

Intimate Partner Homicide Methods in Heterosexual, Gay, and Lesbian Relationships

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Previous research indicates that the killing method used in homicides may reflect the motivation of the offender and qualities of the victim–offender relationship. The effect of gender and sexual orientation of intimate partner homicide offenders ($N = 51,007$) was examined with respect to the brutality of killing methods. Guided by previous research and theory, it was hypothesized that homicide brutality will vary with the offender's sexual orientation and gender, such that the percentage of killings coded as brutal will be higher for (a) gay and lesbian relative to heterosexual relations, (b) men relative to women, (c) gay relative to heterosexual men, and (d) lesbian relative to heterosexual women. The rates of intimate partner homicide were also hypothesized to vary with the gender of the partners, such that (a) homicide rates will be higher in gay relative to heterosexual and lesbian couples and (b) homicide rates will be lowest in lesbian couples. The results support all but one prediction derived from the two hypotheses. We predicted that men would kill their partners more brutally than would women, but the results indicate that the opposite is true.

Keywords: homicide methods; gay; lesbian; heterosexual; intimate partner

A significant number of all homicides involve intimate partners (Drach, 2004; Paulozzi, Saltzman, Thompson, & Holmgreen, 2001; Scott & Davies, 2002). Research on intimate partner abuse, of which the most extreme cases culminate in homicide, among heterosexual partners is extensive (Aldridge & Browne, 2003; Dawson & Garner, 1998; Dobash, Dobash, Cavanagh, & Lewis, 2004; Drach, 2004; Dugan, Nagin, & Rosenfeld, 2003; Dutton & Kerry, 1999; Paulsen & Brewer, 2000; Saunders & Browne, 2000; Silverman & Mukherjee, 1987; Wilson & Daly, 1992, 1993, 1996). Similar research on intimate partner *abuse* among homosexual partners (see Burke & Follingstad, 1999, for a review) has become more prevalent in recent years. However, parallel research on same-sex intimate partner *homicide* is scarce (Glass, Koziol-McLain, Campbell, & Block, 2004; Puzone, Saltzman, Kresnow, Thompson, & Mercy, 2000).

Guided heuristically by evolutionary psychological theory (applying Darwinian evolutionary theory to psychological processes), this article addresses several gaps in the literature on intimate partner homicide, for both opposite-sex and same-sex partners. The main focus of the current article is on the method of killing of intimate partners according to the gender and sexual orientation of the offender. Gender differences are discussed to outline the underlying psychology of men and women and why there may be differences between the sexes

in motive and method of intimate partner homicide. First, evolutionary explanations for sex differences are presented followed by supplemental social explanations for sex differences from more mainstream social psychological sources. Relevant literature on sexual orientation is addressed in the same manner as the literature on sex differences. Previous research addressing the prevalence of homicide in general and intimate partner homicide specifically is summarized. This summary examines the prevalence of homicide and trends in homicide, with a special focus on gender, sexual orientation, and method of killing. An analysis of a national-level database is conducted to replicate and extend previous research. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and a presentation of several avenues for future research.

SEX DIFFERENCES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL AND HOMICIDAL BEHAVIORS

Evolutionary psychological theory provides an explanation for why men and women display behavioral similarities in some realms of life and behavioral disparities in others. Buss (1995) argues that some adaptive problems were encountered by both sexes during the environment of evolutionary adaptation, leading to species-wide adaptations, whereas a select set of adaptive problems was sexually asymmetrical, producing sexually dimorphic psychology, physiology, and behaviors. For example, women faced the problem of attracting a mate with “good genes” who also would provide adequately for and protect her and her offspring. It may not have been possible to find a mate who was able to provide both good genes and good fathering. One solution to this problem may have been cuckoldry, which allowed a woman to engage in surreptitious extra-pair mating to obtain the best genes while maintaining a long-term pairing with a good father.

In contrast, men were confronted with the possibility of investing resources in offspring that were not genetically related to them. Buss (1988) has identified several mate-guarding tactics that men use, and these behaviors vary with the probability of female infidelity (Buss & Shackelford, 1997b; Goetz et al., 2005). The fact that men feel the need to use mate-guarding behaviors suggests that women do engage in extra-pair copulations and that the mere act of extra-pair mating leads to the possibility of cuckoldry. Bellis and Baker (1990, and see Schmitt, 2006) estimate that as many as 30% of mothers are partnered to a different man than the genetic father at the time of their baby’s birth, and some of these mothers are likely to be engaging in cuckoldry of their partners.

