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Rose Grace Grose¹ and Shelly Grabe¹

Abstract

This study offers a feminist psychology analysis of various aspects of relationship power and control and their relative explanatory contribution to understanding physical, psychological, and sexual violence against women. Findings from structured interviews with 345 women from rural Nicaragua ($M_{\text{age}} = 44$) overwhelmingly demonstrate that measures of power and control reflecting interpersonal relationship dynamics have the strongest predictive power for explaining violence when compared in multivariate analyses to several of the more commonly used measures. These findings have implications for future research and the evaluation of interventions designed to decrease levels of violence against women.

Keywords

domestic violence, relationship power, women

Domestic violence is a pervasive international human rights violation against women and a serious public health problem (United Nations Development Fund for Women [UNIFEM], 2006; World Health Organization [WHO], 2005). Researchers have demonstrated that 13% to 61% of women worldwide experience physical violence, 20% to 75% experience psychological violence, and 6% to 59% experience sexual violence

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by intimate partners during their lifetime (WHO, 2005). A growing global awareness of the consequences of violence against women has led to increased international attention to domestic violence from academics, advocates, and policy makers alike (Beadnell, Baker, Morrison, & Knox, 2000; WHO, 2005; Yllö, 1993).

In particular, in the past several decades, numerous international agencies have promoted widespread commitment to reducing the prevalence and consequences of domestic violence. The United Nations (UN) has several initiatives aimed at curbing violence against women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the UN Millennium Development Goal 3 “to promote gender equality and empower women,” and the Beijing Platform for Action (UN, 1979, 1995, 2014). The Beijing Platform for Action articulates that “violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women’s full advancement” (UN, 1995, paragraph 118). As a result of this growing awareness and attention, international initiatives have increasingly devoted their resources to gender-based interventions aimed at altering women’s relative levels of power and control within the marital relationship (Gage & Hutchinson, 2006; Kabeer, 1999; WHO, 2005).

Feminist scholars and practitioners have long argued that men’s disproportionate levels of power and control put women at risk of domestic violence (Acosta-Belén & Bose, 1990; Anderson, 2005; Connell, 1987; Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010; Heise, 1998; Malik & Lindahl, 1998; Pence & Paymar, 1993; Wingood & DiClemente, 2000; Yllö, 1993). For example, the theory of gender and power proposes that gender-based inequalities are pervasive societal characteristics that result in men’s disproportionate power and control over a number of areas, including women’s bodies (Connell, 1987). Normative gender ideologies that assume masculine superiority and feminine inferiority reinforce these structural inequalities. Specifically, these socially constructed ideologies perpetuate the belief that men are entitled to power over women and may discipline women for perceived insubordination or violation of gender roles (Anderson, 2005; Wingood & DiClemente, 2000; Yllö, 1993). Scholars and activists across Latin America, in particular, work from the theoretical perspective that violence against women stems from women’s subordinate political and social status (e.g., Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010; Lagarde y de los Ríos, 2010). For example, several Latin American countries are promoting legislation regarding gender-based violence through the term *femicidal violence*, a term intended to explicitly uncover the systemic nature of violence based on gendered power imbalances (Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010). From this perspective, violence against women is due to women’s exclusion from power structures and is rooted in social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities.

Despite much theoretical and applied work, a largely interdisciplinary international body of literature (e.g., from economics, international development, politics, psychology, public health, and sociology) examining processes surrounding what has been termed “power” within marital relationships has resulted in contradictory empirical findings (e.g., Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993; Castro, Casique, & Brindis, 2008; Pulerwitz, Gortmaker, & DeJong, 2000). For example, several

researchers have reported that increased power for women, as indicated by control and access to material resources, relates to fewer experiences of domestic violence (Castro et al., 2008; Gage & Hutchinson, 2006). Others have reported that power, as measured by spousal differences in income, employment, and education favoring women, relates to increased risk of violence for women (Anderson, 1997; Atkinson, Greenstein, & Lang, 2005; Flake, 2005). The contradictory evidence to date might be explained, in part, by a lack of widespread consensus on how to define and measure relationship power within and across the various disciplines that are leading investigation into these processes (Griscom, 1992; Kabeer, 1999; Mosedale, 2005). The current study offers a feminist psychology conceptualization and analysis of the various dimensions and measures of relationship power and control.

The inconsistent findings in the literature linking power to violence against women may also be explained by differential attention to various kinds of violence as the outcomes of interest under investigation. Specifically, much research on domestic violence focuses on physical violence, whereas some discipline-specific investigations (e.g., HIV research originating in public health) focus on sexual violence (Castro et al., 2008; Flake, 2005; Gage & Hutchinson, 2006). Less often examined is psychological violence—or verbal abuse such as insults, belittling, and intimidation. Despite that physical, sexual, and psychological violence against women often co-occur within the same relationship (Ellsberg, Peña, Herrera, Liljestrand, & Winkvist, 2000; WHO, 2005), they have not received equal attention from researchers. The current study investigates several widely used assessments of power and control and their relative explanatory contribution to understanding physical, psychological, and sexual violence against women by their partners.

