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Sex, Gender, and Relationship Type in the Relational Uncertainty of Victims of Partner Violence

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Intimate partner violence (IPV) affects victims in ways beyond initial abuse experiences. This study examines one of these victim experiences, that of relational uncertainty. Former IPV ($N = 345$, $n = 106$ males, 239 females) victims completed surveys based on their former heterosexual romantic relationships. Results indicated that male and female relational uncertainty experiences differed and corresponded with type of IPV relationship (i.e., situational couple violence [SCV] or intimate terrorism [IT]) and gender (i.e., masculinity) affiliation. Results are discussed in terms of how they both reinforce and challenge current theorizing about IPV and relational uncertainty. Both scholarly implications and practical applications to victims are presented.

KEYWORDS: self-uncertainty; partner uncertainty; relationship uncertainty; intimate terrorism; situational couple violence

In addition to the immediate physical and emotional pain caused by intimate partner violence (IPV), victims also may experience debilitating health problems such as depression and anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms including sleeplessness and irritability, and psychosomatic symptoms such as gastrointestinal problems and chronic headaches (Dutton, 2006; Lilly & Graham-Bermann, 2010). These costs of IPV may be further exacerbated by victims' uncertainty about their own and others' perceptions and volatile situations.

This study (a) examines relational uncertainty for male and female IPV victims and (b) connects relational uncertainty to IPV, sex, gender, and IPV relationship types. I begin by introducing relational uncertainty as applied to IPV theorizing, follow by describing study methods, and end by discussing results in terms of some practical applications for victims and theoretical implications for scholars.

RELATIONAL UNCERTAINTY AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Based on understanding of social norms, individuals anticipate situational outcomes and strive to predict others' reactions to their identities (Goffman, 1959). However, humans and situations are capricious. *Uncertainty* is the "subjective sense of the number of alternative predictions available" in a situation (Bradac, 2001, p. 458). Already present concerns (e.g., *topical uncertainty* such as victimization) may be further exacerbated by *social uncertainty* or inability to predict situations (Brashers, Neidig, & Goldsmith, 2004). Uncertainty, in general, references situational outcomes; *relational uncertainty*, in particular, refers to relationship contexts and is the "degree of confidence people have in their perceptions of involvement within close relationships" (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999, p. 264). Ambiguity in close relationships may be particularly salient in IPV, but no research has explicitly accounted for relational uncertainty in this context.

According to Knobloch and Solomon (1999), three sources produce relational uncertainty. Difficulty forecasting or explaining one's own relational involvement sparks *self-uncertainty*. *Partner uncertainty* occurs when individuals question a companion's involvement in the relationship. Finally, *relationship uncertainty* centers on people's ambiguities regarding their relationship as a social unit. Each source of relational uncertainty is comprised of themes. Self and partner sources contain themes of *desire* (e.g., emotions and dedication), *evaluation* (e.g., how the relationship is defined by each member), and *goals* (e.g., future intentions for the relationship). Relationship uncertainty includes the themes of *behavioral norms* (e.g., acceptability of actions), *mutuality* (e.g., reciprocity of partner's feelings), *future* (e.g., expected development of the relationship), and *definition* (e.g., characterization of current relationship status). Individuals may experience relational uncertainty from multiple sources at once or face only one source at a time (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002), but all sources and themes of relational uncertainty are potentially salient for IPV victims.

For Victims: Potential Relational Uncertainty Applications

Individuals experience self-uncertainty when they are unsure how to present identities to others (Brashers et al., 2004). Self-uncertainty for IPV victims, negotiating potentially stigmatizing identities, may be particularly detrimental. Knowing more about victims' potential self-uncertainty can facilitate counselors' targeting of specific themes (e.g., desire, evaluation, goals) when counseling victims to leave IPV relationships or to otherwise cope with victimization.

Second, not knowing what a partner will do or say next can result in victims' insecurity or fear in the form of partner uncertainty. Indeed, perpetrators, particularly of intimate terrorism (IT), often facilitate erratic behavior to exert power (e.g., psychological and physical enactments of coercive control) over victims (Walker, 2000); they maintain emotions as volatile (desire theme), are fickle in treatment of a partner (evaluation theme), and sustain capriciousness about relational prospects (goals theme) (Romero, 1985). Recognition of partner uncertainty can help IPV researchers

and practitioners identify severity, frequency, or type of abuse because some relationships (e.g., IT) are theorized to possess more sustained ongoing partner uncertainty than others (e.g., situational couple violence [SCV]; Johnson, 2008).

Finally, the relationship source of uncertainty exists for victims deciding to continue or end ambiguous relationships. Knowing what is relationally “appropriate” (behavioral norms theme), being secure in a partner’s reciprocal commitment and affection (mutuality theme), believing in likelihood of relationship continuation (future theme)—all may be experienced differently by people rationalizing staying with an abusive partner (Eckstein, 2010a). Knowing particular victims’ relational identities (self-uncertainty) and current relationship assessments (relationship uncertainty) can inform counseling strategies tailored to victims at varying stages of leaving IPV relationships (Khaw & Hardesty, 2009). Including evaluation of diverse victims’ relational uncertainty can aid practitioners in targeted approaches for working with specific identity (i.e., self) and interpersonal (i.e., partner and relationship) ambiguities for IPV victims.

