



IS MUTUAL VIOLENT COMBAT (MVC) A GENDER NEUTRAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE?

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Theoretical attention on female perpetrators of partner violence often centers on men's experiences and theories of masculinity, leaving women's experiences, motivations, and participating factors largely under-examined. In tandem with current public debates about whether theories on intimate partner violence are gender neutral, this qualitative analysis examines variations of control and physical aggression, and women's relative motivations during bidirectional violence. A typology introduced in Johnson (2006) identifies *mutual violent combat* as one of four types of intimate partner violence. During mutual violent combat, two partners who engage in mutual physical aggression partake in a battle for control (Miller and Meloy 2006). This study uses the model of mutual violent combat and findings from focused interviews to describe patterns of control performed by the participants and their partners to explore bidirectional violence. Findings in this study indicate that the mutual violent combat model does not clearly measure women's use of control tactics, and limits the understanding of how and why women perform hostile bidirectional violence.

Bidirectional intimate partner violence is a form of systematic abuse experienced by both intimate partners. The violence may be physical, sexual, or emotional in the context of control. Most research on bidirectional intimate partner violence examines women's victimization rather than their perpetration of violent abuse. Among studies that survey women perpetrators, a debate exists concerning whether women are equally or more likely than men to engage in or initiate violent behavior. The current research explores mutual bidirectional violence, domestic violence entailing partners who perform physical violence "mutually". The *mutual violent combat* model, a type of intimate partner violence classified in a current typology, is applied in this theoretical investigation of bidirectional violence (Kelly and Johnson 2008; Wangmann 2011).

Studies examining the mutual violent combat model focus their attention specifically on each partner's use of "coercive control". As per the model, power emerges through an exchange of violent coercive control tactics. Each partner uses coercive controlling conflict resolution strategies to excite violent and coercive behavior. However, the existing theoretical framework on mutual violent combat does not measure reciprocal use of control types other than coercive control.

Among the population in this study, violent partners rarely performed exact or comparable measures of control. This finding is consistent with research on physical aggression and domestic violence (Miller and Meloy 2006). This study describes women's reported use of control during physically aggressive partner violence. The goal of the current study is to offer a comprehensive understanding of women's use of power during bidirectional intimate partner violence. The analysis of power offers a conceptual understanding of control, which is applied to assess

whether the mutual violent combat model offers a gender neutral explanation of men and women's violence.

Mutual Violent Combat

The *mutual violent combat* model offers a framework for understanding bidirectional violence. Johnson (2006) introduces mutual violent combat as one of four types of physical aggression and control in a typology of intimate partner violence (see Table 1: Johnson's typology of intimate partner violence). Johnson and Ferraro (2000) define mutual violent combat as a battle of control between two aggressive partners who are violent and vying for control (Johnson 1999, 2000; Miller and Meloy 2006). Each partner is likely to use a variety of controlling behavioral tactics and aggressive conflict resolution strategies to confine and regulate the other, such as psychological abuse and explicit threats (Tjaden and Theonnes 2000; Yodanis 2004). According to the mutual violent combat model, the reciprocal performance of control over the other partner and symmetrical use of physical violence determines their intent or determination to commit violence mutually.

Table 1: Johnson's typology of intimate partner violence

Types of Intimate Partner Violence	Physical Aggression and Control
Violent resistance	Perpetrator can be violent and non-controlling but in a relationship with a violent and controlling partner
Situational couple violence	Perpetrator can be violent and non-controlling and in a relationship with a partner who is either nonviolent or who is also violent and non-controlling
Mutual violent combat	A violent and controlling perpetrator may be paired up with another violent and controlling partner
Intimate terrorism	Perpetrator can be violent and controlling and in a relationship with a partner who is either nonviolent or violent and non-controlling

This study finds that mutual violent combat abuse is likely to be conditioned by conflict over decision-making. During the fight or mutual competition, each partner expresses power by positioning themselves or their ideas as being naturally superior. Each abuser is likely to insult and degrade the other, potentially making the partner feel threatened or helplessness. Data and findings on the aforementioned conduct have nearly an exclusive focus on masculine behaviors (Vangelisti and Perlman 2006).