Given the contradictory findings and gaps in our understanding of women's risk of violence, there is urgent need for systematic investigation into how the processes of power and control influence all three types of violence against women. Feminist psychologists recognize that oppressive social structures and ideologies help sustain unequal power within relationships, thereby putting women at risk of violence (Connell, 1987; Heise, 1998; Moane, 2011; Wingood & DiClemente, 2000), and a feminist liberation psychology considers questions of power as central to analyses that can better explain threats to women's psychological and physical health (Moane, 2011).

Unlike the more common focus in psychology on individual levels of analysis, a feminist liberation psychology seeks political and structural frameworks for understanding psychological phenomena that result from power disparities (Moane, 2011). Thus, the current study asks "whose power?" in relation to violence against women. It explicitly addresses men's power and control over women as well as mutual power and control over various aspects of the relationship to attend to various levels of power in the social context. As a feminist liberation psychology analysis, this study explicitly aims to fill gaps in our understanding of the processes of power and control so as to aid in the design and assessment of political and social interventions addressing women's rights violations (Moane, 2011; Mosedale, 2005; Prilleltensky, 2008).

Power in Relationships

Despite a lack of widespread consensus in defining power, there is some level of agreement that power involves having both the capacity and the opportunity to fulfill or impede personal and relational needs (Hayward, 1998; Prilleltensky, 2008). Although definitions of power may vary, it is widely agreed upon that power changes with contexts and over time and varies according to intersecting social positions (Heise, 1998; Malik & Lindahl, 1998; Mosedale, 2005; Prilleltensky, 2008). For example, individual power is shaped by social boundaries such as class, gender, ability, and race (Hayward, 1998; Hurtado, 2009). Within psychology, it has been suggested that power can be broken down into two interrelated processes: individual *power to* and interpersonal *power over*.

“Power To” and Domestic Violence

“Power to” can be defined as the ability to act upon one’s wishes or goals and to control one’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Blanc, 2001; Kabeer, 1999; Yoder & Kahn, 1992). This has also been described as the power to strive for wellness, resist oppression, and pursue liberation (Prilleltensky, 2008). Therefore, an individual’s “power to” may involve pushing the boundaries of what is achievable for oneself without necessarily affecting others’ abilities to do the same (Hayward, 1998; Mosedale, 2005). In empirical investigations, “power to” is often measured by assessing levels of social, material, or human resources because they are theoretically thought to increase one’s ability to pursue their interests (Blanc, 2001; Kabeer, 1999; Malik & Lindahl, 1998; Yllö, 1993). In domestic violence research, women’s age, income, education level, and occupational status are common measures of “power to” because these resources may reduce economic or social dependency and improve women’s ability to resist violence or escape an abusive situation (Blanc, 2001; Gage & Hutchinson, 2006; Malik & Lindahl, 1998; Pulerwitz et al., 2000).

Empirical investigations examining the explanatory role of power in domestic violence typically demonstrate that increases in women’s power is associated with decreased experiences of violence when assessed with “power to” indicators. For example, there is evidence from Bangladesh, India, Mexico, and Nicaragua that age is associated with violence such that as women get older they experience lower levels of physical (Castro et al., 2008; Ellsberg, Heise, Peña, Agurto, & Winkvist, 2001; Panda & Agarwal, 2005; Schuler, Hashemi, Riley, & Akhter, 1996) and psychological violence (Panda & Agarwal, 2005). There is also evidence from Haitian and Indian samples that when women control household income for expenditures such as food, clothes, and toiletries they report fewer experiences with physical and sexual violence from their partners than women who lack control over household income (Gage & Hutchinson, 2006; Jejeebhoy, 1998; see Schuler et al., 1996 for an exception in which no relationship was found in a sample from Bangladesh). Similarly, it has been demonstrated in Kerala, India, that higher levels of education reduce women’s risk of psychological and physical violence (Panda & Agarwal, 2005), although there is evidence from 12 other countries that this relationship is not linear (Castro et al., 2008; Ellsberg

et al., 2001; Flake, 2005; Jejeebhoy, 1998; Panda & Agarwal, 2005; Schuler et al., 1996; WHO, 2005). For instance, studies from Peru and India have found that education does not have a protective effect until women reach the secondary or post-secondary level (Flake, 2005; Jejeebhoy, 1998). Studies using employment as an indicator of power provide contradictory findings. Some investigations (in Mexico and Peru) demonstrate that women who were employed experienced more physical violence than those who were not (Castro et al., 2008; Flake, 2005), whereas some investigations in India report that women's employment has no effect on receipt of violence (Jejeebhoy, 1998; Panda & Agarwal, 2005).

Collectively, these findings suggest that increases in women's "power to" are related to fewer experiences of violence across cultures. However, despite the promising nature of these findings, when examined in isolation, "power to" measures tell us little about the dynamic nature of relationship power or the social context in which violence occurs. Analyses and measures that index the interpersonal nature of relational power are necessary in the examination of gender-based violence.

