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Re-Theorizing Intimate Partner Violence through Post-Structural Feminism, Queer Theory, and the Sociology of Gender

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Academic Editor: Judy Hughes

Received: 1 June 2015 / Accepted: 1 September 2015 / Published: 7 September 2015

Abstract: In this article, we apply three theoretical frameworks, poststructural feminism, queer, and sociology of gender to the issue of intimate partner violence (IPV) in order to better account for heterosexual female perpetration and same-sex IPV. Although the traditional feminist paradigm—that assumes men use violence as an extension of patriarchy against their female victims—has been useful in explaining some instances of IPV, it does not adequately frame instances of heterosexual female perpetration and IPV in same-sex relationships. Therefore, in this article we seek to add to existing literature by re-theorizing IPV using poststructural feminism, queer, and sociology of gender perspectives, and their attendant understanding of power as dynamic, fluid, and relational and gender as both interactional and structural, in order to open up new ways of framing IPV and encourage new lines of empirical research resulting in better policy proscriptions and treatment interventions.

Keywords: IPV; heteronormativity; theory; sociology of gender; poststructuralist feminism; queer; LGBT; hegemonic masculinity; gender structure; doing gender

1. Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) scholarship in the U.S. has primarily focused on heterosexual male offenders and heterosexual female victims [1–5]. In this article, we focus on the U.S. context (e.g., the cultural, political, and linguistic milieu). We use the term intimate partner violence as defined as the use of physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and/or psychological aggression by a current or former intimate partner [6]. Here, we are principally concerned with patriarchal terrorism (see [7]) as it possibly occurs in same-sex relationships. We understand that the multidimensional construct of abuse subsumes physical violence but also includes relationship control tactics like intimidation, coercion, manipulating children, economic abuse, *etc.* We also acknowledge the ways family violence and feminist scholars have understood violence. The former view violence in intimate relationships as bi-directional and neither coercive nor controlling (see [8]), while the latter see it as heterosexual violence directed by men at their female intimate partners to maintain power and control over them (see [9]). Johnson’s seminal work [7,10,11] shows the definitional difference between feminist and family scholars by positing that each were talking about two mutually exclusive, non-overlapping phenomena. He asserted that the family violence scholars were targeting for understanding what he termed “common couple violence”. This occurs between two partners in a relationship with relatively equal power. In these cases, neither party feels scared or threatened by the other party, nor is the violence perceived as coercive or controlling. Johnson claims this is the type of violence captured in national surveys and community samples where the family violence scholars find relatively equal rates of violence perpetration between men and women (see for a comprehensive review [12,13]). In contrast, Johnson described the kind of violence found in criminal justice samples and in studies involving women in DV shelters as “patriarchal terrorism”. This is the type of violence more typically viewed as “domestic violence” where the man is directing the concept of “multidimensional abuse” described above towards his female intimate partner with the goal of controlling and dominating her. Such a view comes to dominate the predominant feminist paradigm within the U.S. context.

The predominant feminist paradigm in the U.S. for IPV—that men abuse women as an extension of patriarchy in order to assert power and control (e.g., [14–18], see for extensive analysis [19])—has proved invaluable in unveiling the patriarchy present in domestic relationships and de-normalizing men assaulting their wives. Although not the only feminist approach within this field, this prevailing paradigm in U.S. research, proving very useful in explaining why men abuse women in opposite-sex relationships, influenced a number of policies (e.g., the Violence Against Women Act) to outlaw such forms of IPV and to prioritize certain treatment interventions (e.g., Duluth model) over others. In the wake of these policies, recent research has begun to show that in the U.S., instances of IPV appears to be bidirectional, meaning both partners participate in some sort of violent behavior (e.g., physical violence, stalking, psychological aggression, *etc.*). This point as addressed above is hotly contested within the field, therefore, see for a comprehensive review [12]. Moreover, scholars have found that women can initiate violence almost as often as men in heterosexual relationships [4,13,14]. Even less scholarship has focused on IPV in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Queer relationships, but the little empirical work that exists has found that IPV occurs at rates similar to or greater than heterosexual couples [20–25]. Similar to traditional feminist approaches’ focus on the consequences of IPV for victims and perpetrators, by applying poststructuralist feminist, queer, and sociology of gender

theoretical approaches we seek to highlight the meanings, context, and impacts of violence in order to better identify responses needed to address such abuse. Furthermore, in adding to existing feminist scholarship and in using these perspectives we aim to show ways in which gender and sexuality are constitutive of dynamics, not just outcomes, in instances of IPV (see for example [26]).

