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Emily M. Wright

University of Nebraska at Omaha, emwright@unomaha.edu

Michael L. Benson

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Relational Aggression, Intimate Partner Violence, and Gender: An Exploratory Analysis

Emily M. Wright

University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina, USA

Michael L. Benson

University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA

Abstract: This study explores the effects of romantic relational aggression on intimate partner violence. The concept of relational aggression denotes a type of nonphysical aggression that is specific to relationships and that has only recently been recognized in the psychological literature. Using responses to the Conflict Tactics Scale from adults participating in the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods, romantic relational aggression is examined with regard to male and female intimate partner violence perpetration and victimization. Results indicate that romantic relational aggression is a predictor of partner violence perpetration and victimization among both males and females.

Keywords: domestic violence, intimate partner violence, relational aggression, aggression, relationships, nonphysical aggression

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Address correspondence to Emily M. Wright, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208. E-mail: ewright@mailbox.sc.edu

INTRODUCTION

A considerable amount of research effort has been devoted to the study of violence that occurs in domestic or intimate settings. Scholars have examined physical, psychological, and verbal aspects of partner violence in an effort to understand both the influences and dynamics of intimate partner violence (IPV) (e.g., Feldman & Ridley, 2000; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989; Ridley & Feldman, 2003; Straus, 1979). Studies have revealed that factors such as marital status, cohabitation, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, relationship quality, and jealousy are associated

with IPV (Barnett, Martinez, & Bluestein, 1995; Fagan & Browne, 1994; Holtzworth-Munroe, Smutzler, & Bates, 1997; Lloyd & Emery, 2000; Wilkinson & Hamerschlag, 2005). Although some scholars have considered the relationship between verbal, psychological, or emotional aggression and IPV (e.g., Feldman & Ridley, 2000; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989; Ridley & Feldman, 2003; Stith, Smith, Penn, Ward, & Tritt, 2004), there may be other types of nonphysical aggression on which studies have not concentrated (Hamby & Sugarman, 1999). In this study, we explore a form of nonphysical aggression and assess its relationship with IPV. To do this, we focus on the concept of relational aggression.

Relational aggression is a nonphysical form of aggression that can occur in relationships. Distinguishing relational aggression as a separate form of aggression (see also Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Werner & Crick, 1999), Linder, Crick, and Collins (2002) assert that relational aggression harms relationships, whereas physical aggression harms others through physical means— and verbal, psychological, or emotional aggression harms others by damaging their perceptions or feelings. Specifically, relational aggression refers to any behavior that damages peer or intimate relationships by purposefully manipulating and harming others' feelings of love or acceptance (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). The goal of relational aggression is therefore to make another person feel unloved or unwanted; within intimate relationships, the target of *romantic* relational aggression is the romantic partner or the relationship itself (Linder et al., 2002). While some scholars suggest that any aggression in a relationship is used to make a partner feel unloved, we stress that relational aggression has been theorized to damage the relationship in ways distinctly different from physical, verbal, psychological, and emotional aggression (Linder et al., 2002). We thus propose that the importance of relational aggression for the study of IPV is that it is specific to *relationships*; as such, this type of nonphysical aggression may be as relevant as other forms of nonphysical aggression in explaining negative outcomes in relationships, such as IPV, since the intent of romantic relational aggression is to damage the relationship itself. Further, it may be that various forms of aggression used in intimate settings evoke different types of interactions between partners; if

so, it is important to explore the effects of the separate types of aggression that are used (e.g., romantic relational aggression).

For the purpose of this study, then, we consider relational aggression as a form of nonphysical aggression that is specific to relationships. We use this conceptualization in an attempt to extend Crick and her colleagues' (e.g., Crick, 1996, 1997; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Crick & Werner, 1998; Grotpeter & Crick, 1996; Linder et al., 2002; Werner & Crick, 1999) work on relational aggression to intimate partnerships among adults. Romantic relational aggression has been associated with the quality of relationships, such that relationships characterized by frustration, ambivalence, jealousy, clinging, and distrust display high levels of romantic relational aggression (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996; Linder et al., 2002). Based on this, we theorize that relationships in which romantic relational aggression occurs are characterized by destructive qualities such as jealousy and distrust, and are more likely to experience negative outcomes such as IPV.