Methodology

This qualitative study applies a centered perspective to explore four women's perceptions of perpetration and victimization that occurred during their experiences of bidirectional intimate partner violence. The participants were an optimal study population because each reported their violent performances as being more violent or consistent with the domestic violence performed by their partners. The interview included questions such as, "What were your experiences of violence? How did you respond to your experiences? What did you do before the violent event(s) occurred? How did your partner respond?" The primary objective was to learn and assess how each participant perceived their own experiences of bidirectional intimate partner violence. The interviews were recorded and transcribed with participants' consent and pseudonyms were established (Aaliyah, Renee, Debra, and Sasha) to protect each participant's anonymity.

This study considered the mutual violent combat model from Johnson's typology as a primary framework to explain women's experiences of bidirectional violence. The framework included a two-dimensional relationship between physical aggression and control that required both partners to perform coercive control tactics during the violent experience. However, Johnson's model automatically centered the experiences of subject(s) who controlled the relationship, and in many cases overlooked women's reported perspectives. The mutual violent combat model also disregarded the context of violence when women's experiences were not positively associated with aggression or control. Johnson's model implied that women's violence echoes patterns of male aggression, which inspired the need to examine whether the model entailed a gender neutral theory.

Gender Neutral Theory

For the past two decades, researchers have debated about whether there is gender symmetry in intimate partner violence (Archer 2000; Johnson 2006a; Graham-Kevan and Archer 2003). For instance, family violence theorists who use general samples have argued that during everyday tensions and conflicts of family life, women are as violent as men in intimate relationships (Straus 1999). Some researchers have sought out gender-specific theories to explain men and women's violence separately, while others argue that the alleged symmetrical nature of violence lends to use of universal theories to explain violent aggression.

Johnson alleges that the controlling physical conduct performed by both partners during mutual violent combat is gender symmetrical, and claims that the model offers a gender neutral analysis. An ongoing perspective of gender symmetry during intimate partner violence contends that women have more access to power in relationships and have become more violent because they are likely to take on traditionally masculine roles. The patriarchal context is about the systematic subjugation of women, and men's use of force as an instrument to control women. In tandem, Johnson's model of mutual violent combat alleges that the contextual motivation for violence is attributed to men emulating patriarchal traditions, or women adopting traditionally masculine forms of violent aggression.

This study offers conclusive evidence that the mutual violent combat model limits or omits findings on women's motivations and responses to domestic violence. Hence, the mutual violent combat model fails to consider multiple historical, cultural, or situational factors that influence women's physical and emotional responses. The patriarchal context of the model is not a gender neutral interpretation because it overlooks other potential motivations for women's perpetration such as previous exposure to violence and other occurrences of abuse.

To fully assess women's violence, a gender neutral theory should consider perpetration and victimization. Previous studies have found that women's responses to violence are often conditioned by previous experiences of victimization. In most cases, policymakers and activists engage wide-ranging efforts to end various forms of oppression enacted against women. Without considering the appropriate context and motivation for violent aggression, offenders may be criminalized, mistreated, and demonized. In this study, women's reported motivations for intimate partner violence varied depending on the context of violence.

Although participants and their partners abused each other, a context of masculine traditions did not always explain women's motivations to hit. In the analysis of control, this study extends the framework of the mutual violent combat model to include additional interpretations of control. Women's motivations to hit were uncovered in the analyses of coercive control (control over the partner's conduct), situational control (control over the situation), and coercive

emotional control (use of coercion to regulate the partner's emotions). The analyses of types of control confirmed that the degree and types of coercive control, or control over a partner are not performed symmetrically among participants and their partners. Partner's use of control was not related when the physical violence was performed reciprocally. The following analysis considers multiple types of control and is useful in a gender neutral analysis of intimate partner violence.

Analysis of Types of Control

The term "mutual" as a characterization of bidirectional violence has been terribly misleading in studies that fail to consider varying degrees of control and different frequencies of brutality such as of physical, emotional, and verbal abuse. This study considers women's participation in bidirectional spousal violence, and describes types of control to consider use of power during bidirectional violence. This analysis of control examines regulatory conduct, relationship conflict, emotional responses, motivations to hit, and use of physical aggression.

The current study describes controlling conduct performed by four women (Aaliyah, Renee, Debra, and Sasha) during their experiences of bidirectional intimate partner violence. This analysis also distinguishes types of control to examine whether reciprocated physical violence entails specific uses of control that are performed. The analysis introduces three classifications of control exerted during reported cases of partner violence: (1) coercive control, (2) situational control, and (3) coercive emotional control. This classification method is consistent with studies on patterns of violence among dating, cohabiting, and married couples that examine modes and classifications of control (Holmes and Murray 1996; Swan and Snow 2002; Rosen et al. 2005).

