variety of protective strategies in response to Levon's behavior in the year before they separated. For example she sought help from clergy; talked to a doctor or nurse; talked to someone at a domestic violence shelter, program or hotline; stayed in a shelter; kept

important numbers she could use to get help; talked with family and friends about what to do to protect herself and her children; and tried to avoid him and an argument from him. She also reported that she fought back physically and threatened to use a weapon against him. Tamara continued to use these protective strategies after separation as well as additional strategies including sending her children to stay with family or friends and leaving her home or another location to get away from him.

Case 2. Linda is a 43 year old biracial woman with an associate's degree who works full time as a supervisor for a charity organization. She and her former partner, John, have two children ages 8 and 14. Linda initiated the divorce, but both she and John filed for divorce on the same day, after 14 years of marriage. The main reason that she filed for divorce was because there was no love in the relationship.

Although John did not try to control Linda during their marriage, he frequently used severe forms of violence against her. For example, he used a knife or gun on her, punched or hit her with something that could hurt her, and slammed her against a wall. She also reported using violence against him six to ten times to defend herself. As a result of John's violence, Linda reported injuries (e.g., broken bone, sprain, bruises and cuts) that required medical attention. Linda also reported high levels of fear during her marriage. She indicated that John had a look that went straight through her and terrified her and that he could scare her without laying a hand on her. She felt owned and controlled by him, and she tried not to rock the boat because she was afraid of what he might do. She hid the truth from others because she was afraid of what would happen if she did not. She also felt unsafe in her own home, programmed to react a certain way to him, and ashamed of the things that he did to her.

John has harassed her in various ways since they physically separated. Linda reported that he frightened people close to her and threatened to have the children taken away from her. He has

occasionally taken things that belonged to her so she had to see him to get them back, came to her house when she did not want him there, and shown up without warning.

In the year before they separated, Linda engaged in a variety of protective strategies in response to John's behavior. For example, she sought help from a coworker, talked to a doctor or nurse, kept important phone numbers she could use to get help, and talked with family and friends about what to do to protect her and the children. She continued to use these protective strategies after separation as well as additional strategies, including calling a mental health counselor for herself, talking to someone at a domestic violence service, improving security in her home, and ending or trying to end contact with him.

Variation within Situational Couple Violence

As shown in the above case studies, situational couple violence includes a wide range of experiences. In addition to case descriptions, data were analyzed at the group level for mothers who experienced situational couple violence. Results indicated a range of experiences pertaining to the frequency and severity of violence, level of fear during marriage, former partners' harassing behaviors after separation, protective strategies used by mothers during the last year of marriage and after separation, and mothers' reasons for divorce.

Frequency and severity of violence. When asked how many times their former partner committed an act of violence against them, either during marriage or since separation, mothers reported a range. Five (27.8%) mothers reported a single occurrence of violence while one mother reported over 54 occurrences of violence. The severity of violence also varied among the mothers. Twelve (66.7%) mothers experienced minor acts of violence (e.g. twisted arm or hair, pushed or shoved, grabbed, slapped) while 6 (33.3%) mothers experienced severe acts (e.g. used a knife or gun on her, choked, beat up, kicked).

Fear. All 18 mothers experienced some level of fear during their marriage but at varying levels. Mothers' reported WEB scores ranged from 10 ($n = 3$, 16.7%) to 46 ($n = 1$, 5.6%). Eight

mothers (44.4%) had a WEB score of 24 or higher which according to Smith et al. (1999) indicates a battering relationship. While the other 10 (55.6%) mothers did not report high levels, they still reported some level of fear.

Harassing behaviors. Ten (55.6%) mothers reported no harassing behaviors after separation. Eight (44.4%) mothers reported 1 to 11 different harassing behaviors, with the frequency of those behaviors ranging from rarely to very frequently.

Protective strategies. In response to their former partner's behavior, all 18 mothers reported engaging in at least one protective strategy in the last year of marriage, with a range of 1 to 15 different protective strategies. All 18 mothers reported using at least two different protective strategies after separation, with a range of 2 to 18 different strategies.