To this end, we begin with a discussion of poststructuralist conceptualizations of power, how it differs from traditional feminist formulations of power, and how such understandings of power can inform scholarship on the problem IPV with an eye towards developing more adequate policy proscriptions and treatment interventions. From here, we apply sociology of gender to the problem of IPV to show the ways that different articulations of masculinities and femininities inform the ways violence is deployed and experienced at the individual, interactional, and structural levels of analysis. In utilizing these perspectives to better understand occurrences of IPV, specifically perpetration by female offenders in heterosexual relationships and occurrences of IPV within same-sex relationships, we aim to add to previous scholarship and to work towards future developments of more informed models of interventions and more effective policies concerning IPV perpetrators and victims.

2. Poststructuralist Feminist Theoretical Approach

One distinct and important insight of a poststructuralist feminist theoretical approach is its understanding of power. Applying such an approach to intimate partner violence allows us an opportunity to view how power may be exercised and deployed differently from a traditional feminist perspective of patriarchal top-down forms of power. It is necessary to note that many theorists produce both poststructuralist feminist and queer scholarship. In this section, we apply a poststructuralist feminist approach to same-sex perpetrators of IPV as an example to show how the deconstruction of binary categories reveals ways power operates for both victims and perpetrators in domestic violence occurrences. Deconstruction is a method that: (1) identifies ways in which binaries are operating; and (2) investigates the effects of how these binaries operate. The method of deconstruction shows these binaries (e.g., heterosexual/homosexual, white/black, man/woman, *etc.*) are inherently unstable because of the subjugation of the second term in order to define the first.

Deconstructing identity categories is important in order not to reproduce or sustain dominant discourses and dominant arrangements of disciplinary power [27]. Poststructuralist feminist theory utilizes a Foucauldian conceptualization of power [28]. According to Foucault's understanding [27,29], power operates in a field of relations. People, based on their social location, use tactics and strategies available to them to negotiate dynamics of power. Groups consist of identities (e.g., men/women, heterosexual/homosexual). Since identity is formed within and by discourses, a Foucauldian model of power provides a framework to understand how identities are produced and how people may use particular strategies and tactics, available to them based on their social location, to enact resistance to dominant forms of power. This is a key difference from a Marxist model of power in which the dominant group controls all forms of power and the subordinated group does not. A traditional feminist paradigm of IPV, e.g., [15,16] uses such a Marxist model of power in that men use violence against women as an expression of patriarchy, a defining quality of society's superstructure. Foucault [27,29] argues that Marx was not wrong about power, but that Marx's articulation of how power operates is just one of several ways in which it functions. By focusing on only this one form, we may miss the

other ways power operates; namely discursive forms of power. Similarly, by focusing on patriarchy, which assumes that men as a group hold power in a static form, as the main explanation for domestic violence, misses the other ways power operates in relationships, generally, and IPV, specifically.

A structuralist feminist paradigm with its attendant focus on the ways structures inform individuals' lived experiences, while productive in revealing such structural dynamics, may limit our ability to understand the ways women exercise their full agency. Understanding power in such a structural sense may mean missing other ways that power is deployed, as Foucault argues. For example, as some scholars have argued, men exercise violence in intimate partnerships as a form of patriarchy and that women only enact violence as a form of self-defense [13–17]. Such a formulation reduces a woman's ability to enact violence in any way that is not self-defense. This means that only men may really initiate IPV, and that women, even if they initiate violence in a given interaction, are always already acting in self-defense. This framework creates a social norm that men are the only ones capable of many forms of and motivations for violence in intimate partnerships, and women are not capable of any form of violence other than self-defense. Interestingly, although some research has been unwilling to acknowledge women's capacity to initiate violence for reasons other than self-defense, some research has been willing to show that women abuse their children [30] establishing not only their ability to initiate violence but also the ability for society to frame them as abusers in this light. In order for women to be understood as wielding power in this way, power is understood as static and binary and functions as power over, e.g., men have power over women, and women have power over children. Such a framing also constructs a discursive binary, men are always already powerful, potential-aggressors and women are constructed then as always victims-in-waiting, powerless, and never true aggressors. Like all binaries, the first term relies on the second term for its definition in opposition to it and subordinates the second term. The privileging of one group over the other establishes the first group as the norm or referent in a binary construct. Deconstructing this binary, we find that women are just as capable as men for initiating violence, in fact they initiate violence almost as often as men in their domestic relationships and have a range of motivations for doing so [1,2,31–33]. Although some scholars, notably Johnson's typology of IPV [7,10,11], have addressed a range of motivations people have for using violence to mediate their intimate relationships, and this has proved useful to some in the field, using a poststructuralist approach can also be helpful in addressing deployments and arrangements of power within occurrences of IPV as well as institutional responses (e.g., agencies, police, courts, policy, *etc.*). This approach adds insights into how this binary obscures the uses of power, who has access to power, and how they might wield it. Furthermore, this perspective adds much needed insight into both policy and treatment interventions. As scholars have persuasively argued [33], IPV policy in the U.S. perpetuates an illusion of inclusion through inclusive language that unintentionally serves to obfuscate key dynamics of IPV. In terms of treatment of IPV in the U.S., we add to the growing chorus of scholars that argue that a one-size-fits-all treatment model for IPV perpetrators, e.g., the Duluth Model, e.g., [34], should be replaced by culturally relevant and specific treatment options (see for instance [33,35–38]). Finally, we argue all treatment interventions should address issues of sexism, homophobia, racism, and classism in order to address not only the personal motivations of perpetrators but also the ways society materially disadvantages some while privileging others.