Coercive Control

This study examines coercive control as psychological manipulation that is used to subjugate partners, make them dependent, and regulate how they perform everyday activities. Coercive control entails a violent collective bargaining process that occurs when couples become violent or threaten to hurt each other. Coercive control is instigated during mutual fights that resemble wars. Coercive control was exhibited by Aaliyah, Debra, Renee, Sasha, and their partners. Some conceptions of coercive control were similar among multiple couples, while others were only applicable to the experiences of one partner or one couple. Coercive control tactics reported by participants included: (1) retaliation, (2) mirror punishment, (3) isolation, (4) intimidation, and (5) restraint techniques.

Retaliation. Retaliation is an empowering violent act that is implemented to relieve tension and frustration. Participants reported a concern that they make their partners experience mutual pain. For example, Debra retaliated when her partner insulted her in front of her co-workers. Debra's retaliation was spontaneous, rather than premeditated. When he attacked her verbally, she struck him again. Whether he had a knife, or was unarmed, Debra relied on her natural strength and physically defeated her partner during every instance of bidirectional violence. When Debra won a fight, she simultaneously controlled her partner by retaliating to limit his conduct.

Revenge is a form of ruthless and aggressive retaliation that involves coercion, but requires minimal authoritative control over the partner. However, revenge was temporarily effective because winning served as a form of therapy. Winning ultimately became a way to let their partners know that "they could not be controlled and the partners could not destroy their lives."

Rather than expressing concern about winning a fight, Aaliyah retaliated to injure her partner as a form of revenge. Her retaliation was empowering but, it did not mark her partner's defeat. Aaliyah seized temporary control of her boyfriend when she won a fight. Her control was temporary because its scope was limited to a physical defeat. Winning did not alter Aaliyah's submissive position in the relationship. She gained minimal control over her partner. Although the partner was physically larger, Aaliyah felt authoritative. Aaliyah enacted most violence defensively but her vengeance was ruthless and mutually aggressive.

Sasha defined her retaliation in a unique way. She implemented revenge as a way to process pain. Sasha exorcised all of the rage, anger, or bitterness employed by her partner. Sasha performed any aggressive action necessary to be certain that her partner experienced more pain than she had ever undergone. Oftentimes, the partner restrained Sasha and would not retaliate. Sasha also retaliated verbally, threw objects, destroyed her husband's property, and hit him. She reported that retaliation relieved tension and frustration.

Premeditated physical aggression is another method of retaliation. Renee typically committed reactive and premeditated violence when a specific circumstance triggered rage or despair. Renee thought the acts through critically before reprimanding the father of her children for cheating. Aaliyah's violence was also premeditated. Aaliyah spent much time deliberating and carefully devising ways to injure, but not kill her partner. Thus, when he hit, Aaliyah was readily able to react and defeat him successfully. Her plan of attack was deliberate and thorough. When Aaliyah became frustrated and ready to attack, she also predicted situations that would trigger her partner's violent responses. This finding is consistent with evidence that intimate partner violence can be both premeditated and impulsive in Patrick (2006: 484).

Mirror Punishment. Mirror punishment is a type of aggressive conduct that serves as retribution for harm inflicted. For example, one partner who strikes another is later stuck in the exact same way, or a partner inflicts similar injuries in response to previous victimization. In this study, during exchanges of physical violence, the prevalence of violence was partly a function of what each partner could get away with in a specific setting. Mirror punishment was first introduced in Howard-Bostic (2011) as a style of female-perpetrated intimate terrorist violence. For example, Sasha and Aaliyah performed or experienced mirror punishment that entailed one partner enacting the same action that their partner enacted upon them. Sasha had an "an eye for an eye" philosophy on domestic violence. She ranked actions and violence accordingly. Sasha believed that she deserved beatings because she cheated in the relationship while her partner supporter her financially and cared for her children. Sasha applied this philosophy throughout her real life experiences. Her husband perpetrated a vengeful attack, disfiguring her face, leaving her with two blackened eyes and a swollen nose. Sasha forgave her husband because she believed that she deserved the beating. Mirror punishment also explains why some partners remain in violent relationships.