For Scholarship: Potential Relational Uncertainty Implications

In addition to practical contributions, clearly delineating and studying relational uncertainty has important implications for IPV scholars. Many IPV theoretical perspectives assume relational uncertainty or an equivalent construct exists for victims. Relatively more overt incorporations are described in research on victims negotiating boundary management and IPV intrusion from ex-partners (Hardesty & Ganong, 2006), in application of the stages of change model to relational ambiguity in exiting IPV relationships (Khaw & Hardesty, 2009) and in the study of revealing IPV victimization to others (Eckstein, 2010b). More implicit inclusion of relational uncertainty is tacit in the cycle of violence stage of “tension building” (e.g., trepidation, unease proceeding abuse; Walker, 2000) and in many IPV relationship classifications characterized by fear, coercive control, and “crazy making” (Johnson, 2008; Romero, 1985).

Despite this integration in established IPV theorizing (both explicitly and more unspecified), IPV victims’ relational uncertainty remains untested. Therefore, because such examinations have the potential to contribute to both theory and practice, I asked the following research question:

RQ1: Which relational uncertainty sources and themes, if any, are present for IPV victims?

Generalizing research and resulting practical services to all victims is problematic, because IPV is varied and experiences are nuanced. Disparities exist in terms of IPV relationships (e.g., IT, SCV), victims’ sex (e.g., male, female), and victims’ genders (e.g., masculine, feminine). When studying IPV victims’ relational uncertainty, it is necessary to account for these differences.

Intimate Partner Violence Relationship Differences. One classification of IPV relationships was initiated by Johnson (2008), who initially outlined distinct IPV relationships. Two relationship types—*intimate terrorism* (IT) and *situational couple*

violence (SCV)—are based on frequencies, patterns, and types of abusive behaviors (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). *Coercive control* tactics are used in IT; these psychological tactics often are accompanied by physical and may include sexual abuse. Recent research accounting for the coercive control element in IPV relationships indicates it may be a motivator of IPV (Tanha, Beck, Figueredo, & Raghavan, 2010). Abuse in IT can escalate over time, and abusive incidents are more frequent than in other relationships (Johnson & Leone, 2005). According to Johnson, IT is believed (although this view remains disputed, e.g., Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011) more likely to be perpetrated by men and to result in fear, injury, and/or death for all victims than other IPV relationships. Another type of relationship, SCV is a violence escalated from conflict situations in which coercive control is absent. SCV is not theoretically characterized by predictable patterns of relationship violence, is not believed likely to escalate in severity over time (Johnson, 2008), conceptually involves fewer incidents of physical violence than IT (Johnson & Leone), is theorized as more likely to be mutually perpetrated by men and women, and is held to be the most prevalent IPV relationship type in the United States (Straus & Gelles, 1990). It is important to note that the distinction between IT/SCV (with coercive control as a key distinguishing factor) has been studied among both male and female victim samples (Anderson, 2008; Carlson & Jones, 2010; Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011; Olson, 2004).

Because SCV is believed to be more common in society than IT (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000), SCV is not always perceived in our culture as abusive in the same sense as IT; SCV lacks a controlling dimension and is not fraught with psychological uncertainty (Johnson & Leone, 2005). SCV is perceived by many people as normative communication experienced by conflicting couples. However, both IT and SCV are serious types of IPV and experienced and perpetrated by both men and women (Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011). As a result, it follows that victims' uncertainty in each IPV relationship should vary based not solely on biological sex of the victim, but on the presence/absence of coercive control or the type of IPV relationship experienced. The following hypotheses were derived from this theoretical understanding of relational uncertainty and its association (not necessarily causal) with IPV relationship types:

- H1: IT victims will report experiencing more self-uncertainty than will SCV victims.
- H2: IT victims will report experiencing more partner uncertainty than will SCV victims.
- H3: IT victims will report experiencing more relationship uncertainty than will SCV victims.

Sex and Gender Differences. Men and women may differ not only in terms of victimization likelihood (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), but they may also diverge in terms of personal IPV repercussions. For instance, Romito and Grassi (2007) found victim differences in terms of mental and physical health outcomes, which were moderated by victims' sex and type of IPV (i.e., physical, psychological, or sexual) experience. Further, Shortt, Capaldi, Kim, and Laurent (2010) discussed sex differences in terms

of relationship satisfaction associated with the presence of IPV. Possible disparities among victims suggest further diversity for men and women encountering and dealing with the uncertainty of their abuse. I proposed the following research question to examine these ideas:

RQ2: What differences, if any, exist between male and female IPV victims experiencing sources and themes of relational uncertainty?

In addition to IPV sex differences, victims' uncertainty may be related to their gender (i.e., masculinity or femininity) enactment itself, a negotiation process fraught with uncertainty (Bem, 1993). Female IPV victims have reported feelings of failure as "women" and as relational partners (Lloyd & Emery, 2000). Male IPV victims have reported struggling with masculine identities after being abused by women (Eckstein, 2010b). These critical and qualitative approaches to victim identification suggest that (a) the nature of victimization may threaten confidence in (stereotypical) gender identities and/or (b) people lacking confidence in their gender identities may be susceptible to identity threats in the form of psychological victimization. On the other hand, research focused on forming/maintaining gender identities leads to an understanding of gender roles as variant depending on circumstances (e.g., biological sex expectations, situations; Bem, 1993). This latter understanding implies that gender plays an interactional role with sex and type of IPV relationship (e.g., if coercive control is present) in determining (or being determined by) levels of uncertainty in a relationship. Ultimately, because gender is rarely tested in quantitative IPV research, the influential role of gender identities remains unclear. To examine gender affiliations with relational uncertainty in IPV contexts, the following research question was proposed:

RQ3: What is the role of gender in male and female IPV victims' relational uncertainty, particularly in IT versus SCV contexts?