As poststructuralist feminist theorists [28,39,40] have argued, taking the discursively constructed category of women as always already socially constituted by a sense of shared oppression risks

overlooking women as material subjects with their own histories and experiences, with their own motivations for and experiences of violence. The dangers of such an elision have consequences for understanding how power works. Feminist discourses, such as traditional feminist paradigm of domestic violence e.g., [15,16], in producing an always already constituted group of women, separate from their histories or particularities, and in describing this group as always already powerless defines this category, women, by its very subordination. Doing so defines power as a binary: men, the oppressors, have it, use it to enact violence in intimate relationships, and women, the oppressed, do not have power, and are the victims of such violence. Such delineations constrain strategies to resist oppressions and reinforce the gender binary between men-as-aggressors and women-as-victims. Put concisely, framing women as an already constituted coherent group regardless of race, class, or sexuality, buttresses binary structures of men and women, in which men dominate women. Precisely because when talking about men and women, we assume that what we think of as men and women is the same as what you think of as men or women, poststructuralist feminist theory deconstructs these commonplace assumptions which allows us to understand and discuss with a degree of specificity for both individuals and groups. Viewing women as an already constituted homogenous group, without taking into account the historical and particular context of particular groups of women, creates a binary structure of power, in which the dominant have it (e.g., men), and the subordinated do not (e.g., women). In this way, women can only be understood as victims and using violence as self-defense. Not only does common sense tell us this is not true, but recent research also finds that women use violence in ways other than self-defense, such as jealousy, control, anger, and frustration [1,2,10,31,35]. Such a simplistic reduction also ignores the various ways groups of women, along lines of race and class, are different in terms of access to power and resources. Intersectionality, the assertion that identity categories (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, *etc.*) are interconnected [40,41], offers another means to better understand what resources are available to women and how they may access and exercise them (for excellent analysis and application of intersectionality to domestic abuse see Crenshaw [41]). In advancing our understanding of these issues, intersectionality provides the space to investigate instances of intimate partner violence as it relates to co-constituted identity categories. Put simply, intersectionality provides the space to ask: In what ways does one's womanness inform this instance of IPV? In what ways does her sexual orientation inform this behavior? Race? Class? And, in what ways does the intersection of these identities contribute to IPV? Similarly, intersectionality also helps us understand the ways members of institutions that respond to IPV, such as treatment professionals, identify and perceive identities of clients. This is an important and valuable tool to help us understand both how violence is experienced and how it may differ across both individuals within the community and at different times for the same individual.

Furthermore, these binary structures of power limit the ability to create and utilize strategies and tactics to combat oppressions, since either one belongs to a group with power or one belongs to the powerless. Deconstructing this binary of men-as-aggressors and women-as-victims allows us to understand the many different ways women use and experience violence in their intimate partnerships in both heterosexual and queer relationships. A structural feminist paradigm that explains IPV as an expression of patriarchy then is one way to understand how power operates in our society, e.g., [15,16]. However, as research suggests [33] it cannot account for all uses of violence in mediating intimate partner conflict. Although there may be commonalities across these different social locations as to why people

use violence in their intimate relationships, there are also important differences. This point is most evident in instances of female perpetrators in heterosexual relationships and same-sex IPV. The poststructural feminist framing allows us to frame violence by female perpetrators in heterosexual couple in a different way. Rather, based on her social location (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, *etc.*) certain tactics and strategies for using power are available to her. Violence may be one of these strategies. However, the violence she performs cannot be understood in the same way that a man using violence against a woman would be understood. Because of his social location, different tactics and strategies are available to him. Since we live in a patriarchal and heteronormative society, he has distinct advantages over the female batterer. Although both may punch, how we understand their acts of aggression and power differ because of the ways society is gendered and sexuality is organized.