Isolation. The act of socially isolating one partner may increase the other partner's control in the relationship. Acts of isolation may also be used to establish a victim's lack of independence or discourage their social connections with others. For example, Renee and the partners of Aaliyah and Debra performed patterns of isolation. Renee exerted control in response to her partner's communication with other women. She attempted to isolate her partner as a way of managing his whereabouts and with whom he spent his time. Renee noted that she felt "shattered and in excruciating pain" following her partner's episodes of infidelity and abusive responses to her conduct. According to Renee, her partner was a compulsive liar, especially when he tried to conceal his whereabouts. She reported that he refused to disclose information to her because they were not married. Renee's brutal disputes typically involved destroying property and throwing

items. As also reported in Caldwell et al. (2009), participants in this study were likely to show passive-aggressive signs of jealousy by becoming moody when their partners excluded them from plans.

Aaliyah's partner would leave her in their home, but coerced her to stay alone. In her efforts to reach out to others, he would insult or violently attack her. Aaliyah reported that isolation gradually became a **double standard** in her partner's favor because he cheated in the relationship while prohibiting her from communicating with any other men or women. Aaliyah reported that she never contemplated cheating. On the other hand, Debra's husband also attempted to dictate her patterns of communication. He was dissatisfied with Debra's companionship with her co-workers at construction sites. Debra admitted calling home during the course of her workday to check in with her husband. She said, "I did it voluntarily to keep the peace." These findings are consistent with findings in Ferraro (1997) and Sullivan et al. (2005) on women's methods of coping with violence.

Intimidation. Intimidation occurred when one partner threaten the other or directed violence toward an object (broke an item or hit an object). Renee, Aaliyah, and Sasha threw items at their partners such as sneakers, plates, pictures, broken glass, and various objects that were likely to knock their partners unconscious. Renee also attempted to run her partner over with a car. Participants reported that intimidation was not performed exclusively. For instance, when Sasha's husband became angry, he punched holes through their wall to frighten her.

Restraint Techniques. Control and Restraint (C&R) techniques are life-threatening forms of control. Security personnel and law officials use similar techniques, but jurisdictions require personnel to use an open-minded assessment of the situation and potential outcomes (Hamberger and Potente 1994). Although Aaliyah was able to predict that C&R techniques would result in severe injury if applied improperly, she did not adhere to those sanctions while performing bidirectional violence. While restraining her partner using methods learned during previous training, Aaliyah also yelled verbal mandates urging her partner to provide financial support to her and their unborn child, or die. Aaliyah used excessive physical contact to control and injure her partner. While initiating and resisting, Aaliyah used a combination of professional aggressive tactics to subdue and control her partner.

Situational Control

Situational control pertains to unique circumstances that involve conflict and perceptions of a situation. Situational control deals with controlling self and, or a situation rather than gaining control over the partner. During the specific situation, conflicting responses may also entail ideas and feelings that threaten a partner's ability to perform physical or emotional control. As noted in Holmes and Murray (1996), situational conflict gradually affects relationship satisfaction negatively through an accumulation of negative interpretations. When reported in family conflict studies, cases of situational conflict show relatively equal rates of assault performed by men and women (McHugh and Frieze 2006; Simpson et al. 2007). Like coercive control, situational control also leads to severe cases of violent combat. The participants in this study report five modes of violent situational control: (1) control of body, (2) infidelity, (3) abuse of a child, (4) substance or alcohol use, and (5) financial constraints.

Control of Body. Control of the body occurs when one partner performs these actions without the other partner's consent and carries them out using coercive control with the intention of causing degradation that is emotional, sexual, and physical. Among participants in this study, sexual violence occurred when one partner physically assaulted the sexual parts of the other

partner's body or made sexual demands with which the other partner was uncomfortable. For example, Aaliyah reported experiences of sexual violence during which her partner overpowered her, leaving her defenseless. During forced sexual conduct, Aaliyah reported having bruised arms that resulted from being held down. The sexual violence performed against Aaliyah involved physical force, coercion, and psychological intimidation. In effort to take control of the situation, and of her body, Aaliyah responded to sexual violence with brutal attacks against her partner. Overtime, Aaliyah became fearless of sexual attacks and refused to allow successful sexual attacks, which would have resulted in physical penetration. While securing control of her body, Aaliyah said, "His hits hurt, but I didn't feel the pain until the fight was over." This finding is consistent with research in Yodanis (2004) on unconscious perceptions of fear and violence following multiple occurrences of physical and sexual violence.