METHOD

Participants

After obtaining full approval for participant recruitment and data collection procedures from a human subjects' safety committee, I distributed participation calls to over 900 Internet sources (e.g., forums on violence, health, relationships, sports, shopping) and over 200 social service agencies (e.g., domestic violence centers and/or their email networks); 34 agencies and 350 forums posted a call containing study information, a survey link, and researcher- and victim-resource-contact information. Participants had to have experienced any physically or psychologically abusive behavior from a past heterosexual romantic partner. To maximize safety, current IPV victims were not recruited.

Victims ($N = 345$; $n = 239$ females, 106 males) aged 18–72 years ($M = 42.12$, $SD = 11.59$) reported on IPV relationships ranging from 2 months to 55 years in length ($M = 8.98$ years, $Mdn = 6.75$ years, $SD = 8.06$), with 19.4% ($n = 54$ females,

13 males) dating, 23.5% ($n = 65$ females, 16 males) cohabiting, and 57.1% ($n = 120$ females, 77 males) married. Further demographic and descriptive details of this participant sample are provided in Eckstein (2010c).

Procedures

An online survey was accessed by participants via a link on a secure, Secure Socket Link data encrypted server. Participants, identified by autogenerated numbers, remained anonymous (i.e., Internet Protocol address autodeletion) when taking the survey, for which they were not compensated. Contact information for local and national IPV help resources were provided to participants on the first and last pages of the online survey.

Intimate Partner Violence. Participants' physical perpetration ($M = 1.16$, $SD = 0.32$, $\alpha = .78$) and victimization ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.25$, $\alpha = .92$) frequency (0 = *Never* to 6 = *Always*) were measured by the Conflict Tactics Scales 2 (physical subscale; Straus, Hamby, & Warren, 2003) and nonredundant items from the Partner Abuse Scale-Physical (PASPH; Hudson, 1997). The Index of Psychological Abuse (IPA; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999) gauged psychological IPV perpetration ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 0.65$, $\alpha = .86$) and victimization ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.31$, $\alpha = .91$) prevalence (1 = *Never* to 7 = *Always*) across the course of the previous relationship. Coercive control victimization ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.34$, $\alpha = .79$) and perpetration ($M = 1.58$, $SD = 0.56$, $\alpha = .67$) were calculated from the IPA's control-relevant items. Peralta and Fleming's (2003) fear scale determined prevalence (1 = *Never* to 7 = *Always*) of participants' IPV fear ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.53$, $\alpha = .91$).

IT versus SCV relationship status was determined post hoc via hierarchical cluster analysis (i.e., group categorization based on characteristics common to each group); variables used to identify groups included the measures of (a) physical victimization, (b) physical perpetration, (c) psychological victimization, (d) psychological perpetration, (e) coercive control victimization, (f) coercive control perpetration, and (g) fear. Following Johnson's (2008) proposed IT/SCV classification method, mean scores were compared on all IPV scale variables and squared Euclidean distance scores (i.e., similarity/difference measures between each observation) were clustered by a between-groups linkage method (i.e., cases with smallest mean differences combined; Romesburg, 1984). A two product cluster solution was subjected to criterion scores of $\alpha = .05$, resulting in all participants assigned to either SCV ($n = 219$) or IT ($n = 126$). Variable-difference findings from the hierarchical cluster analysis are reported in detail in Eckstein (2010c) and indicate, as per the cluster technique, that SCV victims were significantly lower on mean scores of all IPV victimization and perpetration measures than were IT victims. As noted in Eckstein (2010c), this classification also revealed that fewer men than women were categorized as IT relationships ($n = 30$ or 28.3% of all males and $n = 96$ or 40.2% of all females); 23.8% of IT victims were men and 76.2% were women. For SCV victims, 71.7% of men and 59.8% of women were classified in this group (63.5% of total participants) with 34.7% ($n = 76$) of SCV

victims being men and 65.3% ($n = 143$) of SCV victims being women. To supplement this recent (and perhaps controversial) classificatory scheme, each hypothesis also included *all* participants' data with violence as continuous measures. As a result, this "doubling" of how each hypothesis was tested adds to current research on the debate over SCV/IT classifications as ideal in identifying IPV victims.

Gender. Brems and Johnson (1990) created the Interpersonal Bem (1974) Sex Role Inventory with interpersonal sensitivity (femininity/expressiveness, $M = 5.63$, $SD = 0.83$, $\alpha = .90$) and interpersonal potency (masculinity/instrumentality, $M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.09$, $\alpha = .86$) as concepts focusing on gendered social performance. Participants rated agreement (1 = *Never true* to 7 = *Always true*) with self-descriptiveness of culturally valued masculine/feminine adjectives.

