

## Empirical Research About Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence: A Methodological Review

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**TABLES 1 AND 2 CAN BE FOUND AT THE END OF THE ARTICLE**

### **Abstract:**

This article presents a systematic review of empirical research examining intimate partner violence among same-sex couples. Seventeen studies that met the inclusion criteria were rated using a 15-item evaluation questionnaire. The results indicated that the existing body of research examining same-sex intimate partner violence demonstrates some common methodological strengths and limitations. The authors conclude with a list of recommendations for future research based on the results of this study.

### **Article:**

Same-sex intimate partner violence (SSIPV) describes acts of physical, psychological, and emotional, and sexual abuse that occur between two intimate partners of the same sex or gender (Murray, Mobley, Buford, & Seaman-DeJohn, 2007). Rates of SSIPV are comparable to rates of heterosexual domestic violence, with approximately one quarter to one half of all same-sex intimate relationships demonstrating abusive dynamics (Alexander, 2002; T. W. Burke, Jordan, & Owen, 2002; McClennen, 2005; Pitt, 2000). The consequences of SSIPV can be severe and affect the involved individuals in many areas of their lives—including their physical and mental health, extended family relationships, social support networks, occupational functioning, and financial well being. SSIPV is therefore a significant issue facing the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) population.

To date, a limited body of research exists examining the prevalence, dynamics, and consequences of SSIPV. Previous researchers studying the issue have acknowledged significant limitations within the existing research that reduce its usefulness and generalizability, as will be discussed in the review of the literature section. The purpose of the study described in this article was to conduct a systematic evaluation of recent empirical research examining SSIPV. We sought to determine the strengths and weaknesses of this growing body of research in order to define the current state of research examining SSIPV. In addition, we aimed to develop directions for future research based on the needs demonstrated within the existing literature. We recognize the challenges inherent to studying an issue that is as shrouded in silence as SSIPV; therefore, the intent of this study is not to disparage previous researchers and their scholarly endeavors, but rather to provide a solid foundation for stronger research to aid in the understanding of this complex issue.

To that end, we reviewed 17 empirical studies examining SSIPV that appeared in the scholarly literature between January 1995 and July 2006. We located studies through an extensive search of databases in relevant academic disciplines. We then conducted a systematic review of the methodologies used in those studies. For this review, we adapted the methodological review strategies used in two previous studies: the review of family preservation program research by Heneghan, Horwitz, and Leventhal (1996) and the review of heterosexual intimate partner violence prevention program evaluation research by Murray and Graybeal (2007). We provide additional information about the methods used for the data analysis in the methodology section of this article.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this section, we present a literature-based rationale for conducting a systematic methodological review of research examining SSIPV. We first describe the history and context surrounding SSIPV research. Next, we outline previous scholars' commentaries regarding the state of research examining SSIPV, including common challenges facing researchers studying this phenomenon. Finally, we demonstrate the value of systematic methodological reviews by describing their purpose and their previous utility in other areas of scholarly inquiry. It is beyond the scope of this article to present a complete description of the dynamics of SSIPV. Therefore, we refer interested readers to the following content-based literature reviews for this information: Alexander (2002); L. K. Burke and Follingstad (1999); Murray et al. (2007); and Poorman (2001).

### *History and Context of Research Examining Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence*

A number of contextual factors have influenced the growing body of research examining SSIPV. The most significant influences are seen in the areas of (a) historical issues, (b) the general contexts of research examining same-sex relationships and of research examining domestic violence, and (c) public policy issues.

Research examining SSIPV began relatively recently, within the past 30 years. One of the earliest studies examining SSIPV was published in 1978, but the body of research did not really begin to grow until the mid- to late-1980s (L. K. Burke & Follingstad, 1999). Although an increasing number of studies have been published over the past 30 years, “in comparison to studies involving heterosexual partner abuse, gay and lesbian battering has remained an understudied phenomenon” (p. 487). Burke and Follingstad suggest that a number of factors contributed to the slow growth of research on SSIPV, including widespread cultural perceptions that intimate partner violence is limited to male perpetrators abusing female victims, discriminatory biases against the LGBT community and same-sex relationships, and reluctance to acknowledge that large numbers of same-sex intimate relationships exist. Overall, the rate of publication of research examining the dynamics of heterosexual violence has far outpaced that of research examining SSIPV (Fortunata & Kohn, 2003).

Dynamics of the communities of scholars who study either same-sex intimate relationships and the LGBT population or domestic violence in general have also shaped the existing body of research on SSIPV. In past years, researchers studying the LGBT population have demonstrated a preference for examining other issues, such as HIV and AIDS, over SSIPV (Byrne, 1996). In addition, McLaughlin and Rozee (2001) suggested that lesbian intimate partner violence is

shrouded in silence within the lesbian community and that “the lesbian community may not be conceptualizing violence in lesbian relationships as domestic violence” (p. 45). Research by LGBT scholars may therefore have been limited by an inadequate availability of theoretical conceptualizations and appropriate language to describe SSIPV (Bornstein, Fawcett, Sullivan, Senturia, & Shiu-Thornton, 2006).

Scholars within the domestic violence community have also been slow to study SSIPV. Poorman, Seelau, and Seelau (2003) point out that, traditionally, violence perpetrated by men against women has been judged to be more serious than other forms of intimate partner violence, thus leading many domestic violence researchers to focus primarily on that targeted to heterosexuals. However, perhaps the most fundamental challenge to domestic violence researchers in studying SSIPV is that it confronts the underlying feminist paradigm that has propelled much of the domestic violence movement. The essence of the philosophy of the domestic violence movement (also referred to as the *battered women's movement*) is that patriarchy and sexism are the root causes of male violence toward women in intimate relationships; therefore, women are the domestic violence victims of male perpetrators (Elliott, 1996). Although recent years have seen the advancement of more inclusive definitions of domestic violence, a primary challenge that remains for domestic violence researchers as they study SSIPV is overcoming the heterosexual paradigm that defines much of the domestic violence movement (Ristock, 2003).