The consequence of the conflicting interests of men and women was a sexual arms race of differing mating strategies. Women’s mating stratagem may have caused the evolution of countermeasures in men in the form of anticuckoldry mechanisms, which in turn resulted in an increased need for subterfuge on the part of women. Not all women use cuckoldry, but the possibility of it occurring may have resulted in the evolution of psychological mechanisms that produce jealousy, male proprietariness, and aggressive behavior (Daly & Wilson, 1999; Wilson & Daly, 1995, 1996; Wilson, Johnson, & Daly, 1995) to counter the risk of sperm competition (for further discussion see Goetz & Shackelford, 2006; Shackelford & Goetz, 2007; Shackelford, Pound, Goetz, & LaMunyon, 2005).

Men’s aggression can be used as a mate-guarding strategy in both intrasexual and intersexual interactions. Aggression and violence can operate both to deter interlopers in mate-poaching and to prevent or dissuade a woman from pursuing outside mating. Both of these may serve to decrease the likelihood of cuckoldry. According to Buss and Shackelford (1997a), “Males are more often the perpetrators of violence because they are

the products of a long history of mild but sustained effective polygyny characterized by risky strategies of intrasexual competition for access to the high-investing sex" (p. 613). On occasion, however, such behaviors can result in the death of the interloper, the intimate partner, or both.

Eagly and Wood (1999; and see Wood & Eagly, 2002) have argued that gender differences are the result of social roles within society (but see Archer, 2004). Social explanations for the development of gender differences in aggression specifically (e.g., Keenan & Shaw, 1997) have been offered as well, but research demonstrating that these differences do not escalate with time suggests that biological explanations for gender differences are more likely (Baillargeon et al., 2007). Regardless of the theoretical perspective (social or evolutionary), researchers generally agree that there are differences between men and women in many domains, including aggression.

Although women also use violence in interactions, Crick and Grotpeter (1995; but see Hyde, 2005) argue that women are more likely to display relational aggression (i.e., gossip or social exclusion) rather than physical aggression (Campbell, 1995). There are instances when women will resort to physical aggression and homicide, but it seems that the motivation behind the violence is different for the two sexes. Although women do report and display jealousy when their relationships are threatened, researchers have not found this to be a motivation behind intimate partner homicides committed by women. Using interviews of perpetrators, researchers have identified the specific motivations behind many homicides. For example, Kirkwood (2003) identified three circumstances in which women committed homicide. First, instances of severe coercion, abuse, and attempted femicide by a male partner can result in the woman responding with physical violence or killing in self-defense (see also, Mann, 1990; Peterson, 1999; Saunders, 2002, Wilson & Daly, 1992). Second, women kill both their children and sometimes their partners when they experience extreme stress from mothering problems in nonsupportive environments. Finally, women may kill their partners (and others) when they are financially disadvantaged. Thus, whereas the research suggests that men are motivated to kill their intimate partners in response to suspected or actual infidelity (Brewer & Paulsen, 1999; Buss & Shackelford, 1997a; Daly & Wilson, 1988a; Johnston & Hotton, 2003; Wilson & Daly, 1993; Wilson et al., 1995), women kill their male partners out of want for resources (Kirkwood, 2003), or out of fear of injury or death to themselves or their children (Drach, 2004; Johnston & Hotton, 2003; Kirkwood, 2003; Mann, 1990; Peterson, 1999; Saunders & Browne, 2000).

SOCIAL STRESSORS RELATED TO SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND SAME-SEX VIOLENCE

The literature on sexual orientation and abuse is sparse and the work that does exist consists primarily of convenience samples, which is a further limitation. Research has shown, however, that intimate partner abuse among gay and lesbian partners is similar to the types and frequency of abuse between heterosexual partners (Burke & Follingstad, 1999; Glass et al., 2004; Island & Letellier, 1991; Lobel, 1986; Renzetti, 1992; Turell, 2000; Worcester, 2002). Furthermore, researchers have demonstrated that gender has a greater effect than sexual orientation on mating strategies (Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, & Glaude, 1994). Other researchers, however, have found that sexual orientation does play a role in jealousy responses of participants, in that the sexual orientation of the interloper moderated the

jealousy responses (Dijkstra et al., 2001). Considering only the above findings, it seems unlikely that homicide between same-sex partners might be fundamentally different from homicide between opposite-sex partners. However, there are additional factors that must be considered before positing any predictions for this study.