Relational Uncertainty. Self, partner, and relationship sources of relational uncertainty (abbreviated version: Knobloch & Solomon, 1999) were composite measures of collapsed themes. Self and partner sources included themes of desire, evaluation, and goals. Relationship themes included behavioral norms, mutuality, and future (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Most participants (80.6%), recruited based on experience with IPV *romantic* relationships, were married (or its equivalent) with former partners. Therefore, to address possible ceiling effects, the definition theme characterizing current relationship status was not included. Participants assessed the extent of felt certainty (1 = *completely/almost completely certain* to 6 = *completely/almost completely uncertain*) on *self* ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.53$, $\alpha = .93$), *partner* ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.56$, $\alpha = .94$), and *relationship* ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.30$, $\alpha = .82$) sources.¹

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses examined variables' bivariate correlations. All measures (except coercive control victimization) were also positively related to physical and psychological victimization and perpetration and coercive control perpetration. Femininity was positively correlated with physical and psychological victimization, fear, and coercive control victimization. Masculinity was positively related to psychological and coercive control and negatively related to relationship uncertainty. Psychological IPV victimization was positively related to both partner and relationship uncertainty sources. There were positive intercorrelations among all three sources of uncertainty (see Table 1).

RQ1 asked which relational uncertainty sources/themes were reported most frequently. Paired samples *t* tests comparing self, partner, and relationship sources resulted in reports of both more partner uncertainty ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.55$), $t(312) = 9.12$, $p < .001$; and relationship uncertainty ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.30$), $t(312) = 13.62$, $p < .001$; than self-uncertainty ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.54$). Partner and relationship sources did not significantly differ. RQ2 asked about differences between male and female reports of relational uncertainty. Independent samples *t* tests evaluated sex

TABLE 1. Bivariate Correlations Among Continuous Variables

	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9	V10	V11	V12
V1: Masculinity	—											
V2: Femininity	.04	—										
V3: Physical victimization	.06	.16**	—									
V4: Physical perpetration	.06	-.03	.22***	—								
V5: Psychological victimization	.05	.22***	.62***	.13*	—							
V6: Psychological perpetration	.12*	-.09	.18**	.61***	.20***	—						
V7: Coercive control victimization	.03	.21***	.53***	.07	.86***	.13*	—					
V8: Coercive control perpetration	.11*	-.02	.18**	.49***	.19**	.85***	.12*	—				
V9: Fear felt	-.02	.25***	.63***	.02	.63***	.08	.64***	.09	—			
V10: Self-uncertainty	-.05	-.08	-.00	-.03	-.02	.08	-.01	.07	.09	—		
V11: Partner uncertainty	-.00	-.01	.04	-.03	.25**	.08	.16**	.15**	.08	.26***	—	
V12: Relationship uncertainty	-.13*	-.03	.07	-.05	.21***	.04	.21***	.13*	.15**	.50***	.60***	—

Note. *N* = 345 participants (*n* = 239 women, *n* = 106 men).
 * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

differences and found women reported more self-uncertainty than did men. There were no sex differences in partner or relationship uncertainty sources (see Table 2).²

Hypotheses predicted that IT victims would experience the sources—self (H1), partner (H2), and relationship (H3)—of relational uncertainty more than would SCV victims. Independent samples *t* tests evaluating IPV relationship differences by relational uncertainty source indicated that IT victims experienced more partner and relationship uncertainty than did SCV victims. SCV and IT victims did not differ significantly in self-uncertainty. Thus, H2 and H3 were supported, whereas no support was found for H1 (see Table 2). The rationale behind H1–H3 was that coercive control and types/frequencies of abuse distinguish IT versus SCV relationships. Accordingly, in addition to the method of cluster assignment for participant grouping, H1–H3 were tested separately using the continuous measures of predictor variables (i.e., coercive control, physical, and psychological victimization and perpetration and fear; see Table 3). Results indicated that self and relationship sources of uncertainty were positively predicted by psychological victimization, coercive control received, and coercive control perpetrated, but with each accounting for between 2%–6% of overall variance in self and relationship sources. Level of felt fear also predicted the relationship source of uncertainty, but explained only 2% of the variance in that equation. As a result of these findings and to determine the salience of victimization characteristics in predicting relational uncertainty, subsequent analyses included IPV victimization *and* perpetration scores in the substantive tests of gender interactions.

Because men and women differed in experiencing some of the sources of relational uncertainty, in addition to biological sex, victims' identified genders also were of interest in this study (RQ3). If gender plays an independent or interactional role with sex and/or IPV relationship type in predicting victims' relational uncertainty, then any association gender shares with relational uncertainty should persist after taking into account participants' sex and IPV relationship type. Hierarchical regression analyses³ were employed to test these interactions using two methods (per preliminary findings) of participant analysis. First, continuous measures of IPV (i.e., physical, psychological, and coercive control perpetration and victimization and fear) were each tested in a linear regression model for each source of uncertainty. Results demonstrated that none of the individual measures of victimization or perpetration were significant predictors of self-uncertainty. Partner uncertainty was positively predicted by psychological IPV perpetration ($\beta = .16, \Delta R^2 = .02, p < .05$), psychological IPV victimization ($\beta = .34, \Delta R^2 = .07, p < .001$), and coercive control perpetration ($\beta = .26, \Delta R^2 = .02, p < .05$); whereas coercive control victimization ($\beta = -.23, \Delta R^2 = .01, p < .05$) negatively predicted partner uncertainty. Relationship uncertainty was predicted only by psychological victimization ($\beta = .25, \Delta R^2 = .04, p < .001$) and coercive control perpetration ($\beta = .33, \Delta R^2 = .03, p < .01$).