Using a poststructural feminist approach to instances of IPV, we show that women cannot be understood as powerless and men cannot be depicted as having all the power as assumed in a U.S. traditional feminist paradigm. Women can and do exercise power; sometimes in forms similar to how men use power (such as to perpetrate IPV). However, because we live in a society that privileges men and heterosexual people, how we understand the use of this power is different. Therefore, policy proscriptions and treatment interventions should reflect these differences in order to better account for the various experiences, motivations, meanings, and contexts of perpetrators and victims.

3. Queer Theoretical Approach

Queer theory, similar to poststructuralist feminist theory, uses a Foucauldian model of power to understand dynamics of power, with a particular focus on discursive forms of power [42–47]. In this section, building off the work of Cannon and Buttell [33], we apply a queer theoretical perspective to the problem of same-sex IPV to show the ways that heteronormativity operates both within the feminist paradigm and treatment interventions. Just as traditional feminists convincingly argued that gender is a central category of individual, interactional, and institutional living, necessary for understanding oppression, so too is sexuality, since heterosexism and homophobia are deeply embedded in every social institution [42,43,47]. Therefore, a queer theoretical approach seeks to articulate identity binary constructions, with a central focus on those relating to sexuality, and their effects. In doing so, queer theory [42,43], like poststructuralist feminist theory, seeks to analyze, critique, and reveal normativity itself, such as heteronormativity, rather than focus on part of the binary with hierarchical power (e.g., man, heterosexual), which relies on the subjugated term for its definition (e.g., women, homosexual), as the traditional feminist paradigm of IPV does [15,16]. Heteronormativity are the practices associated with heterosexuality, which are discursively constructed as the norm or referent. Those who self-present or whose practices are different from what is socially recognizable as heterosexual are discursively constructed as deviant. In this way, queer theory, similar to poststructural feminist theory, focuses on that which is normed rather than on the identity binary construction of heterosexual/homosexual, e.g., [42,46]. Exposing that which is defined as normal, revealing the power dynamics and inequalities that enable it as such, and to bare the differences that matter, these are the tasks of queer theory.

Applying queer theory to IPV, similar to the two other theoretical approaches presented here, provides unique insights into how we understand IPV, generally, and same-sex IPV, specifically. Similar to a poststructural feminist critique of the man/woman binary, a queer theoretical approach deconstructs a discursively constructed binary of heterosexuality/homosexuality. By identifying and analyzing how heterosexuality functions as a norm in our society, queer theory can broaden our understanding of same-sex IPV. Rather than trying to understand same-sex IPV with a heteronormative framework, such as a traditional feminist paradigm that assumes a male perpetrator and female victim [16], a queer theoretical approach can show how such heteronormative approaches may not only interfere with effective treatment interventions but may also add to the stress of those marginalized by their sexuality.

Similar to the example given above, a lesbian batterer with her female victim understood using the traditional feminist paradigm limits our ability to understand how the lesbian batterer is not using patriarchy to enact violence. Rather, given queer theory's Foucauldian conceptualization of power (as elaborated above) we can understand the use of violence in same-sex relationships as one tactic available to queer people based on their social location. Although the violence may look the same as a male or female perpetrator in a heterosexual relationship, we understand it differently since society is one that privileges heterosexuality, and thus heterosexuals enjoy less restricted access to more dominant forms of power. By deconstructing the heterosexual/homosexual binary, a queer theoretical framework reveals the ways that heterosexuality functions as a norm in our society. The traditional feminist paradigm reinforces this norm when it assumes men as perpetrators and women as their victims.

Applying queer theory to IPV produces several insights. First, it reveals this heteronormative binary. Second, it undermines the discursive power of assuming men as perpetrators and women are their victims; such assumptions render invisible both female IPV perpetrators as well as perpetrators and victims of same-sex IPV. Third, applying a queer theoretical perspective reveals that the assumption that men are batterers and women are their victims is a contingent arrangement. Importantly then, this arrangement is not fixed, and suggests that both women and men, queer and straight, have access to different strategies and tactics to deploy power. The amount and type of power will vary depending on many attributes (e.g., social location), but they all have access nonetheless. From this vantage point, it is easy to see that queer identified people are just as capable of exerting violence in intimate partnerships, though how we understand their use of violence may differ. In this way, a lesbian batterer's violence is not an extension of patriarchy, but rather just one relationship tactic available to her, which she can deploy against her partner at her discretion.

In the following discussion, we build on the poststructural formulations of power articulated above as they relate to advances in the field of sociology of gender. Applying this perspective, noticeably at the individual, interactional, and structural levels, to the problem of IPV we add to the field by conceptualizing the ways masculinities and femininities may illuminate new pathways for research, policy development, and treatment interventions.