Infidelity. Alongside rape, another type of sexual manipulation relates to a partner having sexual affairs outside of the relationship. During infidelity, the sexual "other" is a threat to a current partner that may entail the presumption that a partner has not fulfilled the other partner's sexual needs or expectations. In this study, the consequences for infidelity varied in each relationship. As recounted in Kishor and Johnson (2004) and Driscoll et al. (2006), hitting or punishment for losing control occurred when a partner was unfaithful. For example, when Sasha became dissatisfied with the conditions in her relationship, she would strike her partner and threaten to leave to be with the "other" man. Whenever Sasha mentioned this man, her husband degraded her self-image and highlighted her failed role as a wife. Sasha also justified her own victimization by reporting that hitting an unfaithful partner is "understandable violence" or a legitimate response. However, by leaving or taking the children along with her, the act of infidelity placed Sasha in a position of power. Situational control using physical violence during infidelity was performed by both partners with the intent of causing jealousy and, or distress.

Abuse of a Child. As reported in in Ness (2004), some children suffer immediate consequences or long-term medical consequences of child abuse, while others are more likely to experience psychological effects of greater severity than others. Three participants performed violence while the safety of their children was at risk. In most cases, violent attacks were less severe when children were present. Sasha and Aaliyah were pregnant during an instance of domestic assault. Both partners controlled violent situations by including their children in episodes of conflict. Debra exposed her son to one violent attack, but he was not injured. Debra did not report the incident.

Since child maltreatment often warrants Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement, only one case of child abuse was reported among couples in this study. During the reported case, an infant was critically injured. During the hospital visit, the pediatric unit filed a report with CPS and refused to return Sasha's child. The disposition reporting the allegations held both partners responsible for the abuse. Sasha lost custody of her daughter following a dispute with her husband. As Sasha's partner held the infant during a fight, the shaking caused retinal hemorrhaging.

Substance abuse. Participants reported that their partners' alcohol consumption promoted aggressiveness and excessive violence. Substance and alcohol abuse presented various conflicting pathways to relationship violence. The violent outcome of each situation was conditioned by partners' use of alcohol or other controlled substances. In cases of alcoholism, women's violent aggression was enacted in response to the intoxicated partner's threatening conduct. The participants alleged that their partners were also more threatening, hostile, and damaging in a nonphysical way after drinking excessively. Although partners under the influence

inflicted, or attempted to inflict physical harm, each man was a target for physical defeat. For example, Debra performed attacks deliberately when her husband was intoxicated.

Control over Finances. Participants in this study indicated financial conflict as a pathway leading to domestic violence, with financial stress perpetuating their use of situational control during arguments and physical disputes. Although the role of money varied during financial conflict, there was rarely a point of consensus during each reported participant experience. In some cases, participants and partners used different forms of pressure to leverage their partner's behavior.

Two participants reported that their husbands were more violent during battles to maintain or gain financial control. For example, conflict emerged in Aaliyah's relationship because their role expectations varied drastically. Aaliyah's frustration stemmed from her claim that the partner treated her as a nuisance and failed to tend to the financial needs of herself and their unborn child. Pregnant and unemployed, Aaliyah depended on him for food and shelter. Rather than meeting her requests, the boyfriend denied Aaliyah access to money and failed to tend to the maintenance of their home. Aaliyah also noted that her partner was materialistic and believed that he could buy her things to make her love him. Use of situational control occurred when her partner would purchase gifts to improve their state of affairs. Nevertheless, Aaliyah became physically violent, rejecting the purchased items by sometimes throwing or ruining the objects. She claimed to take control of the situation by rejecting his perspective and asserting her own perspective violently.

Similarly, financial conflict in Sasha's relationship involved her husband's perceived ownership of their material resources. Sasha reported that her husband used his rights to their rental unit to maintain power whenever he became angry; he threatened to kick her out of their home following arguments or disagreements, especially when he was unable to prove his case. Although she contributed financially, all of their finances were documented in Sasha's partner's name. Sasha had felony charges on her criminal record and was not approved for a lease agreement. Sasha demanded situational control by retaliating physically and refusing to leave.