Because of the influential role of psychological IPV and coercive control for various sources of uncertainty, a second method of participant analysis collapsed abuse measures; essentially, the SCV/IT classification method (theoretically distinguishing victims based on psychological IPV and coercive control) set up by Johnson (2008)

TABLE 2. Mean Differences in Reports of Relational Uncertainty by Sex^a and IPV Relationship Type^b

	Men		Women		SCV		IT	
	Mean (SD)	t (df)	Mean (SD)	t (df)	Mean (SD)	t (df)	Mean (SD)	t (df)
Self-uncertainty	2.84 (1.42)		3.37 (1.58)	2.90 (197.84)**	3.21 (1.50)		3.20 (1.63)	0.06 (313)
Desire	2.95 (1.50)		3.42 (1.63)	2.41 (313)*	3.30 (1.51)		3.23 (1.75)	0.36 (219.08)
Evaluation	2.47 (1.52)		3.08 (1.75)	3.11 (206.55)**	2.86 (1.69)		2.97 (1.74)	0.55 (308)
Goals	2.93 (1.63)		3.46 (1.73)	2.55 (313)*	3.30 (1.69)		3.29 (1.76)	0.05 (313)
Partner uncertainty	4.24 (1.36)		4.14 (1.64)	0.56 (209.21)	4.03 (1.55)		4.40 (1.55)	1.99 (312)*
Desire	4.31 (1.41)		4.13 (1.76)	0.96 (214.75)	4.05 (1.67)		4.42 (1.63)	1.93 (311)
Evaluation	4.16 (1.44)		4.15 (1.67)	0.06 (202.96)	4.03 (1.60)		4.36 (1.60)	1.78 (312)
Goals	4.38 (1.57)		4.13 (1.83)	1.19 (200.27)	4.06 (1.76)		4.44 (1.73)	1.87 (309)
Relationship uncertainty	4.41 (1.18)		4.30 (1.35)	0.70 (312)	4.14 (1.27)		4.45 (1.36)	1.99 (312)*
Behavioral norms	4.39 (1.38)		4.30 (1.49)	0.47 (311)	4.21 (1.41)		4.53 (1.52)	1.86 (311)
Mutuality	4.41 (1.33)		4.32 (1.57)	0.54 (210.59)	4.25 (1.49)		4.50 (1.52)	1.45 (311)
Future	4.45 (1.45)		4.26 (1.68)	0.99 (202.99)	4.27 (1.59)		4.39 (1.66)	0.63 (311)

^aN = 345 participants (n = 239 women, n = 106 men).

^bN = 313 participants (n = 195 SCV, n = 118 IT).

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

TABLE 3. Predictors of the Sources of Relational Uncertainty

Predictor Variables	Self-Uncertainty			Partner Uncertainty			Relationship Uncertainty		
	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i> (<i>df</i>)	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i> (<i>df</i>)	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i> (<i>df</i>)
Physical victimization	.00	.00	.01 (1, 313)	.04	.00	.58 (1, 312)	.07	.01	1.55 (1, 312)
Physical perpetration	.03	.00	.31 (1, 313)	.03	.00	.29 (1, 312)	.05	.00	.86 (1, 312)
Psychological victimization	.02	.00	.08 (1, 313)	.25	.06	21.51 (1, 312)***	.21	.04	13.90 (1, 312)***
Psychological perpetration	.08	.01	1.80 (1, 313)	.08	.01	2.00 (1, 312)	.04	.00	.42 (1, 312)
Coercive control received	.01	.00	.14 (1, 313)	.16	.02	7.67 (1, 312)**	.20	.04	13.61 (1, 312)***
Coercive control perpetrated	.07	.00	1.36 (1, 313)	.15	.02	7.16 (1, 312)**	.13	.02	5.32 (1, 312)*
Fear received	.09	.01	2.57 (1, 313)	.08	.01	2.18 (1, 312)	.15	.02	7.39 (1, 312)**

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

was used to categorize participants. In this set of analyses, step one included a dummy coded variable representing participants' sex (men = 0, women = 1). Next, IPV relationship type, determined via cluster analysis, was entered into the model (SCV = 1, IT = 0). The third step included the independent variable (femininity or masculinity) in the model. The fourth step added two-way interaction terms calculated as the product of each of the first three variables in the model multiplied by one another. The final step contained an interaction term computed as the product of all three variables. Hierarchical regression results indicated that, on the first step, sex predicted self-uncertainty ($\beta = .16$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $p < .01$); such that women were more likely to experience self-uncertainty than were men (reinforcing *t* tests finding support for RQ2). On the second step, IPV relationship type was a statistically significant predictor of partner uncertainty ($\beta = -.12$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p < .05$). The direction of this effect was such that IT victims reported experiencing more partner uncertainty than SCV victims (providing additional support for H2). The third step indicated that masculinity was negatively associated with relationship uncertainty ($\beta = -.15$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $p < .01$). Femininity did not play a significant role in predicting any of the sources of relational uncertainty. On the fourth step, none of the two-way interaction terms predicted a change in the relational uncertainty models for masculinity or femininity. However, in the final step, the three-way interaction term ($\beta = 1.09$, $p < .05$) of sex ($\beta = 1.17$, $p < .01$; sex \times IPV $\beta = -1.22$, $p < .05$; sex \times masculinity $\beta = -1.21$, $p < .01$); IPV relationship type ($\beta = 1.09$, $p < .05$; IPV \times masculinity $\beta = -1.14$, $p < .05$); and masculinity ($\beta = .40$, $p < .05$) explained a small amount of additional variation in relationship uncertainty ($\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p < .05$).