Reasons for divorce. Mothers identified the following as their main reasons for filing for divorce: infidelity or cheating ($n = 5$, 27.8%), drinking or drug use ($n = 3$, 16.7%), growing apart ($n = 2$, 11.1%), communication issues ($n = 2$, 11.1%), no love in the relationship ($n = 1$), being unhappy ($n = 1$), financial problems ($n = 1$), illness ($n = 1$), inability to take responsibility for their problems ($n = 1$), and gambling ($n = 1$). Even though all of these mothers experienced violence, none of them used that as the main reason for why they filed.

Comparing Situational Couple Violence

In this section, situational couple violence is compared to violent coercive control and no violence and no control on frequency and severity of violence, levels of fear during marriage, former partner's harassing behaviors after separation, protective strategies used, and reasons for divorce. The differences between violent coercive control and no violence and no control are not discussed, but are indicated in Table 2 as well as all significant pairwise differences. Table 1 displays descriptive demographic data for the three groups. Results of one-way ANOVA's described in the remainder of this section are displayed below in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of ANOVA Means and Standard Deviations by Type of Violence on all Variables

Variable	Type of Violence			<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	Situational Couple Violence (<i>n</i> = 18)	Violent Coercive Control (<i>n</i> = 44)	No Violence and No Control (<i>n</i> = 27)		
Frequency of Violence (<i>M</i> / <i>SD</i>)	7.3 / 12.1 ^a	15.1 / 14.9 ^b	0 / 0 ^{ab}	<i>F</i> = 14.29	<i>p</i> < .001
Severity of Violence (<i>M</i> / <i>SD</i>)	1.3 / .5 ^a	1.7 / .5 ^b	0 / 0 ^c	<i>F</i> = 249.5	<i>p</i> < .001
Fear (<i>M</i> / <i>SD</i>)	24.7 / 13.8 ^a	42.1 / 11.9 ^b	19.2 / 11.3 ^a	<i>F</i> = 23.4	<i>p</i> < .001
Frequency of Harassing Behaviors (<i>M</i> / <i>SD</i>)	4.2 / 5.8 ^{ab}	7.0 / 6.2 ^a	1.7 / 2.9 ^b	<i>F</i> = 5.9	<i>p</i> = .001
Total Number of Different Harassing Behaviors (<i>M</i> / <i>SD</i>)	2.9 / 3.9 ^{ab}	3.9 / 3.2 ^a	.9 / 1.4 ^b	<i>F</i> = 5.7	<i>p</i> = .001
Protective Strategies Before Separation (<i>M</i> / <i>SD</i>)	7.9 / 4.4 ^a	9.8 / 4.5 ^b	3.4 / 2.6 ^c	<i>F</i> = 14.4	<i>p</i> < .001
Protective Strategies After Separation (<i>M</i> / <i>SD</i>)	9.1 / 5.0 ^a	9.8 / 4.6 ^a	4.6 / 3.9 ^b	<i>F</i> = 7.4	<i>p</i> < .001
Fear (% who reported high levels)	44.4	97.7	29.6		

*Note: Means with different superscripts differ significantly from each other (*p* < .05)*

Frequency of violence. A one-way ANOVA was used to test for differences among the three types of IPV on frequency of violent acts. Frequency of total violent acts differed significantly across the three types. Tukey post-hoc comparisons of the three groups indicated that mothers who experienced situational couple violence experienced significantly fewer total acts of violence than

mothers who experienced violent coercive control. There was no significant difference between the mothers who experienced situational couple violence and those who experienced no violence and no control.

Severity of violence. A one-way ANOVA was used to test for differences among the three types of IPV on severity of violent acts. Severity of violent acts differed significantly across the three types. Tukey post-hoc comparisons of the three groups indicated that mothers who experienced situational couple violence experienced significantly less severe violence than mothers who experienced violent coercive control, but significantly more than those who experienced no violence and no control.

Fear. A one-way ANOVA was used to test for differences among the three types of IPV on the mothers' levels of fear during marriage. Levels of fear differed significantly across the three types. Tukey post-hoc comparisons of the three groups indicated that mothers who experienced situational couple violence experienced significantly lower levels of fear than mothers who experienced violent coercive control, but there was no significant difference between mothers who experienced situational couple violence and no violence and no control. Incidentally, the WEB can be used as a measure of battering instead of fear. In the current sample, based on the WEB cut-off scores for battering, 8 (44.4%) of the 18 mothers who experienced situational couple violence met the cut-off for battering, 43 (97.7%) of the 44 mothers who experienced violent coercive control met the cut-off for battering, and 8 (29.6%) of the 27 mothers who experienced no violence and control met the cut-off. The percentage of mothers who met the WEB cut-off score differed by type of IPV, $\chi^2(3, N = 108) = 40.73, p < .001$.