Debra managed her family's finances. She paid bills and accumulated their savings. Debra reported that her husband was academically illiterate, unable to manage finances, and unable to read or complete employment applications. Debra's weekly compensation covered household expenses, which left her husband's income for food and other mandatory costs. Although Debra generated the majority of their income, her husband was displeased with the allocation of his spending money. On occasion, Debra used the financial control to leverage the distribution of power in the relationship. When her husband demanded that she share money in their family account, Debra refused to share control. Debra gave her partner an allowance, but refused to allot money to her partner for leisure spending. During financial disputes, Debra would hit her partner when arguments spiraled out of control.

Coercive Emotional Control

Emotional reactive violence is an aggressive response that occurs when an individual feels threatened. Such feelings may cause frustration or lead to physical or emotional harm of a partner. Studies on mutual violent combat find that perpetrators use these "ongoing" nonphysical tactics to maintain control over, or dominate their partners. Corresponding literature examines emotional control during coerced persuasion, emotional torture, or indirect abuse (Coker et al. 2000; Hughes and Jones 2000). The four types of coercive emotional control performed among

partners and participants in this study include: (1) psychological trauma, (2) conquest, (3) jealousy, and (4) strained attachment.

Psychological Trauma. Constant use of negative comments and verbal abuse are forms of coercive emotional control. In this study, instances of violence often stemmed from the cumulative effects of psychological trauma or verbal abuse. Partners exchanged offensive comments, making the other feel lower than the other felt. Insults sent signs of the other partner's lack of appreciation or respect. For example, Sasha reported increases in her hostility when her partner "violated" her by making downtrodden comments. Aaliyah alleged that her partner made offensive comments about both her and her unborn child such as, "I hope you and the kid die." Similar comments escalated to violence, which overtime became physically hostile.

Conquest. In some cases, partners attempted to gain control of the relationship through an argument, but suddenly, the argument reached a climaxing point and the other partner exhibited a more expressive type of physical violence. Participants reported experiencing emotional arousal that stemmed from "winning an argument." The anger during a fight became an energizing emotion that pulled them out of their misery temporarily. The rush and arousal was purportedly satisfying. For some participants, winning a fight was equivalent to overpowering the partner's ideas, which embodied control over the situation.

Jealousy. Violent partners are likely to use their partner as targets to act out feelings of anger, confusion, and jealousy (Henton et al. 1983, McNeely and Mann 1990). Renee was a jealous partner. Her partner yelled derogatory comments only when she admitted to going through his belongings. Renee accused her partner of flirting, checked up on him, and insisted that he was not being truthful. When she searched his apparel, violating his privacy, he responded with violence. Overtime, Renee was no longer afraid of her partner's violent responses. Renee's emotional attacks developed as she became more insecure of his conduct, and in turn, both partners became more violent. Renee and Debra's partner displayed similar situational patterns of jealousy and possessiveness that incited physical battles.

Strained Attachment. When a partner does not express emotions as expected, including adoration, loyalty, and affection, the imbalance of affection is a sign of strained attachment. Some partners may also expect a deeper level of emotion. For example, when Renee's partner was insensitive to her emotions, she felt defeated, and instantly became physically aggressive. His arrogance and nonchalant attitude also prompted her violent aggression; Renee poured bleach into her partner's saltwater aquarium, killing his fish. Similarly, Sasha was enraged about her husband's disregard for her feelings. Sasha was aware that she could not change or control his conduct. So, she would take charge of the situation by throwing objects, cutting, or scratching her partner because of his 'I don't care' attitude.

Conceptual Challenges

Johnson's model of mutual violent combat only offers an analysis of a unique type of bidirectional violence that involves both mutual coercive control and mutual physical violence. Given this implication, there are several elements to consider in future studies applying the mutual violent combat model. Although all reported hostile bidirectional violence did not meet the current criteria for mutual violent combat, this study found that multiple types of control may exist during mutual physical violence. For example, partners may perform situational or emotionally controlling abuse rather than coercive controlling abuse. There may also be a broader context that extends beyond masculine traditions of violence that distinguish both women and women's motivations for violence. By limiting the study of mutual violence to

instances where control and violence occur simultaneously, the early conceptual model of mutual violent combat limited the understanding of how and why women perform hostile violent abuse. Hence, the model did not offer a gender neutral analysis of mutual bidirectional violence. The following sections describe conceptual challenges in the mutual violent combat model: (1) situational control, (2) external factors, and (3) ability to control.