Using data collected from child-rearing and cohabiting adults participating in the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (Earls, Brooks-Gunn, Raudenbush, & Sampson, 2002), we explore the relative influence of romantic relational aggression on IPV. By considering this relationship, this study not only builds upon the existing applications of relational aggression, it also adds to the extant research regarding IPV and the effects of nonphysical forms of aggression on relationships.

RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

Relational aggression was initially conceptualized as a new way to measure aggression in young children, particularly among girls (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). As such, much of the research on relational aggression has been conducted on young children and early adolescents in school settings. In this context, relational aggression is defined as harming others through purposeful manipulation and

damage of peer relationships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Examples of relational aggression may include such behaviors as excluding other children from a group of peers or events, spreading rumors about them, or withdrawing friendships from them in order to manipulate or damage those children's peer relationships (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996). Studies have found that females are more likely to engage in relationally aggressive acts with their same-sex peers, whereas males are more likely to engage in overt, or physical, aggression with other boys (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Grotpeter & Crick, 1996). More recent studies of relational aggression have assessed relational aggression using older samples. Most of this research has been conducted on college-aged participants (e.g., Goldstein & Tisak, 2004; Linder et al., 2002; Werner & Crick, 1999). Findings from these studies indicate that relational aggression is frequently used by both men and women in same-sex friendships, cross-gender friendships, and heterosexual romantic relationships (Linder et al., 2002). Relational aggression between friends in young adulthood is also associated with negative feelings within those friendship groups; such friendships are often characterized by high levels of exclusivity and jealousy (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996; Linder et al., 2002).

Compared to the research regarding relational aggression among young children and young adults, less is known about the use of relational aggression in dating relationships, intimate partner relationships, and married or cohabitating relationships. The limited research assessing relational aggression in romantic relationships suggests that relational aggression is evident in these types of relationships (Linder et al., 2002). In the context of intimate relationships, *romantic* relational aggression refers to the use of relational aggression in order to harm the feelings of love and acceptance of one's partner. Examples of this type of behavior include "flirting with others to make a romantic partner jealous, threatening to break up with a partner if the partner will not comply, or giving a partner the silent treatment when angry" (Linder et al., 2002, p. 70). Some research suggests that romantic relational aggression is used by young adults and that it may be used frequently and at similar rates by both males and females (Werner & Crick, 1999). However, some studies have indicated that

although males report engaging in romantic relational aggression with their intimate partner, romantic relational aggression may be more frequently used by females in dating circumstances (Linder et al., 2002).

Romantic Relational Aggression and IPV

Researchers have found that forms of psychological and nonphysical aggression are associated with IPV (e.g., Stith et al., 2004), although these forms of aggression have not been studied consistently. Psychological aggression is a broad term that has been used in the literature to refer to verbal aggression, emotional aggression, and other forms of aggression that “do not directly involve assaulting another’s body” (Hamby & Sugarman, 1999, p. 959). For instance, Murphy and O’Leary (1989) define psychological aggression as coercive verbal and nonverbal behaviors that are not directed toward a partner’s body. Similarly, Straus and Sweet (1992) examined verbal/symbolic aggression in couples; they defined this type of nonphysical aggression as either verbal or nonverbal aggression that was “intended to cause psychological pain to another person, or perceived as having that intent” (Straus & Sweet, 1992, p. 347). With regard to intent, Hamby and Sugarman (1999) conceptualized severe psychological aggression as being intentional, malicious, and explicit in nature. These authors concluded that the measures of nonphysical or psychological aggression used in their studies were positively associated with IPV.