In addition to the above issues, public policies shape the context surrounding SSIPV research. Two areas in which public policies influence the availability and quality of SSIPV research lie in the availability of funding for research and the willingness of affected individuals to report their experiences. In many states, SSIPV is either not covered specifically or is clearly denied within state domestic violence statutes (Barnes, 1998; T. W. Burke et al., 2002; Elliott, 1996). As such, public sources of funding (e.g., federal funding agencies and state government agencies) may divert research and service provision funds away from programs studying and serving individuals affected by SSIPV in favor of programs targeting heterosexual domestic violence. Therefore, researchers who study SSIPV may be forced to utilize smaller, local sources of funding (with corresponding smaller pools of financial support) or self-funding in order to finance their work. As a result, researchers may not have the funds or other resources required in order to undertake sophisticated research designs, leading them to rely on strategies of convenience.

Another potential consequence of the exclusion of SSIPV from state domestic violence statutes is that individuals affected by SSIPV may be denied access to such resources as protective orders or treatment services. Due to a real or perceived lack of civil protections, SSIPV victims may not report their experiences of abuse because they believe that being victimized by their partners is less frightening than being victimized by the system (Elliott, 1996). Alexander (2002) notes that existing research is replete with evidence that members of the LGBT population are reluctant to report SSIPV to local authorities and that this problem is compounded by the “lack of training among police officers, medical professionals and mental health workers on assessing same-sex domestic violence” (p. 98). All of these policies may instill or exacerbate a sense of shame among affected individuals and therefore carry over into their willingness to report experiences

of SSIPV to other types of institutional authorities, including scholarly researchers. Chronic underreporting can lead to substantial underestimates of the prevalence and incidence of SSIPV.

### *Previous Commentaries on Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence Research*

Although a systematic review of the methodologies used within that research was not conducted prior to the present study, previous researchers have examined the state of SSIPV research through scholarly commentaries. To date, L. K. Burke and Follingstad (1999) provide the most extensive commentary in their review of empirical research examining intimate partner violence within lesbian and gay relationships. They reviewed 19 empirical studies published in the scholarly literature between the years 1978 and 1995 (all but one of the studies were published between 1986 and 1995). Their work indicates that research examining SSIPV is subject to a number of potential issues that limit the accuracy of reported rates of violent or abusive behaviors within same-sex intimate relationships—including the lack of a standard, universally accepted definition of the phenomenon. Due to the lack of a uniform definition of SSIPV, “the results of the studies can be misleading, because they probably do not assess the same aspects of same-sex domestic violence” (Potoczniak, Mourot, Crosbie-Burnett, & Potoczniak, 2003, p. 253). Another issue is the potential failure for researchers to account for partners within the same couples in which both partners are part of the same research samples, thereby overrepresenting these couples' experiences in the research findings.

Perhaps the most significant challenge facing researchers who study SSIPV relates to obtaining representative samples for research studies (L. K. Burke & Follingstad, 1999). As Owen and Burke (2004) wrote, “there is no sampling frame that lists gay and lesbian persons, so all samples are based on self-identification of sexual orientation; this makes a random sample impossible to design” (p. 131). Alexander (2002) also notes that research on gay and lesbian mental health issues is frequently based on small sample sizes, making it difficult to apply results to a broader group and difficult to replicate study findings. Many researchers studying SSIPV have relied solely on convenience samples (Balsam, Rothblum, & Beauchaine, 2005; Halpern, Young, Waller, Martin, & Kupper, 2004), thereby rendering the findings impossible to generalize beyond study participants. Typical participant recruitment strategies used by SSIPV researchers involve recruiting through LGBT publications, community-based organizations, and public events (Halpern et al., 2004). Facing the impossibility of a truly random sample, researchers who study SSIPV and same-sex intimate relationships in general are faced with the unique challenge of developing alternative strategies to obtain samples that will maximize the similarity of the samples they obtain to the populations they wish to study.

Finally, L. K. Burke and Follingstad (1999) suggested that the existing research examining SSIPV demonstrates potential biases resulting from social desirability. Social desirability presents a major potential threat to the validity of research findings regarding intimate partner violence. Perpetrators may be reluctant to report their own abusive behaviors because doing so would require them to admit to socially unaccepted, often illegal activities. Victims may be reluctant to report their experiences of being abused because they fear that reporting such experiences would reflect negatively on their own decisions and their relationships. Early studies of SSIPV generally did not incorporate strategies to account for potential social desirability biases—such as including measures of social desirability and incorporating multiple sources of data to provide evidence of the existence of SSIPV (L. K. Burke & Follingstad, 1999).

High-quality research examining SSIPV is needed in order to further establish the scope and consequences of this issue, to support the need for increased funding for services for victims and perpetrators, and to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. In addition, Potoczniak et al. (2003) indicate that, while similarities exist between SSIPV and heterosexual domestic violence, the parallels and differences between same-sex and heterosexual relationships are in need of further study and validation. We agree with the assessment by Greenwood and colleagues (2002) that, in the area of SSIPV research, “sorely needed are theory-driven, longitudinal, mixed methodological and well-controlled studies that systematically elucidate the etiology, maintenance, context, and trajectories” (p. 1968). Therefore, a need exists for a systematic review of methodologies used to date in order to (a) examine the extent to which the existing research is limited by common methodological challenges, (b) identify promising practices for overcoming these challenges, and (c) identify areas of focus for future researchers who wish to study SSIPV in a methodologically-sound manner.