Although not a great deal of work explicitly investigating sexual orientation has been conducted from an evolutionary perspective, some research generated from this perspective is relevant. For example, Daly and Wilson (1988a) suggest that genetic interest, both in kin relationships and those mateships in which couples share genetic interest in offspring, has a mitigating effect on the risk of homicide for coresidents. Daly and Wilson (1996) posited that there may be psychological adaptations to deter violence toward genetic kin. Consistent with this hypothesis, they found that genetically unrelated cohabitants are at 11 times greater risk of homicide by their housemate than are genetically related individuals who live together. Although gays and lesbians may form bonds with their in-group members (i.e., other gays and lesbians), they do not have the added benefit of the mitigating effects of shared genetic interest on violence. When children have gay or lesbian parents, they are likely to be genetically related to only one of the partners. Daly and Wilson (1994) and Weekes-Shackelford and Shackelford (2004), in turn, have demonstrated that, at least in heterosexual families, those that include replacement parents (e.g., stepparents) are at increased risk for domestic homicides. It seems reasonable to infer that same-sex partners who become stepparents might also incur this increased risk of homicide.

Relative to heterosexuals, gays and lesbians suffer from exacerbated (Perez, 1996), if not additional, personal stressors (Lebson, 2002), from living in societies that hold the assumptions that (a) everyone is heterosexual (D'Augelli, 2003) and (b) homosexuality is immoral (Murphy, 1989) or unacceptable and, therefore, that gays and lesbians are not entitled to the same rights as heterosexuals. For example, Lewis, Derlega, Berndt, Morris, and Rose (2001) found that gays and lesbians suffered from stressors associated with visibility issues, family conflict, discrimination, and internal conflict over their sexual orientation. Homophobia and discrimination seem to be related to many of the added stressors gay men and lesbians experience (Herek, 2000; Yang, 1997).

Many social institutions legitimize sexual prejudice and marginalization of same-sex couples. Religious institutions are one such entity that sometimes increases both interpersonal and intrapersonal discord. The recent instatement of a new conservative pope, for example, might help to maintain or even amplify this added stressor for homosexual couples. An evaluation of the limited legal benefits afforded to those in gay and lesbian relationships and the laws that serve to oppress such relationships (e.g., sodomy laws that were only recently overturned in Texas and the Defense of Marriage Act, Tahmindjis, 2005; custody laws, Lynch & Murray, 2000) reflect a legitimizing of homophobic reactions. Increased victimization (Balsam, Rothblum, & Beauchaine, 2005; Savin-Williams, 1994), suicide rates, and higher levels of suicidal ideation (de Catanzaro, 1995; Savin-Williams, 2001) among gays and lesbians provide additional support for the proposal of increased stress levels in this population.

Gays and lesbians also experience additional stressors in their relationships. Couples consisting of two partners of the same sex are partnered to an inherent competitor. Individual members of the same sex desire similar resources (i.e., men desire youthful mates and women desire partners of status) so, in general, competition occurs between individuals of the same sex (Daly & Wilson, 1996, 1997). In addition, gay and lesbian partners may have fewer abuse and homicide deterrents relative to heterosexual partners.

Figueredo et al. (2001) found that high local kin density of male relatives and high levels of family support were deterrents for spousal abuse of women by their male partners. Gays and lesbians report experiencing isolation from family and perceptions of a lack of emotional support from family (Kurdeck, 1988; Kurdeck & Schmitt, 1987), especially during the period of time that they initially reveal their sexual orientation (LaSala, 2000).

There are additional issues that may increase the risk of domestic violence in gay and lesbian relationships, relative to this risk in heterosexual relationships. For example, social services have been found to have a mitigating effect on domestic violence (Bybee & Sullivan, 2002; Carlson, McNutt, Choi, & Rose, 2002), and there are fewer social services available to same-sex domestic violence victims and perpetrators. Those services that are available to gay male and lesbian partners often are staffed inadequately or not well-suited to meet the unique needs of the gay community (Giorgio, 2002; Girshick, 2002). In women's centers that service women abused by their male partners, the staff is able to prevent the abusers from accessing the abused women's records or locating the women's shelters. However, it is difficult to differentiate between the victim and the perpetrator in gay and lesbian relationships. The abusive partner can pretend to be the victim and access their partner's records by phone. In the cases of group counseling and sheltering, services often provided by domestic violence centers (B. Levine, personal communication, April 2005), a perpetrator of abuse can obtain access to victims by attending the same group sessions or seeking the same sheltering services as his or her victim. The lack of social service support and the unique problems associated with existing services for victims of same-sex domestic violence put this population at high risk for escalating domestic violence that may result in homicide. Although we were not able to measure directly these psychosocial factors in the current study, they were considered in generating the hypothesis that homicide between same-sex partners will differ from homicide between opposite-sex partners.