Romantic relational aggression, like the above forms of aggression, is non-physical, malicious, and intentional; its unique contribution to IPV, however, may be that its explicit target is to hurt the partner or damage the relationship (Linder et al., 2002). We do not contend that relational aggression is more important than other forms of verbal, psychological, or emotional aggression; instead, we simply argue that relational aggression should be examined with regard to IPV. Romantic relational aggression has not yet been specifically examined in this context, although studies

which have examined nonphysical aggression on IPV have often included components of relational aggression into their measures of verbal or psychological aggression (e.g., Hamby & Sugarman, 1999; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989). Most of these researchers have found positive effects of such nonphysical aggression on partner violence. However, these studies have not explored the importance of romantic relational aggression by itself as a predictor of IPV. This study attempts to take an initial step in this direction.

Romantic relational aggression could be relevant to IPV since it has been associated with negative relationship quality indicators such as frustration, ambivalence, distrust, jealousy, and anxious clinging or neediness (Linder et al., 2002). Using data collected on college students, Linder et al. (2002) found that regardless of gender, those individuals who reported using or experiencing romantic relational aggression were more likely to be frustrated, jealous, needy, and less trusting in their relationships. Linder et al. (2002) go on to suggest that individuals using relational aggression within romantic relationships may desire closeness and exclusivity within these relationships and may use relational aggression in order to control their partner. From Linder et al.'s (2002) finding, one might expect that romantic relational aggression would be associated with negative outcomes in a relationship, such as physical violence. Furthermore, there is some evidence which suggests that studies not assessing relational aggression within friendships and peer relationships could miss a significant proportion of the overall aggression that occurs within such relationships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). A reasonable extension of this finding (see Crick & Grotpeter, 1995) is that similar patterns may occur within romantic relationships, and that a large proportion of aggression within intimate relationships may be untapped when romantic relational aggression is not considered. Therefore, it may be that romantic relational aggression is an often-used form of aggression within poor-quality intimate relationships, and as such, should be included in models predicting IPV.

PREDICTORS OF IPV

Age, socioeconomic status, marital status, cohabitation status, and the race/ethnicity of the victims or perpetrators have

been identified as significant predictors of IPV (DeMaris, Benson, Fox, Hill, & Van Wyk, 2003; Holtzworth- Munroe et al., 1997). Findings from large representative studies indicate that younger couples are at higher risk for IPV than their older counterparts (Stets & Straus, 1989; Straus & Gelles, 1986). It may be that younger couples lack the skills and experience needed to successfully resolve arguments and reach compromise in conflicts, which may explain why older couples are less likely to engage in IPV (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1997). Young couples are also less likely to be married or have been in a relationship for a long period of time (DeMaris et al., 2003), and may not yet understand each other's boundaries for acceptable behavior. Finally, younger people are generally more violent and aggressive than older people (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983), and this may explain why younger couples are more volatile in their relationships than older couples.

Indicators of low socioeconomic status such as low social class, low income, unemployment, and low education have also been positively related to IPV (Smith, 1990). Although partner violence occurs in all socioeconomic strata, couples in the lower strata may experience more stressors arising from financial difficulties, or may experience more frustration due to limited opportunities, and this might increase the likelihood of IPV occurring (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1997). Employment instability and uncertainty, economic strain, and economic deprivation have been linked to individual and family stress (Voydanoff, 1990), marital satisfaction and quality (Conger et al., 1990), and frustration (Anderson, 1999; Wilson, 1987). Voydanoff (1990) states that there is a minimum level of economic stability that is necessary for family cohesion and stability; families below this level may be more likely to experience IPV. Economic hardship or strain may also affect partners' behavior toward each other, thus affecting their perceptions of marital quality and happiness (Conger et al., 1990); marital dissatisfaction, in turn, has been associated with higher instances of IPV (Stith et al., 2004). Similarly, unemployment, limited job

opportunities, and employment instability are associated with higher levels of stress and frustration (Anderson, 1999; Wilson, 1987), and can create tension between partners which may lead to marital disagreements, increased alcohol or drug use, and violence (DeMaris et al., 2003).