4. Sociology of Gender Theoretical Approach

Theories of gender have undergone dramatic shifts in the last thirty years. These shifts are consistent with post-structural understandings of power that reimagine power as fluid, rather than static, in society. In the post-structural tradition, these theoretical shifts also deconstruct the gender

binary and call attention to the constructed difference between men and women through masculinities and femininities [48] and constructed complementarity between masculinity and femininity which results in heteronormative expectations [49]. Instead of conceptualizing gender in terms of “males and females”, gender is conceptualized through masculinities and femininities, which may be embodied by both males and females although with differing consequences. Being that the hegemonic gender structure associates power and violence with masculinity and it is assumed that both males and females may embody or practice masculinity, the sociology of gender offers a frame that assumes that both males and females can perpetrate IPV. Kristin Anderson [50] wrote an excellent article examining the ways in which the relationship between IPV and gender may be re-theorized. The following sections further expound her theorization of gender on the individual, interactional, and structural levels and its relationship with IPV.

4.1. Individualistic

Traditionally, IPV research has conceptualized “gender” as a binary independent variable measured by “sex” that may or may not significantly impact IPV perpetration. Here, distinctions should be made for clarification. West and Zimmerman [51] define *sex* as a “determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males” ([51], p. 127). *Sex category* is “achieved through application of the sex criteria, but in everyday life, categorization is established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one’s membership in one or the other category” ([51], p. 127). Therefore, one may associate with a particular sex category without meeting the criteria of that sex. Finally, *gender* refers to “the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category” ([51], p. 127). The examination of IPV against or between females and males (sex), those who identify as female or male (sex category), and those who embody feminine or masculine qualities (gender) should distinguish between these distinct groups. Studies that investigate the relationship between gender and IPV through the “sex” binary assumes differences between males and females without accounting for how gender as understood through masculinities and femininities influences behaviors for both sexes. Furthermore, this approach fails to account for gendered differences between those of the same sex as well as the differences in rates of IPV perpetration between same-sex individuals. Approaching IPV through the sociology of gender, utilizes a post-structural approach in how it understands the binaries of male *versus* female or masculinity as a characteristic of males and femininity as characteristic of females. Approaching gender through the lens of masculinities and femininities *deconstructs* the historically assumed essential, structured differences between males and females and, rather, assumes a more fluid understanding of gender by arguing that both males and females may embody both masculinities and femininities to varying degrees.

Connell [48] conceptualizes hegemonic masculinity as a particular place in society, an established set of practices, and the consequences of the collective embodiment of these practices on individuals, relationships, organizations, and institutions of domination. Vast amounts of empirical research examining masculinity identify hegemonic masculine characteristics as being domineering, violent, strong, effectively enacting violence, acting as the sexual subject or pursuer, and heterosexuality as components of hegemonic masculinity. Similarly, femininity is characterized by compliance, inability to use

violence effectively, physically vulnerable, and the sexual object of masculinity. It is also important to note that masculinity and femininity should be understood as fluid and contextual. The identifiers of masculinity and femininity are an empirical question that should be examined in particular contexts. With this in mind, some IPV studies utilize the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), which consists of individuals' self-assessments measuring to what extent they embody traits of masculinity and femininity, to examine the relationship between gender and IPV. These self-reports categorize individuals as masculine, feminine, or androgynous. While this approach assumes gender as something individuals decidedly "are" rather than understanding gender as fluid practices of individuals, it does push analyses slightly further in understanding individuals not simply as males and females, but as complex gendered beings. However, research that utilizes the BSRI fails to find a significant relationship between gender and IPV, both in perpetration and victimization [52,53]. Masculinity, at least measured in this way, does not prove to be a significant predictor of IPV. In fact, more "feminine" males and females reported high rates of IPV perpetration [54,55]. Other studies examine the relationship between gender and IPV by categorizing males and females by their attitudes surrounding men and women's gender roles. Although Sugarman and Frankel [56] hypothesized that male perpetrators holding traditional views of gender roles perpetrate at higher rates than males holding egalitarian views of gender roles, empirical findings presented weak and inconsistent support for these arguments.

Given that several studies reveal that IPV perpetration by females has increased over the last couple of decades and other research reveals that IPV perpetration occurs at equal or higher rates in LGBT relationships [53,57], scholars have argued that gender has little effect on the prevalence of IPV perpetration. This approach reduces gender to the practices of males and females and assumes that if males and females are equally violent then IPV is not gendered. These arguments only consider gender from an individualist perspective and fail to examine the relationship between IPV perpetration and gender on the interactional and structural levels. The following sections provide a theoretical framework for conceptualizing gender on the interactional and structural levels and for understanding the relationship between gender and IPV.