### *The Value of Methodological Reviews*

In this section, we aim to familiarize readers with the definition and purpose of systematic methodological reviews and the manner in which these reviews have been used to enhance research practices in other areas of scholarly inquiry. A methodological review involves “descriptions of research design, methods, and procedures that...should highlight the strengths and weaknesses of methodological tools and explore how methods constrain or open up opportunities for learning” (American Educational Research Association, 2006, para. 6). The purpose of conducting a methodological review is to evaluate the methodologies used within existing studies on a particular topic in order to identify needed directions for future research (Dickersin, 2002). Methodological reviews differ from content reviews of a body of literature (which focus on the findings of existing research studies) in that they focus on an in-depth analysis and synthesis of the methodological practices used to generate the reviewed studies' findings (Gallagher, 1999).

Methodological reviews have been used across a wide range of academic disciplines in order to examine research practices involved in a variety of areas of research. They are particularly useful for examining a body of research that is believed to demonstrate significant methodological weaknesses but that is needed for guiding practice- or policy-related decisions. For example, Blow and Hartnett (2005) indicated dual purposes for their methodological review of research examining infidelity in the *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, a journal whose target audience is practicing couple and family therapists. First, they indicated that methodologically sound studies were sorely lacking, with much of the existing research based on “methodologically weak studies” (p. 184), but were needed in order to guide the scientific practice of couple therapy. Second, they aimed to “provide clarity for future research in this key area” (p. 184) by identifying the needs within the current body of research. Within the social science domain, similar efforts have been undertaken recently in the areas of counseling research (Bangert & Baumberger, 2005), adolescent substance abuse treatment (Austin, Macgowan, & Wagner, 2005), the links between viewing violent media and aggressive behavior (Savage, 2004), and health assessments among the elderly population (Byles, 2000), to name just a few. Therefore, methodological reviews represent a well-established practice for evaluating the state

of research in a particular area of inquiry and for guiding future directions for research practices and strategies.

## METHODOLOGY

As a basis for this systematic methodological review of SSIPV research, we grounded our review practices in the strategies used previously by other researchers. The two studies providing a primary foundation for our study are by Heneghan and colleagues (1996)—a methodological review of family preservation program research—and Murray and Graybeal (2007)—a methodological review of intimate partner violence prevention research. Both of these studies were also informed by the work of Chalmers et al. (1981), which therefore provides a secondary foundation for the present study. The remainder of this section presents the criteria used to select studies to review and the criteria and rating procedures we used to evaluate the methodologies used in the selected studies.

### *Study Selection Criteria*

We used eight study selection criteria to determine which studies to include in our review.

1. We only included studies published between January 1995 and July 2006—thereby focusing our review on recent research published since the literature reviewed by L. K. Burke and Follingstad (1999).
2. We included only empirical research for this review, thereby excluding qualitative research. Because qualitative research and empirical research are grounded in different methodological paradigms, unique review criteria would need to be used for each type of research. Therefore, the inclusion of qualitative research was deemed to be beyond the scope of this study, and this is an area in which future investigation is warranted.
3. We included only those studies for which the focus of the investigation was related directly to SSIPV, as opposed to other forms of violence that may occur within the LGBT population (e.g., hate crimes or acquaintance rape). In order to meet this criterion, the term *intimate partner violence* or a synonym of that term (e.g., IPV, domestic violence, or partner abuse) must have appeared in either the title or abstract of the article, and the study must have demonstrated a clear purpose to inform the understanding of SSIPV.
4. We included only those studies whose population of study was same-sex couples within the LGBT population. As such, we did not include studies that included information about same-sex couples that was gathered as part of broader-scale studies examining intimate partner violence within the general population. The rationale for this criterion was that we wanted to examine the methodologies used to study SSIPV specifically.
5. We included only peer-reviewed articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals.
6. We included only descriptive research in this review, and we did not include program evaluation research studying interventions for individuals affected by SSIPV. It is important to note, however, that our extensive search for articles examining SSIPV did not reveal any program evaluation studies, indicating that the existing research focuses on describing SSIPV, rather than on measuring the efficacy or effectiveness of interventions.
7. Only studies published in the English language only were included.
8. Studies were only included if they focused on adult (ages 18 and over) populations. Thus, we excluded two studies of adolescent dating violence within the LGBT population (Freedner, Freed, Yang, & Austin, 2002; Halpern et al., 2004).

Once we established these selection criteria, we began our extensive search for published articles that met all eight criteria. We searched for articles through eight scholarly databases across a variety of relevant academic disciplines: Academic Search Premier, Family and Society Studies Worldwide, GLBT Life, Gender Studies, PsychINFO, PubMed, Social Work Abstracts, and Sociological Abstracts. Within each database, we used all of the following search terms (individually and in various combinations): abuse, bisexual, couple, domestic violence, gay, homosexual, intimate partner violence, IPV, lesbian, LGBT, LGBTI, partner, partner abuse, same-sex, transgender, and violence. We searched these databases until saturation occurred, at which time the same articles were identified repeatedly and no new articles were cited.

We read the abstracts of the articles located through the database search and we obtained full-text copies of all articles that appeared to meet the inclusion criteria. We were unable to track the number of articles that were identified through the search due to the frequent overlap in articles identified through the various databases and search terms, as well as the number of articles that were identified through the databases that were irrelevant to the topic of SSIPV. Therefore, we do not report the percentage of articles identified that were screened further or included in the review because such a figure would be inaccurate and not meaningful. The full-text of all articles that passed the initial screening process was read thoroughly by a member of the research team as part of a content review of the literature on SSIPV. The results of that review are presented elsewhere (Murray et al., 2007). We identified 17 studies that met all eight study selection criteria, all of which are included in this methodological review.