To clarify the direction of this three-way effect in the masculinity model, these interactions were decomposed per Aiken and West's (1991) recommendations. Models including dichotomous independent variables (e.g., sex, IPV relationship type) were evaluated via trimmed hierarchical regression equations, wherein the *simple slope* was the regression of a dependent variable (e.g., relationship uncertainty) onto an independent variable (e.g., masculinity) for different subsamples of participants. I calculated simple slopes for each group of participants: male victims of SCV, male victims of IT, female victims of SCV, and female victims of IT.⁴

Simple slopes⁵ for the interaction between masculinity and relationship uncertainty indicate that masculinity predicted relationship uncertainty for male IT victims ($B = 0.47$, $p < .05$), but not for male SCV victims ($B = -0.18$, *ns*). Masculinity predicted a negative association with relationship uncertainty for female IT victims ($B = -0.26$, $p < .01$), but not for female SCV victims, although this latter negative association approached significance ($B = -0.25$, $p = .056$). These findings add further support to the hypothesis that IT victims experience more relationship uncertainty than SCV victims (H3), but this finding is particularly strong for certain people.

Gender played an interactive role in determining sex differences in the relationship uncertainty source (RQ3). The interaction of sex, gender, and IPV relationship type was such that highly masculine male IT victims were more likely to experience high relationship uncertainty than were all male SCV victims or male IT victims with

low masculinity scores. In contrast, highly masculine female IT victims were more likely to experience low relationship uncertainty (i.e., more relationship *certainty*) than were all female SCV victims or female IT victims low in masculinity (the latter higher in relationship uncertainty). For self and partner uncertainty, there were no interactional gender effects.

DISCUSSION

This study examined relational uncertainty among male and female former IPV victims. Results contribute to perspectives on relational uncertainty theorizing about partner violence and practical suggestions regarding uncertainty for IPV victims. In these sections, results are discussed in terms of their contributions and as arenas for future research.

Implications for a Relational Uncertainty Approach

Contributions to the Cycle of Violence. Results of this study show a relational uncertainty approach as particularly useful for highlighting various aspects of IPV theorizing. Although not intentionally deduced from it, present results may have implications for the cycle of violence. In this model, IT (but not SCV) victims go through repeated (a) *tension building*, waiting for the abuse to occur; (b) *acute battering*, experiencing physical violence; and (c) *honeymoon time*, receiving atonement messages from perpetrators (Walker, 2000). In other words, IT victims are subject to constant psychological uncertainty about their partner's behaviors and about their relationship as a whole. Although this study did not measure changes in relational uncertainty across cycle of violence phases, nor did it directly test the validity of the cyclical model, IT victims of both sexes reported experiencing more partner (H2) and relationship (H3) sources of relational uncertainty than did SCV victims, which initially appears to lend credence to the model—as applied to both male and female IT victims. However, when IT/SCV are parsed out by type, frequency, and direction of abuse, the findings show the problems inherent with simplistic sole-perpetration models.

This study found that a victim exhibited more partner uncertainty when he or she perpetrated psychological IPV, received psychological IPV, and/or perpetrated coercive control on their abuser. Those scoring high on coercive control victimization were less likely to report partner uncertainty. As for the relationship source of uncertainty, psychological victimization, and coercive control perpetration increased victims' likelihood of reporting this variable. Common wisdom holds that a victim experiencing unpredictable or volatile behavior from a partner may question his or her relationship involvement (Schechter, 1982). As currently theorized, IT relationships possess abusers who increase victims' relational uncertainty as part of psychological coercively controlling abuse. An abuser's unpredictability—both in communication behaviors and relationship intentions—creates unease and volatility in the relationship (i.e., tension-building phase; Walker, 2000). In keeping with this explanation, it may be

that the perpetration behaviors of victims are self-defensive and/or coping behaviors. However, the fact that it is not physical IPV, but rather coercive controlling behaviors that are exhibited by victims suggests that the straight-forward model of victim perpetrator is too simplistic. This is not to suggest that all relationships in which victims respond with coercive control or psychological perpetration are in fact SCV. Rather, it may be that the models of SCV/IT need to distinguish self-defense (as in Walker's supposition) and violent resistance (both couples coercively controlling, per Johnson 2008) from merely "responsive" abusive behaviors on the part of the "victim."

On the surface, the cycle of violence as currently theorized can appear to implicate a causal role with relationship uncertainty being a result of perpetrator's actions (e.g., tension-building phase). Just as likely is the possibility that relationship uncertainty contributes to abusive behavior on the part of the perpetrator. Indeed, various typologies of perpetrators suggest people may abuse others for a variety of reasons including self, partner, and relationship sources of uncertainty. The data collected here were cross-sectional in nature and reveal only the victim's perspective of the relationship. As a result, it is not possible to draw conclusions of a causal relationship between IPV and relational uncertainty sources (Byers, Shue, & Marshall, 2004; Carney, Buttell, & Dutton, 2007; Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994; Mauricio & Lopez, 2009; West, 2008; Williamson, 2010). Most likely, and based on the coercive control findings (i.e., perpetration vs. victimization) from this study, there probably exists a complex arrangement whereby both factors contribute to one another reciprocally. It would be interesting to explore in future research the presence of uncertainty and IPV over time—although this may never be a clear-cut case of which comes first, because the IPV cycle for IT relationships has no clear beginning or end.