Harassing behaviors. A one-way ANOVA was used to test for differences among the three types of IPV on the overall frequency of harassing behaviors by former partners after separation. Frequency of harassing behaviors differed significantly across the three types. Tukey post-hoc comparisons of the three groups indicated that mothers who experienced situational couple violence

did not differ significantly from mothers who experienced violent coercive control or no violence and no control on the overall frequency of harassing behaviors after separation. Another one-way ANOVA was run to test for differences among the three types of IPV in the raw number of different harassing behaviors experienced. Tukey post-hoc comparisons of the three groups indicated that mothers who experienced situational couple violence did not differ significantly from mothers who experienced violent coercive control or no violence and no control on the number of different harassing behaviors they reported. Even though there was no significant difference between the three types based on number of different harassing behaviors, the overall ANOVA was significant.

Protective strategies. A one-way ANOVA was used to test for differences among the three types of IPV on the mothers' use of protective strategies both in the year before they separated and since separation. Use of protective strategies in the last year before separation differed significantly across the three types. Tukey post-hoc comparisons of the three groups indicated that mothers who experienced situational couple violence engaged in significantly fewer protective strategies before separation than mothers who experienced violent coercive control, but significantly more than those who experienced no violence and no control. Another one-way ANOVA was used to test for differences among the three types of IPV on the mothers' use of protective strategies since separation. Use of protective strategies since separation differed significantly across the three types. Tukey post-hoc comparisons of the three groups indicated that mothers who experienced situational couple violence showed no significant difference in use of protective strategies from mothers who experienced violent coercive control, but they engaged in significantly more protective strategies than those who experienced no violence and no control.

Main reasons for divorce. Infidelity was the most common reason for divorce among mothers who experienced situational couple violence ($n = 5$, 27.8%). The majority of mothers who experienced violent coercive control ($n = 10$, 22.7%) reported physical or mental abuse as the main

reason for filing. Finally, for mothers who experienced no violence and no control being unhappy in the relationship was the main reason ($n = 5, 18.5\%$).

Chapter Four: Discussion

The current study addresses a gap in IPV literature by providing an in-depth examination of variations within the experiences of 18 mothers who reported situational couple violence during their marriages. Analyses showed that mothers experienced violence varying from minor and infrequent to severe and frequent, as well as a wide range in level of fear, with eight mothers reporting very high levels. After separation, eight mothers were harassed by their former partners to some degree. All mothers reported engaging in protective strategies in the last year before they separated. Mothers who reported situational couple violence differed significantly from those who reported violent coercive control in that they experienced less severe and frequent violence, as well as lower levels of fear, and engaged in fewer protective strategies before separation; however, they did not differ from mothers who reported violent coercive control on use of protective strategies after separation. Mothers who reported situational couple violence reported significantly more severe acts of violence and engaged in more protective strategies before separation than those who reported no violence and no control. There were no significant differences between mothers who reported situational couple violence and those who reported violent coercive control and no violence and no control pertaining to the frequency or total number of harassing behaviors after separation.

The results confirm and extend existing research on types of IPV in several ways. First, research has generally conveyed situational couple violence as less frequent and less severe compared to violent coercive control (Johnson & Leone, 2005). The current findings show that during marriage, mothers who reported situational couple violence experienced significantly less severe violence, fewer total acts of violence, and less fear than those who reported violent coercive control. Johnson (2008) also acknowledges that situational couple violence can include severe and frequent violence, which is illustrated in Linda's experiences (case 2).