Unmarried cohabitating couples are at greater risk for IPV than married or dating couples (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1997). Some scholars suggest that this is a result of characteristics of the relationship, such as lower commitment between the partners, while other researchers contend that unmarried cohabitating couples are more likely to be younger and therefore more violent (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1997; Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, & Silva, 1998; Stets & Straus, 1989). Indeed, cohabiters are younger and more likely than married couples to be minority, depressed, and use alcohol more frequently— all of which are linked to IPV (Stets, 1991). They are also less likely to have been together for a long period of time (DeMaris et al., 2003) and may still be figuring out each other's boundaries (Stets, 1991).

Lastly, African American and Hispanic couples are more likely than white couples to engage in partner violence (Field & Caetano, 2005); however, this finding may be an artifact of social class, since minority couples are more likely to live in more socially disadvantaged areas (Benson, Wooldredge, Thistlethwaite, & Fox, 2004). Economic marginalization and blocked opportunities may create stress and frustration within individuals as well as between partners (Plass, 1993). African Americans may face limited opportunities for education, employment, and upward mobility due to their position in society (Cloward, 1959), which is often in the lower socioeconomic strata (Anderson, 1999; Wilson, 1987). These limited opportunities may result in low-paying jobs or unemployment (Wilson, 1987), economic marginalization (Plass, 1993), and stress or frustration (Merton, 1938). Further, minority males are economically marginalized (Anderson, 1999) and thus may have a harder time filling the “breadwinning” role within the family (Plass, 1993). It has been suggested that when men are not economically dominant, they attempt to exert control or establish dominance over their female partners by using physical force (e.g., MacMillian & Gartner, 1999); since minority males are more

economically marginalized than white men, racial differences in IPV appear evident. Additionally, there may be cultural differences between racial groups, so that the definition and meaning of partner violence or aggression means very different things between these groups (Straus & Gelles, 1986).

The consistency of the relationships between the above variables and IPV across studies suggests that failure to include measures of these concepts in models predicting partner violence may produce misleading results.

In light of previous theory and research, this study contributes to our over- all understanding of IPV, particularly with regard to the role that nonphysical aggression such as romantic relational aggression may play in partner violence. Our interest in romantic relational aggression is not arbitrary—indeed, we choose to focus on this concept because it may directly impact relationship quality, given that the goal of romantic relational aggression is to make one's partner feel unloved or unwanted or to harm the relationship itself (Linder et al., 2002). Research assessing the relationship between romantic relational aggression and IPV has not yet been conducted. Therefore, we do not know whether relational aggression is associated with IPV, whether it is a strong predictor of IPV, or whether both males and females use romantic relational aggression in intimate relationships where violence occurs. In order to answer these questions and better our understanding of the dynamics of relationship violence, we examine the concept of romantic relational aggression within the context of IPV.

METHODOLOGY

This study assesses the relationship between romantic relational aggression and the occurrence of IPV among males and females in cohabiting relation- ships. To this end, we (1) explore the use of romantic relational aggression and the prevalence of IPV within intimate relationships and (2) investigate whether the use or effects of romantic relational aggression vary by gender. Based on

existing research indicating that relational aggression occurs within friendships among children, adolescents, and young adults, we expect that relational aggression is also used in adult romantic relationships. Given that nonphysical aggression is often a predictor of IPV (Stith et al., 2004), we also expect that relationships in which romantic relational aggression occurs will be more likely to experience IPV.

Evidence of relational aggression in early childhood and adolescence indicates that relational aggression is more often used by females than by males. However, as males and females age, it appears that both use relational aggression in their friendship and dating relationships, but the limited evidence as yet is far from conclusive (Goldstein & Tisak, 2004; Linder et al., 2002). In order to understand more fully the effect of romantic relational aggression in this large sample of adults, the influence of romantic relational aggression on both male and female IPV perpetration *and* violent victimization is investigated.

Data

The data for this study were taken from wave 1 of the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN) (Earls et al., 2002). The original purpose of the PHDCN was to examine the development of prosocial and antisocial behavior, and to assess the effects of families, schools, and neighborhoods on adolescent development. The project therefore provided an interdisciplinary approach to studying the sociological, biological, and inter-individual factors that influence the onset, development, continuance, and desistance of antisocial behavior over time. Data were collected from a representative sample of 6,228 children, adolescents, young adults, and their primary caregivers living in diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic neighborhoods in Chicago between 1994 and 1997. Pregnant women, children, and 18-year-old young adults were selected as subjects for the PHDCN, and data were collected from them (i.e., the children) and their primary caregivers (e.g., the individual who spent the most time taking care of the subject).