The conceptualization of IT perpetrators (as opposed to victims, who may also "perpetrate") is such that they are viewed as intentionally confusing in their behaviors (e.g., partner uncertainty); to keep a victim guessing and unaware of upcoming behaviors is essential in controlling a victim (Romero, 1985). As a result, many IT relationships are ambiguous in outcomes (e.g., relationship uncertainty); not knowing what will come next, many victims (and nonvictims) live in an ongoing state of relational tension (Lemay & Dudley, 2011). Varying relational uncertainty sources have been positively associated with negative expressions of jealousy (Bevan, 2004) and with individuals' appraisals of the dominance of their spouse's communication (Knobloch, Miller, Bond, & Mannone, 2007). Although conducted in the context of nonabusive relationships, these studies are compatible with IPV arguments that jealous expressions of dominance accompany volatile perpetrator behavior including severe physical abuse and even murder (i.e., acute battering phase) occurring after periods of high uncertainty about an abuser's behavior and his or her desire to be involved in the relationship (Walker, 2000). Therefore, applying a relational uncertainty perspective to IPV sheds light on victims' insecurity in IT relationships. Future research could explore whether sources of relational uncertainty predict violent partner outcomes; the sources of relational uncertainty experienced by IT victims may correspond to specific stages (e.g., tension-building phase) within violent relationships.

Contributions to Gender Perspectives. Because societal negativity is directed at people viewed culpable for their conditions (Weiner, 1993), women who feel failure as relational partners may internalize stigma, which could lead to uncertainty about their relationship involvement. If IPV victims begin to question their relationship involvement, as a relational uncertainty approach suggests, they may begin to question their feminine (e.g., family caretaker, comforter) identities, which for many women are tied to success as a relational partner (Schechter, 1982). Tellingly, these women's IPV victimization is often coupled with feelings of self-blame (Lloyd & Emery, 2000). This explanation suggests that it is IPV that causes the gender insecurity. The alternative proposed in this study was that gender characteristics, in the context of abusive relationships, influence relational uncertainty experienced. Although this argument still presupposes a causal relationship from IPV to uncertainty (with gender interacting in some way), it may just as likely be that uncertainty itself leads to violence.

Compared to men, women reported more self-uncertainty (RQ2). Additionally, the lower masculinity (i.e., dominance, independence, stoicism) women reported, the more likely they were to experience relationship uncertainty in IT relationships. Some gender role theories suggest that women, more than men, are held responsible for maintaining the comfort, health, and success of intimate relationships (McMahon & Pence, 2003). Current findings lend support to this idea in that recipients of blame who feel failure for not ending IPV may internalize criticisms as negative identity attributes. Women's greater self-uncertainty may have mirrored their desires to conform to cultural gender expectations of supportive partners (Schechter, 1982).

In turn, men with higher masculinity levels reported more relationship uncertainty in IT relationships than men with low masculinity. Men in IT relationships, experiencing severe victimization, are more limited in access to abuse resources (e.g., shelters, hotlines; Hines, Brown, & Dunning, 2007). One explanation is that men who identify as stereotypically masculine know they have no social resources and so do not want to reveal their victimization to others (Hines & Douglas, 2010). As a result, they may struggle with, or be unsure about, staying or leaving their abusive partner (Eckstein, 2009). On the one hand, they may want to leave. However, males forced to reveal their IPV publicly (e.g., social networks) face a lack of professional sources to provide confidential, tangible support. Faced with these choices, masculine-oriented male IT victims experience high relationship uncertainty (i.e., indecision as to the future status/maintenance of a relationship).

It is important to note, however, that the interactional findings in this study accounted for the role of gender only in IPV *relationship uncertainty* and that they were significant only for men's higher levels and women's lower levels of *masculine* attributes. The contributing role of feminine characteristics did not reach significance in this study. Further, self and partner sources of uncertainty did not reach levels of significance affected by, or interacting with, gender characteristics. Finally, the results that indicated masculinity did play a role in predicting relationship uncertainty also showed that this interaction effect accounted for only 1% of the variance in the overall model; therefore, these findings, until replicated, must be interpreted with caution.

Dealing With IPV Relational Uncertainty

The findings also have implications for victims choosing to manage uncertainty in IPV contexts. People experiencing uncertainty are not necessarily motivated to reduce it (Brashers et al., 2000). In some cases, men and women may choose to maintain or intensify their uncertainty in order to avoid learning bad news or to keep excitement alive. Dated psychodynamic IPV arguments claimed that people chose to stay in highly uncertain IPV relationships because they were drawn to, and even enjoyed, the volatility of their partner and the situation. This reasoning was advanced by claims that victims possess masochistic personality traits, view danger as pleasurable, and/or precipitate personal danger and violent situations (Faulk, 1974). However, current research reveals psychodynamic masochist-victim perspectives as innately sexist—for both men and women (Millett, 1990). Either way, reducing victims' uncertainty regarding assault is not likely to prevent violence from occurring (Herman, 1997). In some cases, victims may wish to maintain uncertainty and remain in the tension-building phase of the cycle of violence (Walker, 2000). If they choose to preserve uncertainty, victims manage rather than reduce situational ambiguities.