TRENDS IN HOMICIDE AND HOMICIDE METHODS

Numerous studies have addressed the prevalence of intimate partner homicide. In a review of spousal homicide studies, Aldridge and Browne (2003) found that 37% of all female homicide victims and 6% of all male homicide victims in Wales and England were killed by their intimate partners. Researchers in the United States have calculated similar figures, with intimate partner homicide accounting for 30% of all female homicide victims (Brewer & Paulsen, 1999; Puzone et al., 2000) and 5% of all male homicide victims (Rennison, 2003). During an 8-year period, Carcach and James (1998) provided evidence from Australia supporting the large differential between the percentage of female (77%) and male (21%) homicide victims resulting from intimate partner homicide. Overall, one-third of all homicides during the study period were intimate partner homicides. This literature suggests that intimate partner homicide is a legitimate concern and that men are more likely to kill their intimate partners than are women. In fact, in a study of Chicago homicides, Block and Christakos (1995) reported that male victims of intimate partner homicide were more likely to be killed in domestic gay relationships than in heterosexual relationships.

Factors of relationship quality are related to hostility and to violence in relationships. For example, Gottman (1993) found that a lack of stability in relationships is related to increased hostility, and Heller, Ehrlich, and Lester (1983) found that the severity of victim injury caused during a physical conflict was related positively to the closeness of the

victim–offender relationship. Additional literature suggests that in homicide incidents, the method of killing differs as a function of the relationship type, relationship intensity, relationship stability, and the gender of the people involved in the incident. Intimate partners are more likely than other homicide offenders to kill in or near the victim’s residence and to kill using forms of violence that place them in closer proximity to the victim (Dobash et al., 2004). Dobash and colleagues found that men are more likely to use an “intimate” hands-on form of violence such as strangling in perpetrating intimate partner homicide relative to homicides in which they kill other men. Frye, Wilt, and Schomburg (1999) found that intimate partner femicide victims, relative to female victims of other types of homicides, are more likely to be stabbed or bludgeoned. Silverman and Mukherjee (1987; and see Daly & Wilson, 1994; Weekes-Shackelford & Shackelford, 2004) suggested that the intensity or stability of a relationship may be revealed in the method of homicide. They found that recently terminated intimate relationships (such as those involving separated or divorced partners) were more likely to culminate in violent methods of killing than were stable (i.e., intact) intimate relationships.

Female intimate partner homicide victims are often killed as a result of being shot, which apparently contradicts the intimate killing method theory. Other researchers (Brewer & Paulsen, 1999; Drach, 2004) have confirmed that firearms are a predominant method of intimate partner homicide. It is important to note, however, that gunshot wounds as well as stabbings are more often fatal than are other injuries (Block & Christakos, 1995; Zimring, 1972; Zimring, Mukherjee, & Van Winkle, 1983), which could inflate the figures for these methods of killing relative to other less lethal methods.

Many researchers outside of the United States have found that sharp instruments (Aldridge & Browne, 2003) or knives often are used in intimate partner homicides (Adinkrah, 1999a, 1999b; Dutton & Kerry, 1999). Women, specifically, are more likely than men to kill “in the urgency of passionate anger” (Goetting, 1987, p. 335), and to use a weapon of opportunity, such as a knife (Block & Christakos, 1995; but see Adinkrah, 1999a, 1999b). Corresponding to this greater use by women of knives as intimate partner homicide weapons, Paulozzi et al. (2001) found that men who are killed by intimate partners are more likely than other male homicide victims to be the victims of knife attacks. Aldridge and Browne (2003) also found sharp instruments to be the method of choice for both male and female offenders followed by men’s use of strangulation of female partners.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS LITERATURE

The literature on sex differences suggests that the sexual arms race of differing mating strategies or societal expectations for men may result in men using violence to deter interlopers and their mates from engaging in relationships that may lead to paternity uncertainty or to damage to their reputation. On the other hand, women are more likely to respond to the man’s violence rather than initiate it. The different male and female psychologies underlying intimate partner homicides committed by the two sexes, coupled with inherent physical differences of the sexes (i.e., strength differentials) is likely to be reflected in sex-differentiated methods of killing. The relevant literature on gay and lesbian partners suggests that the psychological sex differences will apply to these groups as well, in that gay men will be driven by similar jealousy and aggressive tendencies as heterosexual men and lesbians will be less likely to be brutal. In addition, the literature suggests that gay and lesbian couples endure additional social stressors relative to heterosexual

couples and that this will play a role in homicides involving these groups. The summary of previous homicide literature suggests that men do kill their intimate partners more often than women do, even in gay relationships, and that the two sexes use different methods of killing. Finally, the homicide literature suggests that situational or relationship factors (e.g., gender of offender, relationship stability) are related to the underlying motivations of killings that are then reflected in the weapon choice.