4.2. Interactional

In the last thirty years, social science disciplines have come to understand gender as a construction of society rather than essential natures of males and females, men and women. In so doing, researchers have examined ways masculinity and femininity are constructed by powerful institutions (e.g., religion, government, media) and how these hegemonic constructions of gender function as a force of societal control. As previously mentioned, Connell [48] conceptualizes masculinity as a particular place in society, an established set of practices, and the consequences of the collective embodiment of these practices on individuals, relationships, organizations, and institutions of domination. Some of the socially preferred characteristics and practices typically associated with hegemonic masculinity include: being domineering, violent, strong, effective in enacting violence, interested in heterosexual conquest, and acting as the sexual subject or pursuer as components of masculinity. Similarly, femininity is characterized by compliance, inability to use violence effectively, physically vulnerable, and the sexual object of masculinity. Through these practices, hegemonic masculinity maintains its privileged status, which is sustained through the establishment of the cultural ideal and institutional

power and influence (e.g., religious theologies, images and messages communicated through media, federal policies). Note: Please refer to Connell [48] to explore the intersection of hegemonic masculinity and race.

Complementary with Connell's conceptualization of masculinity and femininity, Butler [49] posits that heterosexual desire is the central feature that "binds the masculine and feminine in a binary, hierarchical relationship" ([58], p. 90). Heterosexual desire defined as an erotic attraction to difference, connects femininity and masculinity together as constructed complementary opposites. This ontological shift in understanding the construction of gender difference establishes the meaning of the relationship between masculinity (dominant) and femininity (subordinate). In this way, heterosexual desire is not only the foundation of the construction of masculinity [59–65] but the foundation of the "*difference between and complementarity of femininity and masculinity*" ([58], p. 90). As "hegemonic features of culture are those that serve the interests and ascendancy of ruling classes, legitimate their ascendancy and dominance, and encourage all to consent to and go along with social relations of ruling" ([58], p. 90), the difference between and complementarity of femininity and masculinity does not necessarily constitute hegemony. However, as "heterosexual desire marks both difference and complementarity in Western societies, the cultural construction of embodied sexual relations, along with other features of masculinity and femininity, defines a naturalized masculine sexuality as physically dominant in relation to femininity" ([58], p. 90).

Goffman's [64] theory of gender display states that "if gender be defined as the culturally established correlates of sex (whether consequence of biology or learning), then gender display refers to conventionalized portrayals of these correlates" ([64], p. 69). Goffman further conceptualizes gender displays as two-part exchanges consisting of statements and replies. In other words, "Gender is a socially scripted dramatization of the culture's idealization of feminine and masculine natures, played for an audience that is well schooled in the presentational idiom" ([51], p. 130). Furthermore, depending on the absence or presence of symmetry within interactions, these exchanges produce deference (hegemonic femininity) or dominance (hegemonic masculinity). Building on Goffman's theory, West and Zimmerman [51] argue that gender performance is an inevitable social process that all engage in at all times and present gender as "a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment" embedded in everyday interactions ([51], p. 126), which they term "doing gender". Viewing gender as an accomplishment or "an achieved property of situated conduct" shifts the focus from internal processes of the individual to the interactional and institutional spheres. In other words, "Rather than as a property of individuals, we conceive of gender as an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society" ([51], p. 126). In this way, gender is created through interactions *and* simultaneously structures interactions.

Given the cultural expectations of hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity, individuals are expected to follow established patterns of gender as we interact with others and are rewarded by others when we do. Similarly, those who do not conform to the established gendered structuration are likely to experience negative consequences in broader society. Ridgeway [65] writes, "Because we think 'most people' hold these beliefs, we expect others to judge us according to them. As a result, we must take the beliefs into account in our own behavior even if we do not endorse them. In this way, these shared cultural beliefs act as the 'rules' for coordinating public behavior on the basis of

gender” ([65], p. 149). The hegemonic relationship between masculinity and femininity is constructed in a way that only permits masculinity to be enacted by the gender category “man” and femininity to be enacted by the gender category “woman”. In this way, symmetry is achieved and the hegemonic relationship persists. Men who embody feminine characteristics (e.g., physically weak, compliant, object of masculine desire) threaten the “natural” relationship between masculinity and femininity and are, therefore, socially sanctioned. Connell [48] defines subordinate masculinities as masculinities associated with men who embody femininity (e.g., physical vulnerability, compliance, object of masculine sexual desire) in some way(s), therefore, homosexual masculinities are situated at the bottom of the gender hierarchy because hegemonic masculinity is conflated with heterosexuality. Even the possession of one feminine characteristic by a man is considered socially contaminating. As a result, men who embody characteristics of femininity are socially stigmatized (e.g., pussy, fag, wimp). Similarly, Schippers [58] terms women’s embodiment of hegemonic masculinity as “pariah femininities” because they are culturally considered an aggravation to the hegemonic relationship between masculinity and femininity. Women’s embodiment of traits widely understood as masculine (e.g., assertive, aggressive, breadwinner, sexual pursuer, independent) is simultaneously stigmatized and decidedly feminine (e.g., slut, bitch, lesbian). In best case scenarios, women who embody forms of masculinity may be portrayed in a positive light, however, considered anomalous and *tom-boyish* or “one of the guys” or “the man”. The existence of widely held understandings of how gender “should” be situated illustrates the hegemonic nature of the relationship between masculinity and femininity.