"Power Over" and Domestic Violence

Interpersonal "power over" can be defined as the ability to control or change another person's behavior, dominate or manipulate another, or win in a conflict (Miller & Cummins, 1992). "Power over" involves the ability to influence another's behavior, potentially override their decisions, or perhaps prevent them from recognizing there is a conflict of interest through coercion, threat, or violence (Kabeer, 1999; Miller & Cummins, 1992; Mosedale, 2005; Prilleltensky, 2008; Yoder & Kahn, 1992). In the domestic violence literature, researchers have used various indicators in an attempt to index "power over," including assessment of spousal differences in resource contribution, differences in control over household decision making, and partner control of spousal behavior and mobility (Atkinson et al., 2005; Blanc, 2001; Frieze & McHugh, 1992; Kabeer, 1999; Malik & Lindahl, 1998; Pulerwitz et al., 2000; WHO, 2005). Importantly, because power asymmetries by gender are institutionalized and normalized, men may internalize beliefs about male superiority and feel entitled to "power over" the household and over women (Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Gage & Hutchinson, 2006). Therefore, women's "power over" may be seen as illegitimate and challenging to the status quo of gender (Anderson, 1997). As a result, men may use violence to reestablish power and dominance if power dynamics are challenged by women or may use "power over" in combination with violence to keep power dynamics from being questioned in the first place (Anderson, 1997; Flake, 2005; Panda & Agarwal, 2005).

When relationship power is measured as "power over" in the domestic violence literature, empirical investigations reveal largely inconsistent findings. Several studies from India, Peru, and the United States have found that women who earn more money or contribute more to household expenditures, are better employed, or have higher levels of education than their partners also report greater levels of physical violence than women who do not report spousal differences on these indicators of power

(Anderson, 1997; Atkinson et al., 2005; Flake, 2005; Panda & Agarwal, 2005). However, other investigations from around the world (e.g., India, Haiti) have found that spousal differences in education favoring women were related to less physical, psychological, and sexual violence (Gage & Hutchinson, 2006; Jejeebhoy, 1998; Panda & Agarwal, 2005; Pulerwitz et al., 2000; WHO, 2005). Still others have found that an education difference favoring male partners was related to increased psychological violence against women (in India, Panda & Agarwal, 2005). A number of studies from the United States and India have reported no relationships between spousal differences in education, income contribution, or occupation and physical, psychological, or sexual violence against women (Babcock et al., 1993; Jejeebhoy, 1998; McClosky, 1996). Thus, although many of the findings are contradictory, many also call into question the theoretical argument that greater levels of power provide women with greater security.

In addition to resource contribution, one of the more widely used indices of “power over” is decision making, measured by assessing which partner in the couple has a greater “say” in decisions surrounding things such as household expenditures, financial planning, or reproductive planning (Agarwal, 1997; Blanc, 2001; Frieze & McHugh, 1992; Kabeer, 1999; Malik & Lindahl, 1998). A large and growing body of empirical evidence suggests that inequality in decision making is related to greater experiences of violence against women. For example, both female-dominant and male-dominant decision making, versus egalitarian decision making, have been associated with increased experiences of sexual and physical violence for women in samples from Haiti, Mexico, Peru, and the United States (Babcock et al., 1993; Castro et al., 2008; Coleman & Straus, 1986; Flake, 2005; Frieze & McHugh, 1992; Gage & Hutchinson, 2006). However, there is also evidence from India that women’s financial decision making, specifically, is unrelated to violence (Jejeebhoy, 1998). Nevertheless, it seems that, in general, both having and lacking power in decision making is associated with violence for women.

Within recent years, an additional index of “power over” has emerged from within the disciplines of public health and psychology to more explicitly measure the psychosocial and behavioral aspects of relationship power and control. Specifically, rather than focusing on economic factors or control over resources, the Sexual Relationship Power Scale (SRPS) assesses relationship power dynamics and behaviors in an attempt to capture how structural inequalities manifest in interpersonal relationships (Pulerwitz et al., 2000). The SRPS indexes male partners’ relative control over women’s mobility, agency, and everyday activities. A growing body of investigation using the SRPS to index relational power consistently suggests that women reporting less relationship power and control, relative to their partners, experience more physical and sexual violence in the United States as well as in South Africa (Dunkle et al., 2004; Jewkes, Dunkle, Nduna, & Shai, 2010; Pulerwitz et al., 2000). Other researchers in a number of different countries (e.g., Haiti, India, and Nicaragua) have found similar results linking men’s control over women’s mobility to women’s receipt of violence (Ellsberg et al., 2000; Gage & Hutchinson, 2006; Jejeebhoy, 1998; WHO, 2005).

In summary, the findings in this review demonstrate that a wealth of evidence exists suggesting that relationship power and control play a role in domestic violence against

women internationally. However, there seems to be some disconnect between the usefulness of power as a theoretical concept and attempts to measure it. It is not clear which dimensions of power are most important in predicting violence, whether or not there are differential predictions based on type of violence, or in which direction the relations reliably exist. The gaps in our understanding may be present, in part, because many of the existing measures of power actually serve as proxy variables, rather than as scales that were developed to assess the underlying conceptual dimensions of gendered power. Instead, they index characteristics of a woman and her partner that approximate the idea of power (e.g., income, education level), but are nevertheless widely used. Comparing the widely used measures of power and control to the only scale with psychometric properties within one study will help to understand their relative contributions to explaining physical, psychological, or sexual violence.