PURPOSE AND HYPOTHESES

The purpose of the current research is to extend existing research on intimate partner homicide by focused tests of two hypotheses. The first hypothesis is based on the evidence that homicide methods differ in brutality (reflecting different motives) as a function of relationship characteristics. First, we hypothesized that homicide brutality will vary with the offender's sexual orientation and with gender, such that the percentage of killings coded as brutal will be higher for (a) homosexual relations relative to heterosexual relations, (b) men relative to women, (c) gay men relative to heterosexual men, and (d) lesbians relative to heterosexual women.

Based on the evidence that men and women differ in both quality of aggression (men engage in direct aggression rather than indirect aggression) and quantity of aggression (men engage in more aggression overall), our second hypothesis was that intimate partner homicide rates will vary with the gender of the partners. Two predictions were derived from this hypothesis. (a) Homicide rates will be higher in couples composed of two men relative to heterosexual couples and lesbian couples, as a byproduct of the higher levels of aggression in men. (b) Homicide rates will be lowest in lesbian couples relative to heterosexual couples and gay couples, as a byproduct of the relationship being composed of two women.

METHOD

Data and Procedures

We secured access to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHRs) for the years 1976 through 2001 (Fox, 2004). SHRs include incident-level information on criminal homicides collected from each state by the FBI. For inclusion in the study, the "Relationship of Victim to Offender" included the values *Husband*, *Wife*, *Common-law husband*, *Common-law wife*, *Boyfriend*, *Girlfriend*, *Ex-husband*, *Ex-wife*, or *Homosexual relationship*. Not all categories were employed in all analyses. Only those incidents in which the "Age" variable was coded as at least 13 years for both victim and offender were included, so that the individuals were within the range of sexual maturity.

SHRs include codes for 16 methods of killing: (a) Shooting by firearm of unstated type, (b) shooting by handgun (i.e., pistol, revolver, etc.), (c) shooting by rifle, (d) shooting by shotgun, (e) shooting by other gun, (f) stabbing with sharp instrument (i.e., knife, cutting instrument, ax, screwdriver, etc.), (g) beating with blunt object (hammer, club, etc.), (h) personal weapon (i.e., hands, feet, teeth, etc.), (i) poison, (j) pushed or thrown out window, (k) explosives, (l) fire, (m) narcotics and drugs, (n) drowning, (o) strangulation (i.e., choking, hanging, drowning, etc.), and (p) asphyxiation. Intimate partner homicides in which the method of killing was coded as *unknown* were excluded from analyses.

Composite variables for method of killing were constructed using as a guide previous literature (Daly & Wilson, 1994; and see Weekes-Shackelford & Shackelford, 2004). Daly and Wilson established four groups based on the frequency of occurrence of each method in their samples of filicides (child-killings by parents). They found the highest incidence of killing method was for beating, followed by shooting and then suffocation and strangulation. They combined all other methods of killing into an *other* category. For the current study, the variable *stab* was extracted from the *other* category, because the reviewed literature suggested that this is a prominent method of killing in intimate partner homicides. For reportorial efficiency, the *other* category was not analyzed in the current study because the base-rate for these methods made them inconsequential. This resulted in four composite variables, which we labeled *shoot*, *stab*, *beat*, and *suffocate-drown-strangle*. Using the rationale developed in previous research (e.g., Weekes-Shackelford & Shackelford, 2004), as well as the results of a survey developed to examine the relative perceptions of brutality of homicide methods (Mize, 2006), we decided to further categorize the four variables into two categories (labeled as *Less Brutal* and *Very Brutal*). The results of the survey were consistent with the assumptions in previous research in that participants rated the levels of brutality for asphyxiation and shooting similarly and the levels of brutality for beating and stabbing similarly. Thus, for the purpose of determining relative brutality, asphyxiation and shooting are interpreted as reflecting less brutality than beating and stabbing, which arguably inflict greater pain on the victim and require prolonged violence against the victim before he or she expires.

For our second hypothesis, we used recent census data (U.S. Census, 2003) to compute estimates of the rates of homicide in married and unmarried heterosexual, gay, and lesbian household partners in the United States. For these calculations, we assumed that, although there is variation in the reported occurrence of relationship types over the 25-year study period of the SHR, the annual reported occurrence of these relationships is similar enough to allow for estimates of homicide rates to be calculated. There is likely to be error in these calculations, but we are constrained by the available data (i.e., early rates of same-sex relations were not reported in the census data).