Situational Control

Research supports the claim that women who commit mutual violent abuse use coercive control tactics to achieve control over their violent partners (Johnson and Leone 2005). However, this study confirmed that women also use situational and emotional control tactics during hostile cases of bidirectional violence. During situational conflict when the severity of violence was symmetrical, violence occurred because choices or ideas were disregarded or belittled during a given situation. Women used situational control to deal specifically with their ability to make decisions about responsibilities, rules, or conditions during situation. Since women reported that violence was often conditioned by opposing viewpoints, they were likely to aggress to maintain their own power.

For example, Debra performed situational control during mutually violent bidirectional episodes. She held more economic power in her marriage, but did not abuse her ability to influence decisions by using coercive controlling forms of violence. In some crisis situations, Debra made choices that her partner believed were reserved for men only. In response, he initiated vicious brawls regarding his disapproval of Debra's financial choices. However, Debra's physical aggression was typically violent and more severe than the physical aggression performed by her husband. His disrespectful tone often prompted Debra's rage, but his coercive controlling demeanor did not motivate Debra to initiate fights. In this situational context, Debra reported attacking her husband when his remarks echoed her childhood experiences. During Debra's childhood, physical violence was an adult's leading response to frustration and anger. Nonetheless, after being abused as a child, Debra refused to be mistreated. Debra punched her husband and threw him onto the floor or across the room. Following each fight, Debra would immediately submit to her husband's needs because her intent was not to control his ideologies. She would apologize for lacking anger management skills during the situation. Debra reported her most severe violent attacks as stress related responses.

External Factors

By exploring pre-existing conditions as factors that were external to violent outbreaks, this study offered a rich understanding of emotional responses that may have triggered women's performance of bidirectional violence. These emotional responses often contradicted the motivations proposed in the mutual violent combat model. In the analyses of mutual violent combat, patriarchal traditions are proposed as the control-oriented broader contextual justification for mutual performance of physical aggression. Given the diverse experiences reported by the study population, it was unrealistic to hypothesize that each woman was motivated by patriarchal traditions of masculine authority. Correspondingly, this study found that the mutual violent combat model overlooked any current or previous state of affairs that may have prompted anger or aggressive conduct.

For example, family was an institutional influence, or was involved during a participant's first experience of violence. Either as victims, or as witnesses, participants reported how they learned that people with whom they were closest to would be the individuals who hit them. They also learned that using violence was an acceptable way to respond to conflict. Aaliyah used violent techniques learned during her childhood to respond to violent abuse. She was disciplined with severe corporal punishment. As a teen, Aaliyah did not cause fights, but when provoked, she behaved aggressively or violently toward others. She reported her stepfather's physical abuse toward her mother and siblings as normal behavior. He and Aaliyah's mother led self-defense courses and often practiced these methods inappropriately in the home with their children. When Aaliyah's stepfather became angry, he used these same techniques to abuse her. Aaliyah contended that she was not a violent or hostile woman. Nevertheless, it did not take long for her to replicate her stepfather's behavior in her own relationship.

Data on external factors such as history of violence and abuse, access to social support, and addictions offered conclusive evidence that Johnson's two-dimensional relationship between violence and control limited or omitted findings on women's motivations for initiating and responding to intimate partner violence. The model also failed to consider intersectionality of multiple historical, cultural, or situational factors that were reported as being interrelated or occurring simultaneously.

Ability to Control

Studies on mutual violent combat hypothesize that an ongoing exchange of coercive control occurs when two violent partners engage in ongoing battles. All participants in this study performed ongoing violence that was more severe than violence performed by their partners. However, regardless of their determination to exert coercive control, most participants failed to achieve control over their partners. Although the women made a conscious effort to perform violence, their ability to control was limited. The violence performed by women was not directly associated with the extent of control performed or achieved.

The findings include depictions of men laughing at their female partners during fights, even during fights that resulted in severe injury of the male partner. In these cases, aggression was mutual, but the severity of violence and ability or use of control was not. Findings show that the mutual violent combat category often classifies instances of violence as being performed mutually when violence and control are not reciprocated mutually. This study also finds that women who physically overpower a partner during multiple fights may not win control over the intimate partner.