As gender beliefs function as cultural rules, they contribute to a narrow understanding of gender overall and lead to the sanctioning of explicit violations pertaining to gender. In this way, ways in which individuals “do gender” are resultant of gendered expectations and sometimes reactionary to social sanctions. Different from the conventional individualist approach to theorizing IPV, which understands IPV as the result of gender, the framework of “doing gender” allows for the theorization of gender as both an outcome and cause of IPV. For instance, given that effective use of violence is constructed as “masculine” in U.S. culture [48,66], men enact violence as a means to demonstrate masculinity and show others they are a “real man” particularly in situations that call their masculinity into question [67,68]. Some studies reveal that men perpetrate IPV when they perceive their female partners are threatening their authority or status in some way [67,69]. Financial success and stability is also constructed as an ideal of hegemonic masculinity. Some studies suggest that men use violence to compensate for falling short of this gendered ideal and find that men whose female partners are the breadwinners of the household perpetrate at higher rates [70–72]. In these ways, gender both acts as a predictor of IPV and is created through the perpetration of IPV (*i.e.*, an act of masculinity). As a result of how hegemonic masculinity is constructed, power is attained through “doing gender”, or more specifically “doing masculinity”, *and* is a result of gender.

The interactional approach to understanding the relationship between gender and IPV requires researchers to examine the context in which violence is perpetrated and variables that indicate particular power dynamics between partners. In this way, gender functions as a tool for understanding violence between male on female perpetration and male on male perpetration. Some research should be conducted on the ways masculinity is embodied between lesbian partners. If women partners consciously or unconsciously try to maintain gender symmetry within their relationship, an interactional perspective of gender may offer some explanatory power to female on female perpetration. For

instance, if one partner typically embodies more dominant qualities such as being the breadwinner or decision-maker (hegemonic masculinity) and the other typically occupies a position of deference (hegemonic femininity), then a situation that threatens the symmetry that exists in the hegemonic relationship between masculinity and femininity may impact the likelihood of IPV. This, of course, is an empirical question that should be explored further in IPV research.

4.3. *Structural*

Risman [73] conceptualizes gender as a social structure and posits that gender is embedded within individuals and throughout social life. Understanding the social construction of gender difference is key to understanding the production of gender inequality because unless we “see” differences between genders then we cannot justify inequality. For instance, the constructed complementary relationship that exists between masculinity and femininity justifies difference in ways that results in stratification and an unequal distribution of resources between men and women and between heteronormative couples and queer couples. Being that the relationship between masculinity and femininity functions as hegemony, it permeates through major institutions throughout society. For instance, religions construct theologies that reinforce the symmetrical relationship between masculinity and femininity (e.g., males in leadership roles and females in caring or assisting roles). The constructed assumption that marriage should only be between men and women maintains gender symmetry and impacts the passing of federal policies concerning same-sex marriage. Explicit or implicit sexism that exists in workplaces works toward maintaining men’s status in the public sphere and women’s status in the domestic sphere or, at least, in caring roles (e.g., nursing, social work, elementary school teaching). Furthermore, the inherent relationship of domination and subordination between hegemonic masculinity (e.g., strong, leader) and femininity (e.g., physically vulnerable, helper) results in the devaluation of women as evidenced by the well-documented wage gap [74–79], the glass-ceiling [80–90] and the low wages associated with female-dominated professions like teaching, social work, and childcare [74–77]. Here, Risman [73] situates gender on the same analytic plane as economics or politics and illustrates how the social structure of gender contributes to the inequalities that exist between women and men.

Approaching gender as a social structure creates new ways for examining the relationship that exists between IPV and gender. For instance, studies that examine African American IPV perpetrators find that institutionalized and internalized racism results in high rates of poverty within the African American community and both poverty and racism contribute to higher rates of IPV perpetration within African-American households [91–95]. Given the aforementioned discrimination and inequalities that exist between men and women as well as between heterosexual couples and same-sex couples, similarly researchers should investigate the relationship between gender and IPV on structural levels. For instance, some studies demonstrate that women in abusive relationships with men do not leave the relationship because they fear being unable to financially support themselves and their children [96,97]. Anderson [50] argues that economic consequences of leaving an abusive relationship are even more severe for LGBT couples. Other research finds that the threat of “outing” their partners to employers functions as a means of dominance and control in LGBT couples [98,99]. Researchers should conduct more in-depth analyses of how gender intersects with other variables like income, education, race, and sexuality to better understand the relationship between gender and IPV. For instance, several studies

indicate that household income functions as a predictor of IPV. Researchers should investigate the ratio of income between partners to better understand the relationship between power and gender and IPV rather than strictly the income of the household overall. Likewise, researchers should examine the effects of institutionalized and internalized sexism and homophobia on the prevalence of IPV perpetration. These findings would be relevant not only for the examination of perpetrators in the LGBTQ community but for the examination of heterosexual female perpetrators as well.