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The SHR database provides information on over 54,000 intimate partner homicides, of which 51,007 incidents were retained for analyses. Of these cases, 9,496 (18.6%) of the victims were coded as *Husband*, 17,302 (33.9%) were coded as *Wife*, 2,332 (4.6%) were coded as *Common-law husband*, 2,408 (4.7%) were coded as *Common-law wife*, 5,902 (11.6%) were coded as *Boyfriend*, 10,354 (20.3%) were coded as *Girlfriend*, 666 (1.3%) were coded as *Ex-husband*, 1,455 (2.9%) were coded as *Ex-wife*, and 1,092 (2.1%) were coded as *Homosexual relationship*. Of this latter group, 959 (1.8%) victims were male (gay men) and 133 (0.3%) victims were female (lesbians).

Hypothesis 1: Homicide Brutality Will Vary With the Offender's Sexual Orientation and With Gender

The first hypothesis stated that homicide brutality will vary with the offender's sexual orientation and with gender. First, we calculated the percentage of intimate partner homicides

perpetrated by heterosexuals and by homosexuals by each method (see Table 1). The percentage of homicides perpetrated by heterosexuals and coded as *Very Brutal* (beating and stabbing) was 31.8%, and the percentage coded as *Less Brutal* (asphyxiation and shooting) was 68.2%. The percentage of homicides perpetrated by homosexual partners and coded as *Very Brutal* was 61.2% and coded as *Less Brutal* was 38.8%. The prediction (a) that the percentage of killings coded as *Very Brutal* would be higher for homosexual relations relative to heterosexual relations was supported, $z = 20.50, p < .01$.

Second, we calculated the percentage of intimate partner homicides committed by men and by women by each method (see Table 2). The percentages of intimate partner

TABLE 1. Intimate Partner Homicide Methods by Sexual Orientation

Composite Killing Methods	Heterosexual		Same-Sex Partners	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Stab ^a	11,137	22.3	466	42.7
Beat ^b	4,745	9.5	202	18.5
Shoot ^c	32,815	65.7	334	30.6
Suffocate-drown-strangle ^d	1,218	2.4	90	8.2
<i>Total</i>	49,915	100.0	1092	100.0

Note. The z -value for the significance of the difference between two independent proportions was calculated for each composite method of killing before combining the composite methods into the *Very Brutal* and *Less Brutal* categories for Hypothesis 1, Prediction a.

^a $z = 15.88^*$. ^b $z = 9.93^*$. ^c $z = 24.09^*$. ^d $z = 11.99^*$.

* $p < .01$.

TABLE 2. Intimate Partner Homicide Methods by Gender of Offender

Composite Killing Methods	Male		Female	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Stab ^a	5,588	17.1	6,015	32.9
Beat ^b	4,480	13.7	467	2.6
Shoot ^c	21,451	65.5	11,698	64.1
Suffocate-drown-strangle ^d	1,231	3.8	77	0.4
<i>Total</i>	32,750	100.0	18,257	100.0

Note. The z -value for the significance of the difference between two independent proportions was calculated for each composite method of killing relative to gender of the offender before combining the composite methods into the *Very Brutal* and *Less Brutal* categories for Hypothesis 1, Prediction b.

^a $z = 41.02^*$. ^b $z = 40.69^*$. ^c $z = 3.23^*$. ^d $z = 22.86^*$.

* $p < .01$.

homicides perpetrated by men coded as *Very Brutal* and as *Less Brutal* were 30.7% and 69.3%, respectively. The percentages of intimate partner homicides perpetrated by women and coded as *Very Brutal* and as *Less Brutal* were 35.5% and 64.5%, respectively. The prediction (b) that the percentage of killings coded as *Very Brutal* would be higher for men relative to women was not supported. In fact, the percentage of intimate partner homicides coded as *Very Brutal* was higher for women relative to men, $z = 11.01, p < .01$.

Third, we calculated the percentage of intimate partner homicides committed by gay men and by heterosexual men by each method (see Table 3). The percentages of intimate partner homicides perpetrated by gay men coded as *Very Brutal* and as *Less Brutal* were 62.7% and 37.3%, respectively. The percentages of intimate partner homicides perpetrated by heterosexual men coded as *Very Brutal* and as *Less Brutal* were 29.8% and 70.2%, respectively. The prediction (c) that the percentage of killings coded as *Very Brutal* would be higher for gay men relative to heterosexual men was supported, $z = 21.75, p < .01$.

Fourth, we calculated the percentage of intimate partner homicides committed by lesbians and by heterosexual women by each method (see Table 4). The percentages of intimate partner homicides perpetrated by lesbians coded as *Very Brutal* and as *Less Brutal* were 50.4% and 49.6%, respectively. The percentages of intimate partner homicides perpetrated by heterosexual women coded as *Very Brutal* and as *Less Brutal* were 35.4% and 64.6%, respectively. The prediction (d) that the percentage of killings coded as *Very Brutal* would be higher for lesbians relative to heterosexual women was supported, $z = 3.60, p < .01$.