### *Study Methodological Evaluation Criteria*

We developed a standardized, criterion-based evaluation rating guide to use as part of the systematic review of the methodologies used in the studies we reviewed. This rating guide was based on the previous work of Heneghan et al. (1996), whose criteria were based on Chalmers et al. (1981), and Murray and Graybeal (2007). Both of these studies used 15-item questionnaires to guide their reviews of program evaluation research studies on family preservation programs and heterosexual intimate partner violence prevention, respectively. The specific criteria included on the questionnaires used by these researchers were specific to their topics of study. Therefore, the criteria required modification in order to be appropriate for an evaluation of research examining SSIPV. We revised the criteria based on the SSIPV literature review conducted by L. K. Burke and Follingstad (1999), including criteria related to methodological strategies that they described as important when conducting research on SSIPV (i.e., presenting the definitions of the types of abuse studied, clarifying the type of abuse studied, controlling for social desirability, treating members of the same couple appropriately within the data analysis, and specifying the strategy used for classifying participants' sexual orientation).

The questionnaires used by Heneghan et al. (1996) and Murray and Graybeal (2007) required further modification to make them appropriate for evaluating descriptive research, as both of the previous research teams evaluated program evaluation research. Therefore, evaluation criteria that were specific to program evaluation research (e.g., use of a control group, descriptions of the type of interventions used, and details regarding the intensity and duration of the intervention) were excluded and replaced with the above items specific to SSIPV research. The result of these modifications was the development of a rating guide that was specific to the evaluation of descriptive research examining SSIPV.

Fifteen questions comprised the rating guide used for this study. The included questions were as follows:

1. Are representative sampling procedures (e.g., random selection, systematic sampling) used to select individual participants?
2. Are eligibility criteria for participation in the study specified?
3. Are exclusion criteria specified?
4. Does the study specify how participants' sexual orientation is measured or categorized?
5. Are partners within the same relationship either (a) not both included in the same sample or (b) paired in the analysis of the data?
6. Is the timing of data collection specified?
7. Is the methodology described in sufficient detail as to permit replication?
8. Are standardized, psychometrically sound (acceptable reliability and validity described in the text) assessment instruments utilized?
9. Is a control for social desirability used?
10. Is the study clear as to the type(s) of abuse measured within the study?
11. Are definitions of the types of abuse measured presented?
12. Are the conditions under which participants completed the surveys or participated in the research standardized?
13. Do the variables measured represent multiple levels (attitudinal, behavioral, and observational)?
14. Are appropriate statistical analyses used?
15. Are conclusions drawn appropriately?

The detailed rating guide that describes each of these questions, including the instructions for scoring each question, in more detail is available from the first author. For each question answered affirmatively, a study receives one point. Therefore, each study could receive a total possible score of 15.

Like Heneghan and colleagues (1996) and Murray and Graybeal (2007), we used a three-tier stratification system to classify studies based on their final total scores. *Acceptable studies* were those studies receiving at least 70% of the total possible points (i.e., at least 11 out of 15 points). *Adequate studies* were those receiving between 40% and 69% of the total possible points (i.e., 6 to 10 out of 15 points). *Unacceptable studies* were those whose total scores fell below 40% of the total possible points (i.e., 0 to 5 out of 15 points).

### ***Rating Procedures***

Once the Methodological Evaluation Criteria Rating Guide and corresponding Score Form was developed, two raters reviewed each of the 17 studies and assigned scores to each study for each of the 15 criteria. The raters were the second author, who is an assistant faculty member with a doctoral degree, and a Masters-level graduate research assistant, who had prior experience coding data for a methodological review. Each rater worked independently to review each article. Upon completion of the ratings by each reviewer, the data were compiled into a database in order to calculate the interrater agreement using percent agreement and the kappa statistic. The interrater agreement was 87%, or  $\kappa$  of 0.74 (indicating substantial agreement; Landis & Koch, 1977). In order to determine the final score when there were disagreements between the two

raters, a third rater (a Masters-level graduate research assistant in counseling who also possesses a Masters degree in clinical psychology) also assigned scores to all of the studies for each criteria. The third rater's scores were used as a tiebreaker to determine the final scores for those criteria for which the first two raters disagreed. The final scores are reported in the Results section.

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the reference, population studied, and variables assessed in each of the 17 studies included in this review. Table 2 presents a detailed description of the ratings of each study based on our methodological review criteria.

Using the score stratification system to classify the studies according to their final scores, only one study (Greenwood et al., 2002) was deemed acceptable, with a final score of at least 70%. Fifteen studies were deemed adequate, with final scores ranging between 40% and 69% (Balsam et al., 2005; T. W. Burke et al., 2002; Craft & Serovich, 2005; Fortunata & Kohn, 2003; Heintz & Melendez, 2006; McClennen, Summers, & Daley, 2002; McClennen, Summers, & Vaughan, 2002; Merrill & Wolfe, 2000; Miller, Greene, Causby, White, & Lockhart, 2001; Owen & Burke, 2004; Regan, Bartholomew, Oram, & Landolt, 2002; Scherzer, 1998; Telesco, 2003; Toro-Alfonso & Rodriguez-Madera, 2004b; Waldner-Haugrud, Gratch, & Magruder, 1997). One study (Poorman & Seelau, 2001) was deemed *unacceptable*, with a final score falling below 40%.