Women also reported varying experiences with harassing behaviors and use of protective strategies. Mothers who reported severe and frequent situational couple violence experienced

outcomes similar to mothers who reported violent coercive control such as engaging in protective strategies and experiencing harassing behaviors after separation, which also supports prior literature (Johnson, 2008; Johnson & Leone, 2005). Currently, domestic violence shelters focus their services more on women who are experiencing violent coercive control, which could potentially be isolating for women experiencing situational couple violence who do not have that context of control and are generally thought of as experiencing minor and infrequent forms of violence (Johnson, 2008). Shelters may be providing services for women experiencing severe and frequent situational couple violence, but their overarching focus on violence within the context of control may not adequately address the needs of women who experience no control. Prior research has shown that women experiencing situational couple violence may benefit more from counseling, or participating in conflict management interventions with their partner (Johnson, 2008). Also, if women experiencing situational couple violence, in general, report that violence is not a central part of their relationship a shelter's focus on getting them out of that relationship based on the violence may create a disconnect between the wants and needs of the woman and the shelter personnel.

Second, research has shown that fear can affect various aspects of a relationship that involves violence (Johnson, 2006; Olson et al., 2008; Ross, 2012). Although mothers who experienced situational couple violence reported significantly less fear than mothers who experienced violent coercive control and no significant difference from no violence and no control, the qualitative case studies illustrate how fear is still prevalent in some mothers' experiences. For example, Linda (case 2) reported that she felt owned and controlled by John, and like she was programmed to react a certain way to him. These reports of fear may be due to severe violence; however, there may be other reasons that mothers report fear that are not directly related to violence. Thus, it is important to understand the context within which these mothers are experiencing fear. Divorce in general is correlated with higher levels of fear (Olson et al., 2008) and could be a contributing factor to all 18 mothers' reports of some fear. Divorce could also account for mothers reporting levels of fear high

enough to meet the battering cut-off score, indicating important limitations of the WEB for identifying battering in a divorcing sample as it may tap into sources of fear not related to violence.

Finally, none of the women who reported situational couple violence reported physical abuse as the main reason they filed for divorce. This is consistent with prior research that women in relationships that involve situational couple violence may not consider themselves to be abused or in a violent relationship (Johnson, 2008); thus physical abuse may not be the most salient problem in their relationship.

The findings should be considered in the context of several limitations. First, the small sample size and descriptive case study analyses did not allow for more advanced statistical analyses. Further research is needed with a larger sample to determine the effects of the different variations within situational couple violence on women, and for a better understanding of these variations in comparison to no violence and no control and violent coercive control. Second, by analyzing quantitative data qualitatively we were unable to elaborate on issues such as fear or reasons for divorce. Future research can address this by obtaining more in-depth data on these variables. Lastly, to help distinguish between the effects of divorce and the effects of being in a violent relationship, longitudinal research is needed. Longitudinal analyses could also provide a more detailed picture of the context, nature, and effects of situational couple violence over time. Such analyses also may help to better explain the role of fear.

Despite the limitations, this study provides insight into the diverse experiences of women who report situational couple violence. These findings have important implications for future research and practice, and begin to address the unique needs of women experiencing situational couple violence. Further empirical and theoretical work is needed to replicate these findings and further our understanding of what this type of violence entails and the effects it has on women.

References

- Anderson, K. L. (2008). Is partner violence worse in the context of control? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(5), 1157-1168. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2008.00557.
- Ansara, D. L., & Hindin, M. J. (2010). Exploring gender differences in the patterns of intimate partner violence in Canada: A latent class approach. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 64, 849-854. doi: 10.1136/jech.2009.095208.
- Archer, J. (2002). Sex differences in physically aggressive acts between heterosexual partners: A meta-analytic review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 7, 313-351. doi:10.1016/S1359-1789(01)00061-1.
- Bell, M. E., Goodman, L. A., & Dutton, M. A. (2007). The dynamics of staying and leaving: Implications for battered women's emotional well-being and experiences of violence at the end of a year. *Journal of Family Violence*, 22(6), 413-428. doi: 10.1007/s10896-007-9096-9.
- Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J., & Stevens, M.R. (2011). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Campbell, J. C., & Boyd, D. (2000). *Violence against women: Synthesis of research for healthcare professionals* (NJC Document No. 199761). Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.
- Davies, L., Ford-Gilboe, M., & Hammerton, J. (2009). Gender inequality and patterns of abuse post leaving. *Journal of Family Violence*, 24, 27-39. doi: 10.1007/s10896-008-9204-5.
- DeKeseredy, W. S., Rogness, M., & Schwartz, M. D. (2004). Separation/divorce sexual assault: The current state of social scientific knowledge. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 9, 675-691. doi: 10.1016/j.avb.2003.08.004.
- Fanslow, J. L., & Robinson, E. M. (2010). Help-seeking behaviors and reasons for help seeking reported by a representative sample of women victims of intimate partner violence in New Zealand. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 25(5), 929-951.
- Frye, V., Manganello, J., Campbell, J. C., Walton-Moss, B., & Wilt, S. (2006). The distribution of and factors associated with intimate terrorism and situational couple violence among a population-based sample of urban women in the United States. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 21(10), 1286-1313. doi: 10.1177/0886260506291658.
- Gelles, R. J., & Straus, M. A. (1988). *Intimate violence: The causes and consequences of abuse in the American family*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Glass, N., Koziol-McLain, J., Campbell, J., & Block, C.R. (2004). Female-perpetrated femicide and attempted femicide. *Violence Against Women*, 10(6), 606-625. doi: 10.1177/1077801204265016.