In light of a Foucauldian understanding of power, Deutsch [100] argues that if individuals “do gender”, then they have the power to “undo gender” as well. Evidence of “undoing” gender is tracked throughout history with shifts in federal and state policies concerning women and the LGBTQ community, the emergence of women in workplaces, the increase of women in positions of power, shifts in religious theology concerning the LGBTQ community and women, the representation of strong female characters in major media outlets, the hiring of openly gay talk show hosts by major television networks, and the development of more affirming or tolerant attitudes overall. Like any major structural shifts, “undoing gender” occurs more quickly on the individual level, a little less quickly on the interactional level, a little less quickly on the organizational level, and least quickly on the institutional level because institutions prove to be terribly obdurate. Ridegeway [65] describes the process of change as “cyclical” meaning that individuals’ attitudes may lead to change in organizations (e.g., inclusive policies) and inclusive organizational policies may lead to change within individuals. She compares these micro-changes’ impacts on macro structures to individual waves washing away a sandbar. As pockets of society “undo gender”, gender is de-constructed and re-constructed a little at a time. For instance, researchers found that women comprised only 14.6 percent of executive positions and 8.1 percent of the top executive earner positions at *Fortune 500* companies [101]. Furthermore, no women occupied executive officer positions in one-fourth of large corporations like Delta, Comcast, Apple, and Exxon Mobil [101]. Although these findings reveal that the hegemonic gender structure still reigns in the United States, they also demonstrate shifts in women’s representation in top positions of powerful companies given that no women occupied these positions thirty years ago. This is important for two reasons. First, the increase of women in higher paying professional roles may have an impact on the prevalence of IPV particularly in heterosexual relationships. As previously mentioned, studies show that men whose female partners are breadwinners perpetrate at higher rates, which may be result in “reclaiming” masculinity through violence [67,68]. It may also be the case that women who are breadwinners (*i.e.*, embodying hegemonic masculinity) may perpetrate IPV because they have the authority and power to do so. This hypothesis is relevant not only for heterosexual couples but for same-sex couples as well and should be explored through empirical inquiry. Secondly, as the hegemonic gender structure shifts, pockets of society begin to “do gender” differently. By this notion and to reiterate, hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity should be understood in the context of partnership, family, organization, neighborhood, religion, country, *etc.* With this in mind, more in-depth analyses of the relationship between gender and IPV should be conducted in order to not only understand how gender is constructed differently between perpetrators of various contexts, but also how it is constructed similarly between perpetrators of various contexts and how these constructions impact prevalence. Rather than dismissing gender as a key factor concerning IPV, the examination of IPV through the lens of gender on the interactional and structural levels propels researchers toward more in-depth understandings of the relationship between IPV and gender.

5. Conclusions

In this article we have sought to add to the existing literature in formulating a theoretical frame to further understand instances of intimate partner violence, specifically “patriarchal terrorism”, among heterosexual female perpetrators and same-sex perpetrators. Aspects of the current traditional feminist theoretical framework, as discussed throughout this article, inhibits our ability to accurately view the problem of IPV in LGBT relations, as scholars who study female perpetrators in heterosexual relationships have found [102–104]. Deconstructing gender and power binaries creates new opportunities to re-conceptualize IPV for male and female perpetrators in heteronormative couples as well as LGBTQ couples. As we aim to demonstrate, such theoretical developments as these are integral to advancing research, developing policy, and generating more adequate treatment interventions. In-depth examination of the relationship between gender, sexuality, power, and IPV should be further investigated through quantitative studies that account for structural variables (e.g., structural equation modeling), as well as through qualitative studies that address nuanced ways perpetrators understand and “do gender” on interactional levels. In this way, the development of more informed models of interventions and more effective policies concerning IPV perpetrators and victims may be achieved.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Wisner Center at Tulane School of Social Work.

Author Contributions

Clare Cannon wrote the introduction, the post-structural feminist and queer theoretical approaches. She organized materials and corresponded with editors and reviewers. Katie Lauve-Moon wrote the sociology of gender sections and conclusion. Fred Buttell assisted in editing and familiarity with the literature.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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