The results revealed wide variation in the percentages of studies meeting each of the 15 evaluation criteria. The criteria that were least likely to be met by the studies we reviewed were using representative sampling procedures and using appropriate strategies for addressing partners within the same relationship as part of study samples, with only one study (6%) meeting each of these criteria. The other criteria that were met by less than one half of the reviewed studies included specifying the timing of the data collection (two studies or 12%); using a strategy to control for social desirability (two studies or 12%); specifying exclusion criteria (three studies or 18%); utilizing and describing standardized, psychometrically sound assessment instrumentation (eight studies or 47%); and standardizing the conditions under which participants participated in the research (eight studies or 47%).

Just over one half (nine studies or 53%) of the studies met each of the following criteria: presenting definitions of the types of abused measured in the study and measuring variables representing multiple levels. The remaining criteria were each met by over three quarters of the reviewed studies. Thirteen studies (76%) each specified the eligibility criteria for study participation and had methodologies that were described in sufficient detail as to permit replication. Fourteen studies (82%) specified the manner in which participants' sexual orientation was measured or categorized. The criteria of specifying clearly the types of abuse that were measured and drawing appropriate conclusions based on the findings were met by 16 studies (94%) each. All 17 studies demonstrated the usage of appropriate statistical analyses.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate a number of trends related to the methodological strategies used to studySSIPV. Following a summary of the major findings of this study, this section

presents a discussion of the limitations of this methodological review and outlines a number of recommendations for future research examining SSIPV.

### *Summary of Major Findings*

The vast majority of reviewed studies demonstrated adequate methodological strength based on the score stratification system we used to categorize studies based on their final scores. This suggests that, although efforts are needed to strengthen further research, the existing body of research examining SSIPV includes a number of studies using appropriate methodological strategies.

The results of this methodological review reveals trends in the strengths and weaknesses of the existing body of research examining SSIPV. The primary methodological strengths included using appropriate statistical analyses, clarifying the types of abuse measured within the studies, drawing appropriate conclusions based on the results, describing the manner in which sexual orientation was measured or categorized, detailing the eligibility criteria for study participation, and providing sufficient detail about the methodologies used in order to permit study replication. Common methodological limitations included failing to use representative sampling procedures, not using appropriate strategies to account for the potential inclusion of partners in the same relationship in study samples, failing to specify the timing of the data collection, omitting strategies to control for the potential influence of social desirability, and not describing the exclusion criteria for study participation.

### *Limitations*

The findings of this study must be interpreted within the context of its limitations. The first limitation of this methodological review was the strict inclusion criteria we used to select studies to review. The eight criteria were included in order to enhance the systematic nature of our evaluation. However, it is possible that studies incorporating creative methodological strategies were excluded from our review because they did not meet one or more of the eight criteria.

Second, our review was limited to studies that were catalogued within the eight scholarly databases we searched and to those that were identified using the search terms we described in the methodology section. Although we are confident that our search strategy achieved a comprehensive review of existing studies examining SSIPV, the possibility remains that other studies could have been located if we had broadened our search even further.

The third limitation of this review was the exclusion of qualitative research studies. The application of our Methodological Evaluation Criteria Rating Guide was specific for empirical studies and would therefore not have been appropriate for evaluating qualitative studies. Nonetheless, there are a number of qualitative studies that examine SSIPV, and further inquiry is needed in order to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative research in this area.

The final two limitations of this study relate to the strategy used to evaluate studies based on the Methodological Evaluation Criteria Rating Guide. First, because each evaluation criterion was weighted equally in the scoring procedures, the total scores assigned to each study should be considered a basic assessment of the methodological strategies rather than an overall evaluation of the relative merit of a study. By weighting each criterion equally, our methodological

evaluation procedures did not account for the varying levels of impact that each criterion has on the overall strength of a study. Second, the score stratification system we adopted from Heneghan et al. (1996) and Murray and Graybeal (2007) is limited by its arbitrary nature. Studies were stratified based on the percentage of criteria they met; although the stratification offers categorical value, the real differences between the categories have not yet been subject to thorough inquiry. Like Murray and Graybeal, we recommend that the stratification categories be considered in conjunction with each study's raw score and percentage of criteria met. Further research is needed in order to develop more sensitive strategies for systematically reviewing a body of research.

### *Directions for Future Research*

Although the body of research examining SSIPV has continued to grow since L. K. Burke and Follingstad (1999) conducted their literature review, many of the same methodological problems they identified in research published between 1978 and 1995 continue to be found in the more recent studies we reviewed for the present study. In this section, we conclude with seven recommendations for researchers planning future studies examining SSIPV. We base these recommendations on the foundation of the strengths of existing studies, as well as the needs evident for improving the methodological rigor of future studies.

**Develop creative strategies for recruiting representative samples:** Continuing the trends evident in the literature review by L. K. Burke and Follingstad (1999), a major problem that persists within the body of SSIPV research is found in the area of representative sampling. We agree with other scholars (L. K. Burke & Follingstad, 1999; Owen & Burke, 2004) who suggested that obtaining representative samples within the LGBT population is the greatest challenge facing researchers in this area. Nonetheless, representative samples are crucial for establishing the external validity of a study's findings. Therefore, although a true random sampling strategy probably is, indeed, impossible to achieve when studying SSIPV, we urge researchers to utilize strategies that will enhance the generalizability of their findings whenever possible. We recommend that future researchers consider utilizing the following strategies.

First, we encourage researchers who study SSIPV to develop partnerships with other researchers who study domestic violence within general populations using representative sampling procedures. When these partnerships are developed, research teams can modify study materials (including recruitment materials and survey instrumentation) to utilize gender-neutral language that is inclusive of same-sex intimate relationships. For example, a nationally representative survey of dating violence among college students could be constructed to include both heterosexual and same-sex dating relationships. Because the sample would be obtained using representative sampling procedures, the subset of data for participants involved in same-sex dating relationships would be more representative of the population than data obtained through a convenience sample.