The Current Study

The aim of the current study was to explore multiple measures of individual “power to” and interpersonal “power over” and their relative importance in predicting women’s receipt of violence in a large sample of women from rural Nicaragua. Within Nicaragua there is a rich history of activism aimed at addressing violence against women. A strong and organized women’s movement originating in the early 1990s has helped maintain a discourse of women’s rights at the national level and promote organizations that provide support to women locally (Kampwirth, 2008; Molyneux, 2001). One such organization, the *Xochilt-Acalt* Women’s Center, works to empower women, in part through education on human rights in a remote and rural region in the state of León. Participants for the current study were randomly selected from a list of women involved in *Xochilt-Acalt* and from five surrounding communities in which the organization was not involved, as part of a larger investigation of women’s empowerment.¹ The demographics of this sample are comparable with women involved in national-level surveys conducted throughout the country (Ellsberg et al., 2001).

Based on the interdisciplinary literature described above and focus groups conducted in partnership with *Xochilt-Acalt* prior to the design of the survey, we hypothesized that relationship power would be related to physical, psychological, and sexual violence. Because measuring “power over” reflects a greater extent of relational dynamics, as does violence, we expected that the interpersonal “power over” variables would predict violence above and beyond the individual “power to” variables. Within the “power over” category, we predicted that psychosocial measures of relationship power and control would have the strongest explanatory power because they take into account the partner’s control over the *respondent*, rather than over resources or decision making alone.

Method

Procedure

The data were collected in 2007 in the municipality of Malpaisillo/Larreynaga by a local research team. Interviewers were trained in accordance with the field procedures

and guidelines on ethics and safety developed by the WHO for the Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women (Watts, Heise, Ellsberg, & Moreno, 2001; WHO, 2005). Following informed consent, private, face-to-face interviews were conducted in Spanish using a structured questionnaire developed in partnership with the local research team. All questions were translated into Spanish, verified, and back-translated with the Nicaraguan team to ensure meanings would be conveyed properly in the local context before the survey was administered. Because the complexity of some scaled responses made them difficult to understand, the scales assessing Partner Control and Relationship Control were modified for dichotomous responses (this is consistent with prior work in remote areas where literacy rates are low; Ellsberg & Heise, 2005).

Measures

Covariates. Because prior studies have demonstrated that observation of violence in childhood and partner's alcohol use are related to violence, each of these variables were assessed as potential covariates in the current study (Flake, 2005; Panda & Agarwal, 2005). Respondents were asked if they had seen or heard physical violence against their mother during childhood (1 = yes, 0 = no). Respondents were also asked how often their partner used alcohol (every day or nearly every day; once or twice a week; 1-3 times a month; occasionally; less than once a month; and never).

Individual measures of "power to."

Respondent's age. Respondents reported their age in years.

Respondent's education level. Respondents were asked if they had attended school and to report the highest level of completed education. Respondents' education levels were then dummy-coded into three categories: no school (baseline), primary school, and secondary school and beyond.

Respondent's employment status. Respondents were asked if they were currently employed (1 = employed, 0 = unemployed).

Respondent's income. Respondents were asked if they earned an income by themselves (1 = yes, 0 = no).

Interpersonal measures of "power over."

Differences in resource contribution. Differences in resource contribution included spousal differences in income contribution, employment, and education levels. Income contribution was dummy-coded to represent three categories: respondent contributed less than (baseline), equal to, or more than partner. To compute education differences, respondent's education level was subtracted from partner's education level then dummy-coded into three categories: higher level of education for partner (baseline), equal levels of education, or higher level of education for respondent. Similarly,

respondent's employment status was subtracted from partner's employment status, then dummy-coded into three categories: partner employed and respondent was not (baseline), both employed, or respondent employed and partner was not.

Decision-making dominance. Respondents completed three subscales designed to measure decision making as an indicator of power within the marital relationship (International Center for Research on Women, 2006). They reported whether they alone, both partners equally, or the partner alone made the final decisions in these domains: *household expenditure decisions* (eight items, e.g., "buying food items"), *financial decisions* (eight items, e.g., "putting money into savings"), and *reproductive decisions* (five items, e.g., "to have and not have sex"). For each subscale, an average was calculated and higher scores reflect greater autonomy in decision making for the respondent. Internal consistencies were $\alpha = .77$, $\alpha = .87$, and $\alpha = .65$ for household, financial, and reproductive decision making, respectively.

Relationship power. Ten items from the Relationship Control subscale of the SRPS-Modified were used to assess power in the marital relationship (Spanish version, Pulerwitz et al., 2000). Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with items like "my partner tells me who I can spend time with." One item that did not translate well was dropped ("most of the time, we do what my partner wants to do"). Items were summed and higher scores reflect greater levels of relationship power for the respondent ($\alpha = .86$).

Partner control. A 10-item scale labeled partner control was created for the current study. Seven items asked whether the respondents' partners generally prohibit or control their abilities to carry out everyday activities (e.g., visit family or friends), and whether they exhibit controlling behavior or jealousy (e.g., "insists on knowing where you are at all times"; WHO, 2005). Three additional items were added to assess whether partners prevented women from working outside the home, studying, or using contraceptives. Items were summed and higher scores reflect greater levels controlling behaviors by the partner ($\alpha = .87$).