Hypothesis 2: Intimate Partner Homicide Rates Will Vary With the Gender of the Partners

Homicide rates for married and unmarried heterosexual partners, gay partners, and lesbian partners were calculated using population estimates secured from the U.S. Census (2003; population estimates available on request). The intimate partner homicide rate was 63.72 per million per annum for gay couples, 21.25 per million per annum for heterosexual couples, and 9.07 per million per annum for lesbian couples. Both of the predictions for this

TABLE 3. Method of Killing Used by Male Offenders by Sexual Orientation

Composite Killing Methods	Heterosexual Men		Gay Men	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Stab ^a	5,170	16.3	418	43.6
Beat ^b	4,297	13.5	183	19.1
Shoot ^c	21,180	66.6	271	28.3
Suffocate-drown-strangle ^d	1,144	3.6	87	9.1
<i>Total</i>	<i>31,791</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>959</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Note. The z -ratio for the significance of the difference between two independent proportions was calculated for each composite method of killing relative to sexual orientation and gender of offender before combining the composite methods into the *Very Brutal* and *Less Brutal* categories for Hypothesis 1, Prediction c.

^a $z = 22.16^*$. ^b $z = 4.94^*$. ^c $z = 24.62^*$. ^d $z = 8.78^*$.

* $p < .01$.

TABLE 4. Method of Killing Used by Female Offenders by Sexual Orientation

Composite Killing Methods	Heterosexual Women		Lesbian Women	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Stab ^a	5,967	32.9	48	36.1
Beat ^b	448	2.5	19	14.3
Shoot ^c	11,635	64.2	63	47.4
Suffocate-drown- strangle ^d	74	0.4	3	2.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>18,124</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>133</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Note. The *z*-value for the significance of the difference between two independent proportions was calculated for each composite method of killing relative to sexual orientation and gender of offender before combining the composite methods into the *Very Brutal* and *Less Brutal* categories for Hypothesis 1, Prediction d.

^a*z* = .77. ^b*z* = 8.60*. ^c*z* = 4.03*. ^dProcedure could not be validly employed because the groups did not satisfy the requirement that *n*(*p*) and *n*(1-*p*) both be ≥ 5.

**p* < .01.

hypothesis were supported, in that the rate of intimate partner homicides in gay couples was highest, followed by heterosexual couples and then lesbian couples.

DISCUSSION

Analyses of over 50,000 intimate partner homicides provided support for the hypotheses tested in this research. The results supported all but one prediction derived from the two hypotheses. We predicted that men would kill their partners more brutally than would women, but the results indicate that the opposite is true. As shown in Table 2, guns, followed by knives, are the weapons used most often by both men and women to kill their partners. Both sexes use guns about 65% of the time. However, when women kill their intimate partners they use knives at a rate that is almost double that of men. This result might be explained by the sex-differentiated motives underlying the homicides. Goetting (1987) reported that women often kill their partners in self-defense or in response to fear rather than in a premeditated manner. It is reasonable to suggest that knives are readily available to women who are defending themselves from intimate partner abuse. In this instance, women may be acting out of self-defense rather than out of premeditated brutality.

Hypothesis 1, prediction (d) stated that the percentage of killings coded as *Very Brutal* would be higher for lesbian women than for heterosexual women. Hypothesis 2, prediction (b) stated that the rates of intimate partner homicide would be lowest for lesbians. We predicted that lesbians commit intimate partner homicide at a lower rate than do heterosexuals, but that when they do commit intimate partner homicide, it is in a more brutal manner than is the case for heterosexual women. The results supported both predictions. A further examination of the heterosexual homicide results explains this apparent contradiction. Although intimate partner homicide occurs at a higher rate in heterosexual couples in general relative to lesbian couples, heterosexual women kill their partners at a lower rate (7.97 per million per annum) than do lesbian women (9.07 per million per annum).

The current research contributes to the growing literature on gay and lesbian intimate partner homicides. Puzone et al. (2000) examined same-sex relationships but were unable to determine whether the few identified incidents involving this population was a reflection of a lower likelihood of intimate partner abuse in these groups escalating to homicide. The current research demonstrated that the homicide rate in gay partners is higher than is the heterosexual rate and that the homicide rate in lesbian partners is lower than either of the other two rates.