For example, Sasha's partner used violent physical aggression to resist her violent rage. When she hit him, he laughed, and shoved her down to the ground so hard that permanent marks were left on her skin. However, he grew tired of her violent outbursts and used more force during resistance as time progressed (often engaging in physical battles for control). His violence was never mutual or as physically violent as Sasha's. Sasha continued in her efforts to take charge of both the partner and relationship. She mandated that her partner share his whereabouts and harassed him about abandoning his peer network. Nevertheless, the harder she fought the more ridiculous the situation was to her partner. She also performed many other types of violence that Johnson's typology would characterize as coercive controlling behavior. Research evaluating the intersection of violence and control during bidirectional violence should consider a partner's ability to perform a desired degree of control. Future research should also examine women's role as the aggressor of bidirectional intimate partner violence.

Limitations of Study

The current findings were limiting because this study used one perpetrator's observation of violence entailing two intimate partners (Graham-Kevan and Archer 2003). Given the diverse characteristics of the sample population, data from multiple partners was inaccessible for many reasons. Some participants shared their experiences secretly while enduring the abusive relationship, and others were divorced or uncertain of the previous partner's whereabouts. The single informant sample was necessary because this study examined data compiled for a perspective that has been neglected in research.

The current study also failed to include an assessment tool to survey the degree and severity of control. Without an assessment tool that measures control, distinctions between models of intimate partner violence and distinctions of mutual violence will remain inevitably vague or inconsistent. However, the goal of this study was not to measure the severity of each type of control in the continuum of physical aggression. Since abstractions of control in analyses of mutual violent combat are often vague or flawed, this study identified samples of different types of control used by each partner. The types of control explored in the current study extended findings in Kirkwood (1993), which examined coercive controlling behavior, but did not classify specific types of control such as situational control and coercive emotional control. Future research examining types of control performed should offer an analysis that ranks levels of control performed.

Conclusion

In this study, "mutual performance" during bidirectional violence varied by couples' unique types of aggression exercised during different fights. Among all participants in this study, (1) severity of physical violence was implemented mutually or more severely than violence performed by partners who also intended to harm them. In some instances, (2) successful performance of control was not similar or common. However, for most, (3) emotional injury was consistent or reciprocally performed over time. Since there were no cases where physical violence, control, and emotional injury were all performed mutually, the model of mutual violent combat failed to explain these cases of hostile bidirectional intimate partner violence. *The current findings offer evidence that an analysis will uncover "mutual conduct" by exploring aggression types (such as violence, control, and emotional abuse) individually rather than as intersectional components.*

The mutual violent combat model was sufficient for assessing the severity and frequency of female-perpetrated intimate partner violence, but the vagueness of its conceptualization of control and the misanalysis of context limited findings on whether women in the study and their partners performed mutual violence. Although there was always a perceived winner and loser of a fight, sometimes partner's fought without pursuing an immediate goal of controlling their partners. Furthermore, rather than performing control with the intent to dominate the other partner, women's control was often attributed to agency, or their ability to act or coexist. Johnson's conceptualization of mutual violent combat did not fully describe the relationship between women's ability to act and their use of violent emotional responses. *New research must extend the conceptualization of control to better describe women's intentions and motivations for violent conduct.*

The mutual violent combat model also failed to offer a gender neutral conceptualization of participants' unique violent experiences. The mutual violent combat model overlooked various

contexts of women's violence and their intricate motivations for violent behavior. Each participant expression of physical violence and corresponding emotional responses were directly associated with both current and childhood exposure to violence, which is consistent with other studies that associate greater aggression with men and women's exposure to violence (Jacobson and Gottman 1998; Simmons, Lehmann, and Craun 2008). To explain possible cases of gender symmetry or to describe women's experiences of intimate partner violence, research must explore external factors such as support, previous history of violence, or exposure to abuse as alternative contexts to explain use of control. *Research on mutual violence should consider multiple contexts of violent behavior.*

The current findings indicate that (1) when both men and women may have equally violent tendencies, their individual potential for successful performance of violence may vary by the partner's size, personality, and the context of violence; (2) specific forms of aggression may be performed mutually, but it is unlikely that men and women's motivations and aggression will be performed mutually; (3) a partner's intent to control may be comparable while simultaneously, their ability to execute control over the other partner may be limited; and (4) research should carefully assess each partner's previous violent conduct, degree of control performed, emotional responses, and severity of injuries independently before labeling the full violent experience as "mutual violence". *This study confirms that there is a strong need for more focused research on gendered distinctions for violence performed during bidirectional violence.*

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