History of violent experiences. The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) was used to measure lifetime and 12-month prevalence of violence (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). The CTS is widely used internationally to assess levels of domestic violence and has demonstrated success in Nicaragua (Ellsberg et al., 2001; Ellsberg et al., 2000; WHO, 2005). Physical violence was assessed with six acts of aggression, ranging from throwing objects to the use of a weapon. Psychological violence was assessed with four questions about threatening, intimidating, and humiliating behaviors. Sexual violence was assessed with three questions about being physically forced to have unwanted sexual intercourse, having sex out of fear, or being forced to do something degrading or humiliating. Participants answered yes or no and affirmative responses were summed to create count scores. Internal consistencies were $\alpha = .80$, $.77$, and $.73$ for lifetime physical, psychological, and sexual violence, respectively, and

$\alpha = .79, .99,$ and $.94$ for 12-month physical, psychological, and sexual violence, respectively.

Results

Participants

Three hundred and fifty women were administered surveys. Five women did not complete information about a partner and therefore were not included in subsequent analyses, resulting in a total sample size of 345. Demographic information can be seen in Table 1. The majority of the sample was between 25 and 55 years of age ($M_{\text{age}} = 44$, median age = 43). Three quarters of the sample were in partnered relationships, most between 6 and 10 years duration (those who were not currently partnered answered interview questions about their most recent partner). The majority of the sample had three or more children. Although most respondents reported being literate (76%), almost a quarter of the sample never received formal schooling (22%) and another 46% had only completed primary school. These rates are comparable with a survey conducted in a nationally representative sample (Ellsberg et al., 2001).

Preliminary Analyses

Sixty-nine women had observed violence against their mothers in childhood (20%). Almost 16% ($n = 54$) of women reported experiencing all three types of violence over the course of their lifetime, which is comparable with the reported rate in a previous study in a similar region of Nicaragua (21%; Ellsberg et al., 2000). Prevalence rates for lifetime physical (27.8%), psychological (47.0%), and sexual violence (23.2%) were also comparable with reported rates from a demographic and health survey conducted with a nationally representative sample in Nicaragua (Ellsberg et al., 2001). As expected, 12-month prevalence rates were lower than lifetime prevalence with approximately 6% of women reporting physical violence, 20% of women reporting psychological violence, and 8% of women reporting sexual violence experiences in the past year. Because the current study is examining the effect of *current* relationship power dynamics on violence outcomes, we used current (past year) indices of violence, rather than lifetime reports, for the dependent variables of interest.

Pearson correlations between study variables are presented in Table 2.² As can be seen from the table, the “power to” measures were largely unrelated to all three types of violence with the exception of a relationship between age and psychological violence, such that older women experienced less violence. Although the majority of the widely used “power over” measures were also not significantly related to the violence outcomes, the psychosocial relationship power and control measures were. Specifically, as predicted, higher levels of relationship power were related to lower levels of all forms of violence, whereas higher levels of partner control were related to increased receipt of each form of violence. Of the more conventional “power over” measures, income contribution difference and household decision making favoring the

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics.

Variables	n (%)
Age	
Average age (years)	
Woman respondent	44
Partner	49
Age of woman respondent	
17-24	23 (7)
25-34	76 (22)
35-49	128 (37)
>50	118 (34)
Spousal age difference	
Wife = partner (no difference)	23 (7)
Wife < partner	264 (76)
Wife > partner	58 (17)
Relationship features	
Duration of relationship (years)	
<6	43 (12)
6-10	249 (72)
11 and above	53 (13)
Number of children	
0	8 (2)
1-2	84 (24)
3-5	151 (44)
6 and above	102 (30)
Education	
Woman respondent	
No school	79 (23)
Primary	158 (46)
Secondary or beyond	108 (31)
Partner	
No school	106 (31)
Primary	177 (51)
Secondary or beyond	62 (18)
Spousal education difference	
Wife = partner (no difference)	177 (51)
Wife < partner	54 (16)
Wife > partner	114 (33)
Income	
Spousal income difference	
Wife = partner (no difference)	79 (23)
Wife < partner	213 (62)
Wife > partner	51 (15)
Made own money	220 (64)

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Variables	n (%)
Employment	
Woman respondent	
Unemployed	145 (42)
Employed	200 (58)
Partner	
Unemployed	27 (8)
Employed	318 (92)
Spousal employment difference	
Wife = partner (no difference)	193 (56)
Wife < partner	135 (39)
Wife > partner	17 (5)

respondent were related to higher receipt of psychological violence, whereas an equal income contribution was related to lower receipt of physical and psychological violence.

Given the current study was the first comprehensive investigation of multiple indices of power, the relations *between* the indicators were examined (see Table 2). Not surprisingly, within the “power to” measures, education and employment were highly correlated. However, age was negatively related to education suggesting that older women in this sample reported less schooling. Given that education in this area of the country was historically inaccessible, this finding is not surprising. Within the “power over” measures, greater resource contributions by the respondent were related to each other as well as to the decision-making scales, demonstrating face validity of these indices. However, despite the fact that measures of resource contributions and decision making have been the most common indices of power and control used in the literature, there were few strong and notable relationships between the standard indices and the psychosocial relationship power and partner control measures that were added in this study. These findings suggest that the most widely used measures to date may not adequately capture relationship power as it is frequently conceptualized.