Participants in the PHDCN were grouped into cohorts based on their ages; these cohorts ranged from 0 to 18 in increments of 3,

so that subjects who were 18 years old at the time of data collection belonged to cohort 18. Although the subjects of the PHDCN were the children of primary caregivers, the Conflict Tactics Scale for Partner and Spouse (Straus, 1979) was administered to the primary caregivers of children in cohorts 0–15, while the subjects of cohort 18 (i.e., those children who were 18 years old at the time of data collection) completed the Conflict Tactics Scale interview themselves instead of their primary caregivers. For parsimony, we hereafter refer to the participants who completed the Conflict Tactics Scale interview as the respondents.

For this study, variables were merged from three separate PHDCN datasets, including the Conflict Tactics Scale, the Demographic File, and the Master File. The Conflict Tactics Scale measured the physical and nonphysical aggression of each partner in dating, married, or cohabitating relationships, as well as the reasoning and negotiation skills used in such relationships. The Master File provided some demographic and administrative information on the respondents, while the Demographic File provided more complete demographic, race, and ethnicity information on them. Most of the data were gathered via face-to-face interviews with the respondents, although some data were gathered via telephone interviews.

Sample

All data used in this study were taken from the PHDCN described above. However, for theoretical and methodological reasons, a subset of the original sample was used. Specifically, we were interested only in adult respondents who had been in a relationship at the time of or within the year prior to the Conflict Tactics Scale interview and who also were living with or who had lived with their partners during that time. Due to these inclusion criteria, we chose to exclude participants in cohort 18 from our analyses because they were unlike the respondents (i.e., primary caregivers) for cohorts 0–15 in terms of their age, nature of relationships, and residential mobility. For example,

participants from cohort 18, in part due to their age, were less likely to be married or have lived with their partners during the previous year, and therefore most did not meet the inclusion criteria for this study. Eliminating participants from cohort 18 reduced the original sample by 681 cases. We also chose to exclude respondents who indicated that they had not been involved in a relationship within the year prior to the Conflict Tactics Scale interview. This further reduced the sample by 759 cases. Similarly, since we were only concerned with those respondents who had cohabitated with their partners, we eliminated the 1,109 respondents who had been in a relationship during the past year, but who had not cohabitated with their partner during that time. These restrictions reduced the original sample to 3,677 couples who met our inclusion criteria. Finally, because of missing data on the variables of interest, particularly for variables pertaining to the partner's ethnicity, an additional 807 cases were dropped. Thus, our final sample size was reduced to 2,807 couples who were in a relationship and had cohabitated with their partners at the time of or within the year prior to the Conflict Tactics Scale interview.

Measures

Dependent Variables

All measures used in the analyses are described in Table 1. The dependent measures were intended to tap male and female IPV perpetration and IPV victimization. IPV perpetration refers to whether the male or female in the relationship engaged in any one of the violent physical acts which are defined below, and IPV victimization refers to whether the said partner was a victim of IPV. The measures of IPV were derived from questions asked on the Conflict Tactics Scale interview. Respondents were asked how many times during an argument with their partner in the past year their partner had kicked, bit, or hit them with their fist; hit or tried to hit them with something; beat them up; choked them; threatened them with a knife or a gun; and used a knife or fired a gun. The respondents were then asked to indicate the number of times they had kicked, bit, or hit their partner with their fist; hit or tried to hit their partner with something; beat their partner up; choked their partner; threatened their partner with a knife or a gun; and used a knife or fired a gun during an argument in the past year. These acts of

violence are considered severe acts of violence (Straus, 1979; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). The final measures used in this study reveal the prevalence of IPV.