Second, researchers who study SSIPV can utilize quota sampling strategies to recruit samples that reflect basic demographic profiles of the LGBT population (Dooley, 2001). Researchers can consult estimates based on census data for population statistics of the demographic characteristics of the LGBT population within the United States. This demographic information can be found through Internet sites, including Gay Demographics ([www.gaydemographics.org](http://www.gaydemographics.org)),

which also includes state-level data) and The Gay and Lesbian Atlas (<http://www.urban.org/pubs/gayatlas/>). For example, using statistics from The Gay and Lesbian Atlas (<http://www.urban.org/pubs/gayatlas/NewYorkCity.pdf>), a researcher studying SSIPV in New York City could aim to recruit a sample in which 73% of the sample does not have children and the ethnic diversity of the sample includes approximately 59% White participants, 20% Hispanic participants, 16% Black participants, and 9% of participants from other ethnic backgrounds. This researcher could further attempt to match the study sample to the population statistics according to other characteristics, including gender and income level. Although the study sample may still be unrepresentative of the population along other demographic characteristics (Dooley, 2001), quota sampling strategies can help to maximize the similarity of the sample to the population, thereby increasing the generalizability of the findings.

When the use of representative sampling procedures is not feasible, we recommend the following strategies. First, for all studies using convenience sampling methods, researchers should report in great detail the demographic characteristics of the sample. We encourage researchers to expand the demographic questionnaires they utilize to include, at minimum, the following characteristics: age, gender, ethnic background, self-reported sexual orientation, income level, education level, employment status, current relationship status, geographic location, and, if the participant is in a current relationship, the length of the relationship and the partner's demographic characteristics. When comparable population demographic statistics are available, researchers should use statistical techniques to compare their samples to the general demographic profiles of the wider LGBT population. Finally, researchers utilizing convenience samples can establish more clear parameters for the population from which they hope to draw participants by strengthening and reporting the eligibility and exclusion criteria they use to determine their samples. The present methodological review revealed that 76% of the studies reviewed described the eligibility criteria for participation, but only 18% of the studies described exclusion criteria. Rather than aiming to recruit convenience samples with a sole goal of obtaining the maximum number of participants possible, we recommend that researchers develop appropriate eligibility and exclusion criteria that will promote the most meaningful sample for studying the targeted population and variables under investigation.

**Use clear, consistent definitions to describe the types of violence studied:** Clear, consistent definitions of SSIPV are needed in order to strengthen future research in this area (L. K. Burke & Follingstad, 1999; Potoczniak et al., 2003). Researchers studying SSIPV must pay greater attention to the operational definitions they use to define abusive behaviors within relationships. The studies we reviewed varied in the strategies they used to measure abusive relationship behaviors, thereby limiting the ability to compare findings across studies. The present methodological review revealed that most studies (94%) specified the types of abuse that were measured. Because SSIPV can encompass physical, psychological and emotional, and sexual abuse, we recommend that researchers continue this practice in future studies.

Our methodological review also revealed an important area for future improvements related to the definition and measurement of abuse. Only approximately one half of the studies we reviewed presented definitions of the types of abuse that were measured. Future researchers should present a clear statement of the definitions on which they based their studies, including their general definition of SSIPV and definitions of any specific types of abuse they study. Such

definitional clarity will help to enhance comparisons of findings across studies. On a larger scale, we recommend that groups of researchers work to establish consensus definitions of SSIPV and its various forms that can be used across studies.

**Include strategies to control for the potential influence of social desirability:** Self-report data is particularly susceptible to respondents' tendencies to answer in a socially acceptable manner, which is known as social desirability bias. The potential for data contamination by social desirability bias has long been a concern among behavioral scientists (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Social desirability bias threatens construct validity by rendering unclear the extent to which measures represent accurately their intended constructs (Smith & Mackie, 2000). Furthermore, this threat to construct validity may inaccurately attenuate, accentuate, or moderate the relationships between constructs (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999). Within SSIPV research, social desirability bias poses a particular concern for researchers, given that violent relationship behaviors generally are not considered to be socially desirable. However, only 2 of the 17 studies reviewed included measures of social desirability. As such, we suggest the following methods that can be used by researchers studying SSIPV to minimize the threat of social desirability bias, including social desirability assessments, incorporating direct and indirect sources of data collection, and measuring variables across multiple levels of assessment.

A number of assessments exist to measure participants' tendencies to respond in self-report data based on social desirability, such as the Crowne-Marlowe Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960), the Martin-Larsen Approval Motivation Scale (Martin & Greenstein, 1983), and the Other-Deception and Self-Deception Questionnaires (Paulhus, 1984; Sackeim & Gur, 1979). Due to their considerable length and limited psychometric properties of these measures, short form measures with acceptable psychometric properties have also been developed to measure social desirability bias (Blake, Valdiserri, Neuendorf, & Nemeth, 2006; Fischer & Fick, 1993). Researchers studying SSIPV should select appropriate measures of social desirability bias in accordance with the research design and constructs being measured.

Research may be protected further from potential social desirability bias through the collection of both direct self-report data and indirect data. Indirect methods of data collection include utilizing couple data in the analysis to control for individual bias or utilizing indirect questioning. First, the collection of couple (i.e., dyadic) data assesses both partners' perpetration and victimization levels in addition to each partner's tendency toward social desirability responding (McCrae & Costa, 1983). This method allows researchers to estimate the differential effects of social desirability on violent behavior and violence reporting (see Sugarman & Hotaling, 1997, for a thorough review). Second, because respondents may find it difficult to express opinions or attitudes about sensitive issues, such as SSIPV via direct questioning (Kidder & Judd, 1986), researchers can also use indirect questioning methods to understand participants' attitudes toward SSIPV. Indirect questioning is accomplished by phrasing questions in neutral, non-first-person terms or by asking respondents for their perceptions of others' opinions or attitudes, rather than their own. An example of an indirect question relating to SSIPV attitudes that could be asked of a student on a college campus, "How do you think students on this campus would respond if they found out that a fellow student was being abused by his or her same-sex partner?"