Multiple Regression Analyses

To examine the relative contributions of the power and control measures on domestic violence, a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted for physical, psychological, and sexual violence in the past 12 months. For each model, covariates were entered at Step 1 (observation of violence in childhood and partner’s alcohol use), measures of “power to” at Step 2 (age, whether one earned an income, education level, and employment status), and measures of “power over” at Step 3 (spousal differences in age, income contribution, education, and employment; household, financial, and reproductive decision making; relationship power; and partner

Table 2. Pearson Correlations Between Measures of Power and Outcome Variables (N = 345).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Power to																		
1. Age	—	.11*	-.40***	.05	-.04	.10†	.02	-.04	.10†	.03	.07	.02	-.30***	-.15**	.04	-.06	-.11*	-.06
2. Income		—	-.07	.82***	.41***	.31***	-.05	.03	.69***	.17***	.07	.14*	.08	.12*	-.06	-.02	.01	-.05
3. Education			—	-.03	-.06	.03	-.08	.38***	-.03	-.07	.06	.11*	.28***	.18***	-.07	.03	.06	-.07
4. Employment				—	.37***	.34***	-.03	.04	.84***	.19***	.06	.11*	.06	.11*	-.02	-.04	.01	-.04
Power over																		
5. Equal inc.					—	-.23***	.03	.00	.32***	.10†	-.02	.02	-.01	.19***	-.18***	-.12*	-.09†	-.07
6. R > P inc.						—	-.08	.11*	.25***	.13*	.14*	.22***	.08	-.07	.14*	.06	.13*	.05
7. Equal ed.							—	-.72***	-.04	.01	-.07	-.13*	-.10†	-.03	.01	.07	.03	.02
8. R > P ed.								—	.08	-.08	.06	.11*	.11*	.10***	-.01	-.04	.00	.03
9. Equal emp.									—	-.26***	.06	.07	.00	.09†	-.01	-.02	.03	-.02
10. R > P emp.										—	.04	.13*	.02	.01	.00	-.05	-.02	-.03
11. House DM											—	.29***	.12*	.01	.06	.02	.12*	.06
12. Finance DM												—	.14**	.03	-.01	-.03	.03	-.08
13. Reproductive DM													—	.20***	-.02	.00	.08	.04
14. Relationship power														—	-.64***	-.29***	-.35***	-.29***
15. Partner control															—	.31***	.52***	.33***
Violence outcomes																		
16. CTS-physical																		.61***
17. CTS-psych.																		.51***
18. CTS-sexual																		—
M	44	0.64	0.77	0.60	0.23	0.15	0.51	0.33	0.56	0.05	2.43	1.88	2.17	1.97	1.72	0.13	0.39	0.12
SD	14.78	0.48	0.42	0.49	0.42	0.36	0.50	0.47	0.50	0.22	0.48	0.55	0.46	2.7	0.29	0.61	0.92	0.46

Note. Education was dichotomized (1 = attended school, 0 = no school); R > P = respondent more than partner; inc. = income; ed. = education; emp. = employment; DM = decision making; CTS = Conflict Tactics Scale; psych. = psychological.
 †p ≤ .10. *p ≤ .05. **p ≤ .01. ***p ≤ .001.

control). Changes in R at each step and standardized β weights indicate which variables contributed to the overall variance explained in each model. Findings were examined and regressions were rerun including only significant predictors to arrive at the most parsimonious models.

Predicting physical violence. Results of the regression analysis predicting physical violence are presented in the first column of Table 3. The full model explained 14% of the variance in physical violence in the past 12 months. At Step 1, the covariates predicted physical violence at a marginally significant level, $F_{change}(2, 342) = 2.71, p = .068$. The measures of “power to” in Step 2 did not explain a greater proportion of the variance in violence above and beyond the covariates, $F_{change}(5, 337) = 1.02, p = .404$. At Step 3, the interpersonal measures of “power over” explained a significantly greater proportion of the variance in violence above and beyond the covariates and measures of “power to,” $F_{change}(11, 326) = 3.88, p = .000$. The nonsignificant variables in the full model were dropped and the model was rerun including only relationship power and partner control. The variables significantly predicted physical violence in the past 12 months, $F_{change}(2, 342) = 21.31, p = .000$ (see top row, Table 4), and explained 11% of the variance in physical violence, with relationship power contributing 1% and partner control contributing 3%. These findings suggest that risk of physical violence decreased with levels of relationship power and increased with higher levels of partner control.

Predicting psychological violence. Results of the regression analysis predicting psychological violence are presented in the second column of Table 3. The full model explained 33% of the variance in psychological violence in the past 12 months. At Step 1, the covariates significantly predicted psychological violence, $F_{change}(2, 342) = 8.09, p = .000$. The measures of “power to” at Step 2 did not explain a greater proportion of the variance in violence above and beyond the covariates, $F_{change}(5, 337) = 1.80, p = .113$. At Step 3, the interpersonal measures of “power over” explained a significantly greater proportion of the variance in violence above and beyond the covariates and measures of “power to,” $F_{change}(11, 326) = 11.25, p = .000$. Again, nonsignificant variables were dropped and the model was rerun including only significant predictors. The findings from the parsimonious model including partner’s alcohol use, respondent’s age, and partner control are presented in the second row of Table 4. This reduced model significantly predicted psychological violence in the past 12 months, $F_{change}(3, 341) = 47.50, p = .000$, with all variables uniquely contributing to the 30% variance in psychological violence explained. Age contributed 2%, partner alcohol use 1%, and partner control 24% of the variance. These findings suggest that risk of psychological violence decreased with age and increased with higher levels of partner control and partner’s alcohol use.