In some cases, the dread and anxiety associated with waiting for a violent episode may outweigh victims' desires to maintain uncertainty. When a shift from wanting uncertainty to desiring certainty occurs, victims may intentionally or unintentionally *trigger* abuse episodes (Walker, 2000). This may be one explanation for the association between victims' perpetration scores and partner/relationship uncertainty levels found in this study. In essence, whereas they have no situational control over being abused, IPV victims are exerting control over their uncertainty. An area for future work involves studying relational uncertainty management by IPV victims. Further, research should assess the valence of relational uncertainty in IPV relationships and the extent to which relational uncertainty mediates or moderates the effects of IPV in relationships. A relational uncertainty perspective, when applied to IPV, contributes to relationship theorizing and research on uncertainty management, advances theories of communicated gender identity, and sheds light on the experiences of IPV victims.

Limitations

The primary limitations of this research involved the participant sample. Online participation limited responses to literate people accessing particular Internet forums. Second, females doubly outnumbered males. Men were targeted by advertising in a variety of forums (e.g., relationships, health, sports, music, cars), but they were difficult to attract. One explanation may be that men, often stigmatized by professional outlets and personal networks for reporting abuse, may refuse to disclose IPV victimization (McNeely & Robinson-Simpson, 1987). Further, men, less likely to label "light" aggression (e.g., slapping or hitting) as abuse (Goodyear-Smith & Laidlaw, 1999), may perceive many IPV behaviors as normative relational acts. Thus, current results may

not accurately reflect male IPV encounters. Future research should examine whether sex discrepancies in this study reflect men's reluctance to participate or fewer male victims in the population. Finally, although both victimization and perpetration behaviors were assessed in this study (and perpetration rates were included in substantive analyses), recruitment of participants as self-identified victims may have influenced the interpretation of findings in terms of strict relational roles. Victim/perpetrator roles are fluid in many relationships; this is an essential consideration when drawing conclusions from these results.

A second limitation, reliance on retrospective self-report data, may have been exacerbated by participants' relationships occurring, on average, 7.13 years ago (range = 1 week to 40 years, $Mdn = 5$ years, $SD = 7.67$). Accuracy in reporting past events is questionable particularly when recalling subjective feelings such as uncertainty. Measures in this study relied on victim perceptions more than objective recall. Whereas acknowledging victims' current interpretations of past events is valuable, the objective accuracy of perceptions felt in the IPV moment is limited. As a result, this study may reflect IPV situations as subjective memories rather than as relational uncertainty actually occurred.

CONCLUSION

This study included application of theoretical perspectives of relational uncertainty and gender to the context of IPV victims and differentiated between types of violent relationships experienced. Results indicated that victims' relational uncertainty corresponded more to their type of IPV relationship (i.e., SCV vs. IT) and identified masculinity than to any biological sex differences. Findings both reinforce and challenge current theorizing about IPV, victims' sex, gender, and relational uncertainty. This research provides an initial step toward understanding the communication experiences of male and female IPV victims. Seeking an understanding of the gendered and/or sexed complexities of victimization can, most importantly, inform national policies and support resources available to diverse victims.

NOTES

1. *Self* items included (a) whether or not you wanted this relationship to work out in the long run, (b) how much you liked your partner, (c) whether or not you wanted this relationship to last, (d) how important this relationship was to you, (e) how much you were romantically interested in your partner, and (f) whether or not you were ready to commit to your partner. *Partner* items included (a) whether or not your partner was ready to commit to you, (b) how much your partner was attracted to you, (c) how important this relationship was to your partner, and (d) whether or not your partner wanted this relationship to work out in the long run. *Relationship* items included (a) whether or not you and your partner felt the same way about each other, (b) whether or not you and your partner would stay

- together, (c) the boundaries for appropriate and/or inappropriate behavior in this relationship, and (d) how you could or could not behave around your partner.
2. Two-tailed significance tests ($\alpha = .05$) on data from 345 participants indicated statistical power for t tests was .99 or higher for medium ($d = .50$) and large ($d = .80$) effects.
 3. Power to detect hierarchical regression effects exceeded .99 for both medium ($f^2 = .15$) and large ($f^2 = .35$) effect sizes.
 4. To illustrate, I began by selecting the male subsample of participants and computed a regression equation in which relationship uncertainty was regressed onto IPV relationship type (SCV = 0, IT = 1), masculinity, and a two-way interaction term computed as the product of the two independent variables. As per Aiken and West (1991, p. 131), when IPV relationship type was coded such that SCV = 0 and IT = 1, the slope for masculinity in the step including the two-way interaction term represented the association between masculinity and IPV relationship for male victims of SCV. To retrieve the slope for male victims of IT, I recoded IPV relationship type (IT = 0, SCV = 1) and recomputed the regression model. I calculated the simple slopes for female victims of SCV and IT by repeating identical steps with the female subsample.
 5. To be able to draw conclusions from small sample subgroups, I report unstandardized regression coefficients here.

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