Another strategy that researchers can use to control for the potential influence of social desirability is to measure variables across multiple levels of assessment—including attitudes, behaviors, and observational data. Our methodological review revealed that only 53% of the studies reviewed did so. Observational data is useful in order to validate self-report data, which is highly subject to social desirability (Dooley, 2001). In addition, the sole measurement of attitudinal variables can be misleading, in that attitudes do not necessarily translate into actual behavior (Nabi, Southwell, & Hornik, 2002). Therefore, the inclusion of multiple levels of assessment can enhance future research studies.

**Utilize appropriate assessment instrumentation and provide psychometric properties of instruments used in future studies:** More than half of the studies reviewed either did not utilize instrumentation with acceptable psychometric properties related to reliability and validity or the psychometric properties of the instrumentation were not reported within the text. In this review, we considered instruments to be psychometrically sound if they demonstrated an internal consistency measure (i.e., Cronbach's alpha) of at least  $\alpha = .80$  and at least some evidence to demonstrate construct validity with other measures of similar constructs (Corcoran & Fischer, 2000). WithinSSIPV research, sound instrumentation is essential for ensuring the reliability and validity of a study, as well as to enhance cross-study comparisons of findings. Therefore, we urge researchers studying this phenomenon to ensure that the measures they use in empirical studies demonstrate appropriate psychometric properties and that these properties are described within the methodology sections of written reports. In addition, the limited usage of sound assessment instrumentation suggests that more work is needed to develop appropriate, reliable, and valid instrumentation for assessingSSIPV within the LGBT population. Until appropriate instruments become more widely available, researchers are encouraged to report within each study the psychometric properties of the instruments used based on the study samples from which they collect data.

**Account for variables unique to the LGBT population:** Two of the study evaluation criterion that formed the basis for this methodological review related to methodological issues specific to studying the LGBT population: the measurement of sexual orientation and the treatment of partners within the same relationship in data analyses. The appropriate measurement or categorization of participants' sexual orientations is crucial for describing adequately the study sample and the populations to which the results may be generalized. Two major strategies researchers can use to measure or describe participants' sexual orientations are through self-report data, typically described as distinct categories (e.g., gay, lesbian, or bisexual), or through measures of sexual orientation. The majority of studies we reviewed described the strategies that were used to categorize participants' sexual orientations, and the studies relied primarily on self-report data. Although self-report data provides useful information, assessment instrumentation measuring sexual orientation on a continuum may provide a more accurate indication of the often flexible nature of human sexuality (for reviews of measurement issues related to sexual orientation, see Gates & Sell, 2007; Gonsiorek, Sell, & Weinrich, 1995; and Sell, 1997). Furthermore, researchers studyingSSIPV should also make efforts to determine the gender of the partners within relationships in which current or past violent behaviors are reported. An individual who self-identifies as being gay or lesbian may have experienced abusive dynamics within a current or former relationship with a heterosexual partner. If the researcher studying that

individual assumed that this partner is of the same gender because the individual self-identifies as being gay or lesbian, the rates of SSIPV may be inflated in the final results.

Only one of the studies reviewed included appropriate treatment within the data analyses of partners in the same relationship. Researchers studying SSIPV must be aware of the potential for biasing the results of the study toward the experiences of partners within the same relationship if these partners are not linked in the data analyses (L. K. Burke & Follingstad, 1999). This issue becomes particularly important in light of the trend for study samples to be recruited through convenience sampling methods, often including recruitment through LGBT-focused community organizations or events (Halpern et al., 2004). Partners within relationships may belong to the same organizations and attend events together, thereby increasing the likelihood that both partners will be recruited into study samples. Researchers who do not ask participants explicitly if their partners have also participated in the study—or use any other strategy to identify these relationships—are unlikely to be aware that this potential source of bias has entered into the study data. Overall, we urge researchers studying SSIPV to pay careful attention to the potential inclusion of relationship partners within the same study samples.

**Replicate previous studies in order to validate their findings:** We concur with L. K. Burke and Follingstad's (1999) suggestion that existing research findings about SSIPV should be subject to replication by other researchers, using stronger methodological strategies, in order to determine the extent to which findings have been influenced by their methodological limitations. Approximately three quarters of the studies reviewed for this methodological review were found to demonstrate methodologies that were described in adequate detail so as to permit replication by other researchers. Replications of previous studies with different samples and improved methodological practices will help to establish the validity of previous findings. In addition, even minor improvements in the methodological basis for the body of research examining SSIPV will enhance the availability of accurate information about this phenomenon, ultimately providing a stronger foundation for future research, practice, and public policy.

In seeking to improve upon previous studies, we urge researchers to pay particular attention to the areas in which this review revealed common methodological weaknesses in the existing research, namely related to sampling procedures, specifying the timing of the data collection, controlling for social desirability, and establishing exclusion criteria for participation when warranted. Because each study is subject to its own unique contributions and limitations, researchers should consider specific strategies they can use to improve upon any particular previous study they wish to replicate.

Two studies we reviewed provide an example of the value of study replication for this area of research. McClennen, Summers, and Vaughan (2002) and Merrill and Wolfe (2000), in their studies of domestic violence among gay males, designed their studies based on an earlier study of lesbian partner abuse by Renzetti (1992). These replicated studies allowed for informative comparisons between studies and added credence to the findings of each individual study when similarities were found across studies. Therefore, we recommend that SSIPV researchers undertake further efforts at collaboration and replication as one means of further enhancing the strength of this body of research.