Predicting sexual violence. Results of the regression analysis predicting sexual violence are presented in the third column of Table 3. The full model explained 16% of the variance in sexual violence in the past 12 months. At Step 1, the covariates predicted

Table 3. Multiple Regressions: Full Models Predicting Violence in the Past 12 Months (N = 345).

Predictor	Standardized beta weights								
	Physical violence			Psychological violence			Sexual violence		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Observed violence	.02	.02	-.01	.11*	.12*	.08	.02	.02	-.01
Alcohol	.12*	.14*	.09†	.17**	.19***	.11*	.12*	.13*	.09
Age		-.09	-.11†		-.14*	-.14**		-.06	-.06
Earned an income		.08	.15		.07	.12		-.03	.01
Education									
Primary		.03	.08		.07	-.20		.06	.06
Secondary		-.05	.05		-.02	.08		.07	.15†
Employed		-.10	-.10		-.02	.06		-.02	-.15
Income diff.									
Equal			-.06			.00			.03
R > P			.02			.06			.03
Education diff.									
Equal			-.01			.04			.01
R > P			-.05			-.01			.00
Employment diff.									
Equal			.01			.14			.12
R > P			-.03			.04			.05
Decision making									
Household			.02			.08			.07
Financial			-.05			-.03			-.12*
Reproductive			-.01			.05			.06
Relationship power			-.17*			-.09			-.19**
Partner control			.19**			.43***			.21
R	.13	.17	.38	.21	.27	.57	.12	.16	.40
R ² change	.02†	.02	.11***	.05***	.03	.26***	.01†	.01	.14***
R ²	.02	.01	.14	.05	.07	.33	.01	.03	.16
Adjusted R ²	.01	.01	.10	.04	.05	.29	.01	.01	.12

Note. Alcohol = partner's alcohol use; diff. = difference; R > P = respondent more than partner.
 †p ≤ .10. *p ≤ .05. **p ≤ .01. ***p ≤ .001.

sexual violence at a marginally significant level, $F_{change}(2, 342) = 2.44, p = .089$. The measures of “power to” at Step 2 did not explain a greater proportion of the variance in violence above and beyond the covariates, $F_{change}(5, 337) = .75, p = .584$. At Step 3, the interpersonal measures of “power over” explained a significantly greater proportion of the variance in violence above and beyond the covariates and measures of “power to,” $F_{change}(11, 326) = 4.89, p = .000$. Nonsignificant variables were dropped resulting in a parsimonious model including financial decision making, relationship power, and partner control (see the third row of Table 4). The reduced model

Table 4. Multiple Regressions: Reduced Models Predicting Violence in the Past 12 Months ($N = 345$).

	Standardized beta coefficients	R	R ² change	R ²	Adjusted R ²
Physical violence		.33	.11***	.11	.11
Relationship power	-.16*				
Partner control	.21***				
Psychological violence					
Alcohol	.12*	.54	.30***	.30	.29
Age	-.14**				
Partner control	.50***				
Sexual violence					
Finance DM	-.07	.36	.30***	.13	.12
Relationship power	-.13*				
Partner control	.25***				

Note. Alcohol = partner's alcohol use; DM = decision making.

† $p \leq .10$. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

significantly predicted sexual violence in the past 12 months, $F_{change}(5, 339) = 11.47$, $p = .000$, with relationship power and partner control uniquely contributing to the 13% of the variance in sexual violence explained. Financial decision-making and relationship power both contributed 1% and partner control contributed 4% to the variance. These findings suggest that risk of sexual violence decreased with higher levels of relationship power and increased with higher levels of partner control.

Discussion

The findings from the current study overwhelmingly demonstrate that measures of power and control reflecting relationship dynamics have the strongest predictive power for explaining domestic violence. These psychosocial indicators were robust not only in their predictive validity across the various dimensions of violence, but they also maintained their predictive power in the context of relative contributions from the most commonly used measures in the literature. Specifically, in support of prior research using the SRPS, we found that women who reported greater levels of relationship power also reported fewer experiences of physical and sexual violence (Dunkle et al., 2004; Jewkes et al., 2010; Pulerwitz et al., 2000). Similarly, higher levels of male control within the relationship predicted increased receipt of all three types of violence, supporting research on physical and sexual violence and extending the finding to psychological abuse (Ellsberg et al., 2000; Gage & Hutchinson, 2006; Jejeebhoy, 1998; WHO, 2005). These findings provide additional support for the feminist argument that men's disproportionate levels of power and control put women at risk of violence (e.g., Acosta-Belén & Bose, 1990; Connell, 1987; Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010; Pence & Paymar, 1993; Wingood & DiClemente, 2000).