Although gay male partners are not involved in a situation in which they may be cuckolded, it has not been demonstrated that gay men lack the sex-specific jealousy adaptations documented in heterosexual men (see Bailey et al., 1994). Therefore, they may respond similarly to heterosexual men in situations evoking jealousy. In addition, gay male relationships are composed of two partners that arguably are more prone to aggression (by being male). Conversely, lesbian relationships are composed of two partners of the less aggressive sex. These propositions are consistent with the finding of Bailey et al. (1994) that sex has a greater differential effect than sexual orientation on mating strategies.

Limitations of the Current Study

There are several noteworthy caveats of this study. We combined the killing methods into *Less Brutal* and *Very Brutal* categories following the logic of previous research and using a survey addressing perceptions of brutality levels. However, doing so may have obscured some of the data. For example, shooting was the most common method of killing across the groups, which may be related to the availability of guns. Furthermore, beating likely requires a strength differential between the partners, as may asphyxiation. The results may have been influenced by factors for which data were not available, such as the availability and feasibility of killing methods for each group. Future research that focuses on describing the homicide methods used by each group, and addressing other issues such as relative gun ownership by each group, should be conducted to address these issues. We used an evolutionary perspective to generate the hypotheses, but we note that other perspectives might generate these hypotheses as well. Social factors (i.e., social support of gay men and lesbians) and evolved mating strategies might both be useful in attempts to explain intimate partner homicides.

Although the SHR database provides information about thousands of homicide incidents, it is possible that some of the data are miscoded (i.e., roommates coded as homosexual partners). Due to changing social acceptance of gay and lesbian relationships, it is possible that there was miscoding of these relationships, in general. In addition, estranged gay and lesbian partners may have been miscoded as *friend*. There are also limitations in specific information that the SHR provides about each incident. For example, it was not feasible with the SHR data to examine the possibility that intimate partner homicides might exhibit more signs of intense rage (i.e., greater number of wounds) relative to homicides between nonintimates. Furthermore, it was not possible with the SHR data to examine the relationship between the degree of “outness” of the gay and lesbian partners and their relative homicide risk.

Future Research

Homicide Risk and Relationship Status. Relationship status is related to homicide risk (Aldridge & Browne, 2003; Daly & Wilson, 1988b; Wilson & Daly, 1992, 1993; Wilson et al., 1995). Specifically, partners in *de facto* (nonmarital, but cohabiting) unions are at

a greater risk for homicide than those in state-recognized unions. A few regions of the United States have granted state-recognized civil unions to same-sex partners. Although there is some research focusing on same-sex partners and civil unions (Todosijevic, Rothblum, & Solomon, 2005), there is a need for specific research addressing the relative risk of homicide in same-sex couples that are in state-registered unions relative to this risk for members of couples who either reside in areas that do not recognize their unions or who choose not to register their unions. Social recognition of gay and lesbian relationships may be associated with a decrease in homicide risk, paralleling the findings for heterosexual relationships.

Regional Research. Researchers have identified regional differences in homicide rates in the United States (DeWees & Parker, 2003a, 2003b; Gauthier & Bankston, 1997; Mann, 1990) and in other countries (Adinkrah, 1999a, 1999b). In two studies, DeWees and Parker (2003a) found regional differences in homicide victimization of women and in homicide offending by women in the United States (DeWees & Parker, 2003b). These authors offered several hypotheses to explain these findings, including a “culture of honor” explanation, relative economic status of the regions, and status differences between the sexes. Male violence is accepted in “cultures of honor” when it is used in cases where honor is at stake, such as when a woman is unfaithful to her husband. The authors suggest that patriarchal family values are stronger in the South than they are in the North and that the subordinate view of women in the South may play a role in the greater risk of homicide in the South.

Rural residents (relative to urban residents) are at greater risk for homicide, in part because of geographic isolation from social support (Adinkrah, 1999a, 1999b). Gays and lesbians may be subject to these homicide correlates as well, and may be subject to additional regional effects. For example, very few regions recognize same-sex domestic partnerships and, therefore, they are *de facto* unions. Research has shown a higher risk for homicide in heterosexual relationships for *de facto* unions relative to married partners (Mercy & Saltzman, 1989; Wilson & Daly, 1993). Several predictions can be derived from the hypothesis that homicide rates may differ as a function of region. Following previous findings, intimate partner homicide rates may be higher in the South than in the North regardless of gender or sexual orientation. The rates of intimate partner homicide, regardless of gender, could be predicted to be higher in urban regions than in rural regions (an effect attributable, in part, to increased violence in congested populations). The rates of homicide for incidents in which the victim is the same sex as the offender might be higher in the North than in the South and higher in rural regions than in urban regions (where social services for same-sex partners are expected to be higher). As current homicide databases are improved or new databases designed, future research needs to focus on these and other regional hypotheses and predictions.

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