### **Seek out, and advocate for, funding sources to help support future research examining**

**SSIPV:** Advocacy, in its many forms, is imperative for increasing the recognition of issues that are understudied or populations that are underserved. Advocacy activities relevant to increasing funding for SSIPV research may include (a) writing letters to sponsors of major funding agencies that support domestic violence research to request that grant funding announcements be inclusive of or designated for the study of SSIPV; (b) submitting grant proposals for research focusing on intimate partner violence to funding sources known to support the LGBT population; (c) working with local, state, and national government representatives in support of public policies promoting SSIPV research and interventions; and (d) engaging in public education activities (e.g., writing editorials in local newspapers and being interviewed for local radio or television broadcasts) in order to raise awareness within the general population of the significance of the issue of SSIPV. In addition, we urge researchers to include various forms of intimate relationships, whenever possible, when designing research and seeking funding for studies examining all forms of intimate partner violence and other relevant relationship dynamics. These activities can help to create an environment that is more conducive to research on the prevalence, dynamics, prevention, and intervention of SSIPV.

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**Table 1** Reference, Population Studied, and Variables Assessed of Reviewed Studies

<b>Study number in Table 2</b>	<b>Reference</b>	<b>Population studied</b>	<b>Variables measured<sup>a</sup></b>
1	Balsam, Rothblum, & Beauchine (2005)	Lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults, and their heterosexual siblings	Lifetime victimization: childhood psychological, sexual, and physical abuse; adulthood domestic physical and psychological violence; adulthood sexual assault
2	Burke, Jordan, & Owen (2002)	Gay and lesbian adults in the United States and Venezuela	Frequency of domestic violence victimization; attitudes toward domestic violence; perceptions of biases and confidence in criminal justice system
3	Craft & Serovich (2005)	Adult gay males who are HIV positive	Emotional, physical, and sexual intimate partner violence; family of origin violence
4	Fortunata & Kohn (2003)	Lesbians in current relationships	Intimate partner violence perpetration; childhood physical and sexual abuse; alcohol and drug use problems; psychopathology
5	Greenwood et al. (2002)	Adult men who have sex with men	Battering victimization (psychological, physical, and sexual)
6	Heintz & Melendez (2006)	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender victims of domestic violence	Sexual violence victimization; Safer sex practices
7	McClennen, Summers, & Daley (2002)	Lesbian adults	Partner abuse victimization; self-esteem; depression
8	McClennen, Summers, & Vaughan (2002)	Gay male victims of domestic violence	Forms and dynamics of abuse; help-seeking behaviors; correlates of abuse (dependence, jealousy, power imbalance, substance abuse, and intergenerational transmission of violence)

<b>Study number in Table 2</b>	<b>Reference</b>	<b>Population studied</b>	<b>Variables measured<sup>a</sup></b>
9	Merrill & Wolfe (2000)	Gay adult males who had experienced partner abuse	Types of partner abuse experienced; help-seeking behaviors; reasons for remaining in violent relationships
10	Miller et al. (2001)	Lesbian adults	Conflict resolution tactics (physical aggression and violence); fusion; independence; control; self-esteem
11	Owen & Burke (2004)	Men and women involved in current or past same-sex intimate relationships	Lifetime domestic violence victimization
12	Poorman & Seelau (2001)	Lesbian perpetrators of partner abuse	Expressed and wanted inclusion, affection, and control
13	Regan et al. (2002)	Gay and bisexual adult males	Physical violence perpetration and victimization; physical injury;
14	Scherzer (1998)	Lesbian adults	Participants' and their partners' relationship behaviors; experiences of partner abuse within relationships; perceptions of fights in their relationships; help-seeking behaviors; attitudes toward partner abuse
15	Telesco (2003)	Lesbian adults involved in current same-sex relationship	Sex role identity; relationship dynamics: dependency, jealousy, and power imbalance; physical and psychological abuse perpetration
16	Toro-Alfonso & Rodriguez-Madera (2004b) <sup>b</sup>	Adult gay or bisexual males in Puerto Rico with a history of at least one committed same-sex relationship	Intergenerational abuse; participants' and their partners' domestic violence behaviors; conflict resolution skills (assertiveness and aggression)
17	Waldner-Haugrud et al. (1997)	Gay and lesbian adults	Intimate partner violence victimization and perpetration

<sup>a</sup>All studies also include collection of demographic data from participants.

<sup>b</sup>This study is based on the same study (and therefore uses the same methodology) described in Toro-Alfonso and Rodriguez (2004a). Therefore, we included only one of these studies in this review.

**Table 2** Methodological Criteria Ratings for Reviewed Studies

Criteria	Study number (From Table 1)																% Meeting criteria	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16		17
Representative sampling procedures	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6%
Eligibility criteria	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	76%
Exclusion criteria	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	18%	
Sexual orientation measurement	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	82%	
Appropriate treatment of partners in same relationship	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6%	
Timing of data collection	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	12%	
Methodology detail	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	76%
Sound assessment instrumentation	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	47%
Social desirability control	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	12%	
Clarifies types of abuse measured	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	94%
Presents definitions of abuse	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	53%
Standardized participation conditions	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	47%
Multiple levels of variables measured	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	53%	
Statistical analyses	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100%
Appropriate conclusions	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	94%
<b>Total Score</b>	6	7	7	9	11	7	6	9	8	9	6	3	10	8	8	8	10	
<i>Notes: 1, present; 0, absent. The numbers used to represent the studies correspond to the study number presented in Table 1.</i>																		