Examining psychosocial indices of power and control in the context of other widely used measures is important to gaining a fuller understanding of domestic violence. For example, we found that resources, relative resource contributions, and decision making power did not generally predict receipt of violence. Although age, education, income, and employment have been suggested to improve women's ability to resist and escape abuse, these variables did not seem to have a protective effect in the current study. It is possible that "power to" measures reflect a potential for power or the *capacity* to fulfill or impede personal and relational needs, rather than *actual* power to avoid or resist male power and violence. Still, we found that earning an income may be protective for some, because women in couples contributing equal incomes reported significantly lower rates of physical and marginally lower rates of psychological violence. However, we found that women who contributed *more* income to the relationship, and reported *higher* levels of household decision making than their partners, reported higher levels of psychological violence. In these cases, it is plausible that male partners use psychological intimidation to reestablish dominance and discipline their partners when women demonstrate a violation of gender norms, perhaps because they feel entitled to power (e.g., Anderson, 2005; Yllö, 1993). Nevertheless, the findings suggest that when women have more relationship power (as measured as an index of relationship dynamics), and their partners control them less, they report fewer experiences with physical, psychological, and sexual violence, further reinforcing the assertion that violence against women is due to women's exclusion from power structures (e.g., Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010). Although increasing access to and control over resources may be an important route to improving women's power, it is ultimately the power dynamics within the relationship that need to change to address violence against women. Without exploring multiple measures of relationship power simultaneously, a full understanding of this process would be lost.

This study also provides evidence suggesting that more equitable attention to psychological violence in the study of domestic violence is warranted. Although there has been a larger focus on physical violence against women (e.g., Atkinson et al., 2005; Flake, 2005), the findings from the current study demonstrate that relationship power and control also predicted receipt of psychological violence. In fact, the results showed that partner control predicted almost twice the variance in psychological violence than in either physical or sexual violence. Importantly, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines violence against women as

any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private (UN, 1995).

Although it is clear that psychological abuses are considered conceptually in the definition of violence against women, they are comparatively under-studied in investigations of domestic violence. The findings from this study suggest that psychological violence is highly correlated with physical and sexual violence and that relationship power and control are an integral part of understanding all forms of violence. Future

research on domestic violence needs to assess psychological violence to have a complete picture of how the cycle of violence operates.

Although the study findings are promising, it should be considered that the models only explain a small portion of the variance in violence against women. The remaining unexplained variance suggests that a number of unmeasured variables might help to understand women's receipt of violence. In particular, because there is an inherent bias toward individual levels of analysis in the domestic violence literature, we argue that greater attention needs to be paid to structural and interpersonal predictors of violence against women (Else-Quest & Grabe, 2012; Fine, 1989). For example, men's motives for power, expectations about and entitlements to power, and their perceptions of and satisfaction with power may help to explain violence against women (Kaura & Allen, 2004; Malik & Lindahl, 1998; Ronfeldt, Kimerling, & Arias, 1998). Violence is integral to the masculine identity of many cultures and has become a tactic deeply intertwined with men's power and entitlement; the ideal man is dominant, strong, aggressive (sexually and otherwise), a breadwinner, decision-maker, and patriarch of the family (Anderson, 2005; Sternberg, 2000; Yllö, 1993). As such, acceptance of violent behavior as part of traditional masculine gender roles, regardless of levels of actual power, may be another variable that could explain a portion of the variance in violence we found. Thus, future research should consider models exploring power and violence from a feminist liberation psychology perspective because it recognizes that oppressive social structures and ideologies help sustain unequal power within relationships, thereby putting women at risk.

Despite the study limitations, these findings have implications for using research on power to design and assess domestic violence interventions. Qualitative studies suggest that men see power as a zero-sum game and often feel disempowered by women's economic and social gains, which may lead them to use violence (Dworkin, Colvin, Hatcher, & Peacock, 2012; Dworkin, Dunbar, Krishnan, Hatcher, & Sawires, 2011). The current study's findings reinforce this idea because women who contributed more income and household decision making than their partners also experienced more violence. In another context, providing income to women via microcredit lending programs led to increased violence against women because it violated norms of power and gender and contributed to conflict over finances (Schuler, Hashemi, & Badal, 1998). Thus, resources should instead be directed toward taking into account men's "power over" by combining women's empowerment programs with work that engages men in exploring how gender equality could benefit them, minimizing the perception of power as a zero-sum game, and reducing backlash (Dworkin et al., 2011). In addition, we must acknowledge how inequalities between men, poverty, and marginalization contribute to men's inability to provide for their families and to feelings of disempowerment, because these factors could magnify women's risk of violence (Dworkin et al., 2012). In sum, we must continue to adopt a feminist liberation psychology analysis with a focus on power and control to eradicate the pervasive human rights violation that is domestic violence and achieve the UN Development Goal (2014, p. 20) "to promote gender equality and empower women."

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Notes

1. See Grabe (2010) for a complete description of the sampling procedure. In the original study, there were two groups, one of landowning women and another of non-landowning women. In the current study, interaction effects between group membership and study variables were tested, but because none of the interactions was significant, the sample was considered as a whole.
2. Twenty-five women were missing data on observation of violence in childhood because their parents did not live together. Nine women were missing a score on the financial decision-making scale, either because none of the decisions was applicable for them, or they chose not to answer. For both of these variables, analyses were run with and without mean replacement using the means from the entire sample. Because mean replacement did not affect the significance of the findings, the computed scores with mean replacement were used to retain the whole sample size in regression analyses.

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