- Goodman, L., Dutton, M. A., Weinfurt, K., & Cook, S. (2003). The Intimate Partner Violence Strategies Index: Development and application. *Violence Against Women, 9*(2), 163-186. doi: 10.1177/1077801202239004.
- Graham-Kevan, N., & Archer, J. (2003). Intimate terrorism and common couple violence: A test of Johnson's predictions in four British samples. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 18*(11), 1247-1247. doi: 10.1177/0886260503256656.
- Hardesty, J. L., & Ganong, L. H. (2006). How women make custody decisions and manage co-parenting with abusive former husbands. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 23*(4), 543-563. doi: 10.1177/0265407506065983.
- Hardesty, J. L., Khaw, L., Chung, G. H., & Martin, J. M. (2008). Coparenting relationships after divorce: Variations by type of marital violence and fathers' role differentiation. *Family Relations, 57*, 479-491. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2008.00516.x.
- Haselschwerdt, M. L., Hardesty, J. L., & Hans, J. D. (2011). Custody evaluators' beliefs about domestic violence allegations during divorce: Feminist and family violence perspectives. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 26*, 1694-1719. doi: 10.1177/0886260510370599.
- Holtzworth-Munroe, A., Meehan, J. C., Herron, K., Rehman, U., & Stuart, G. L. (2003). Do subtypes of martially violent men continue to differ over time? *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 71*(4), 728-740. doi: 10.1037/0022-006X.71.4.728.
- Johnson, M. P. (2005). Domestic violence: It's not about gender – or is it? *Journal of Marriage and Family, 67*(5), 1126-1130. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2005.00204.x.
- Johnson, M. P. (2006). Violence and abuse in personal relationships: Conflict, terror, and resistance in intimate partnerships. In A. L. Vangelisti, & D. Perlman (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships* (pp. 557-576). New York: Cambridge University. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511606632.031.
- Johnson, M. P. (2008). *A typology of domestic violence: Intimate terrorism, violent resistance, and situational couple violence*. Boston: Northeastern University.
- Johnson, M. P. (2011). Gender and types of intimate partner violence: A response to an anti-feminist literature review. *Aggression and Violent Behaviors, 16*, 289-296. doi:10.1016/j.avb.2011.04.006.
- Johnson, M. P., & Leone, J. M. (2005). The differential effects of intimate terrorism and situational couple violence: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey. *Journal of Family Issues, 26*(3), 322-349. doi: 10.1177/0192513X04270345.
- Johnson, M. P., Leone, J. M., & Xu, Y. (2008, November). *Gender, intimate terrorism, and situational couple violence in general survey data: The gender debate revisited – again*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council on Family Relations, Little Rock, AR.

- Kelly, J. B., & Johnson, M. P. (2008). Differentiation among types of intimate partner violence: Research update and implications for interventions. *Family Court Review*, 46(3), 476-499. doi: 10.1111/j.1744-1617.2008.00215.x.
- Kimmel, M. S. (2002). 'Gender symmetry' in domestic violence: A substantive and methodological research review. *Violence Against Women. Special Issue: Women's use of violence in intimate relationships Part I*. 8(11), 1332-1363. doi: 10.1177/107780102762478037.
- Krishnan, S. P., Hilbert, J. C., & VanLeeuwen, D. (2001). Domestic violence and help-seeking behaviors among rural women: Results from a shelter-based study. *Family Community Health*, 24(1), 28-38.
- Kurz, D. (1996). Separation, divorce, and woman abuse. *Violence Against Women*, 2, 63-81.
- Leone, J. M., Johnson, M. P., & Cohan, C. L. (2007). Victim help-seeking: Differences between intimate terrorism and situational couple violence. *Family Relations*, 56, 427-439. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3729.2007.000471.x.
- Mechanic, M. B., Weaver, T. L., & Resick, P. A. (2008). Factors for physical injury among help-seeking battered women: An exploration of multiple abuse dimensions. *Violence Against Women*, 14, 1148-1165. doi: 10.1177/1077801208323792.
- Nicolaidis, C., Curry, M. A., Ulrich, Y., Sharps, P., McFarlane, J., Campbell, D., Gary, F., Laughon, K., Glass, N., & Campbell, J. (2003). Could we have known? A qualitative analysis of data from women who survived an attempted homicide by an intimate partner. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 18, 788-794. doi: 10.1046/j.1525-1497.2003.21202.x.
- Olson, C. E., Kerker, B. D., McVeigh, K. H., Stayton, C., Van Wye, G. & Thorpe, L. (2008). Profiling risk of fear of an intimate partner among men and women. *Preventive Medicine*, 47, 559-564. doi:10.1016/j.ypmed.2008.08.005.
- Ross, J. M. (2012). Self-reported fear in partner violent relationships: Findings on gender differences from two samples. *Psychology of Violence*, 2(1), 58-74. doi: 10.1037/a0026285.
- Ross, J. M., & Babcock, J. C. (2009). Gender differences in partner violence in context: Deconstructing Johnson's (2001) control-based typology of violent couples. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 18, 604-622. doi: 10.1080/10926770903103180.
- Simpson, L. E., Doss, B. D., Wheeler, J., & Christensen, A. (2007). Relationship violence among couples seeking therapy: Common couple violence or battering? *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 33(2), 270-283. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.2007.00021.x.
- Smith, P. H., Earp, J. A., & DeVellis, R. (1995). Measuring battering: Development of the Women's Experience With Battering (WEB) Scale. *Women's Health*, 1, 273-288.
- Smith, P. H., Smith, J. B., & Earp, J. A. (1999). Beyond the measurement trap: A reconstructed conceptualization and measurement of battering. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 23, 179-195. doi: 10.1111/j.1471-6402.1999.tb00350.x.

- Smith, P. H., Thornton, G. E., DeVellis, R., Earp, J., & Coker, A. L. (2002). A population-based study of the prevalence and distinctiveness of battering, physical assault, and sexual assault in intimate relationships. *Violence Against Women, 8*(10), 1208-1232. doi: 10.1177/107780102320562691.
- Sonis, J., & Langer, M. (2008). Risk and protective factors for recurrent intimate partner violence in a cohort of low-income inner-city women. *Journal of Family Violence, 23*(7), 529-538. doi: 10.1007/s10896-008-9158-7.
- Stith, S. M., Amanor-Boadu, Y., Miller, M. S., Mehusen, E., Morgan, C., & Few-Demo, A. (2011). Vulnerabilities, stressors, and adaptations in situationally violent relationships. *Family Relations, 60*, 73-89. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3729.2010.00634.x.
- Straus, M. A. (2011). Gender symmetry and mutuality in perpetration of clinical-level partner violence: Empirical evidence and implications for prevention and treatment. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 16*, 279-288. doi: 10.1015/j.avb.2011.04.010.
- Straus, M. A., Hamby, S. L., Boney-McCoy, S., & Sugarman, D. B. (1996). The Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2): Development and preliminary psychometric data. *Journal of Family Issues, 17*(3), 283-316. doi: 10.1177/019251396017003001.
- Tolman, R. M. (1992). Psychological abuse of women. In R. T. Ammerman & M. Hersen (Eds.), *Assessment of family violence: A clinical and legal sourcebook* (pp. 291-310). New York: Wiley.
- Yin, R.K. (2009). *Case study research: Designs and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.