From the above questions, *male IPV perpetration* and *female IPV perpetration* were dichotomous measures created to tap whether the male or female in the relationship had engaged in any of the IPV behaviors at least one time during the year prior to the interview. *Male IPV victimization* and *female IPV victimization* were defined as whether the male or the female in the relationship had been a victim of the above listed behaviors at least one time in the year prior to the interview.

Independent Variables

The independent variables of interest were intended to measure both male and female romantic relational aggression. Two questions asked on the Conflict Tactics Scale were used because they displayed high face validity with romantic relational aggression. Respondents were asked how many times in the past year they had “sulked or refused to talk to their partner” during an argument and “said or did something to spite their partner” during an argument. The respondents were also asked how many times their partner had “sulked or refused to talk to them” and “said or did something to spite them” during an argument in the past year. Recall that examples of romantic relational aggression include giving one’s partner the silent treatment in order to manipulate the partner or hurt them (e.g., sulking or refusing to talk), as well as purposefully doing something to hurt the partner’s feelings of love or affection (e.g., saying or doing something to spite the partner) (Linder et al., 2002). The response categories to the above questions were none, 1 time, 2 times, 3–5 times, 6–10 times, 11–20 times, and 21 or more times. In accordance with previous analyses of nonphysical aggression using the Conflict Tactics Scale (e.g., Straus & Sweet, 1992), the responses were coded as 0, 1, 2, 4, 8, 15, and 25.

In order to assess gender differences in romantic relational aggression, *female relational aggression* and *male*

relational aggression were examined. Using the response categories and coding described above, female relational aggression and male relational aggression reflected the summed totals of the number of times females and males sulked or refused to talk to their partner and said or did something to spite their partner during an argument. The summed totals to these questions ranged from 0–50 with higher numbers indicating more frequent use of romantic relational aggression by males or females.¹

Control variables used in the analyses follow from the discussion of relevant predictors of IPV. As mentioned, younger couples are said to be at greater risk for IPV than are older couples (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1997). *Female age* and *male age* reflect the respective ages of the partners involved in this study.

The ethnicity of the each respondent and partner consisted of dichotomous variables coded as African American or Hispanic. *Female African American* and *female Hispanic* were dichotomous variables indicating whether the female in the relationship was African American or Hispanic, while *male African American* and *male Hispanic* indicated the race of the male in the relationship.² According to prior IPV research, minority couples may engage in partner violence more often than nonminority couples (Field & Caetano, 2005).

The relationship status of the partners was defined as either married and cohabitating or single and cohabitating. *Single and cohabitating* couples included dating, engaged, widowed, divorced, and separated individuals who were living together at the time of the interview. Married and cohabitating couples were married and living together at the time of the interview, but were left out of the regression models as the reference group. It has been suggested that unmarried couples who live together experience IPV more than married couples because they have lower levels of commitment between the partners, and they are more likely to be younger and more violent than married couples (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1997; Magdol et al., 1998). Therefore, it was expected that single and cohabitating couples would be at greater risk for IPV than married and cohabitating couples.

Socioeconomic status indicators have included the individuals' education levels, employment status, and their

combined income level (Lauritsen & Schaum, 2004; MacMillian & Gartner, 1999; Plass, 1993). In line with such research, *male unemployed* and *female unemployed* were dichotomous variables indicating whether the male or female was unemployed at the time of the Conflict Tactics Scale interview or had been unemployed during the year prior to the PHDCN study. *Household above poverty level* was also a dichotomous variable indicating whether the household was above the poverty threshold in the United States. The poverty threshold was taken from the United States Census Bureau (1994); using the median value on the household salary scale, households were classified accordingly after taking into account their household size.

Female high school graduate and *male high school graduate* were dichotomous variables indicating whether the female or male had successfully completed high school but had not attained any degrees beyond high school. *Female college graduate* and *male college graduate* were also dichotomous variables indicating whether the female or male had completed a four-year college degree. Prior research on partner violence suggests that poverty, unemployment, and low education increase a couple's chances of engaging in IPV (Stets & Straus, 1989; Straus & Gelles, 1986).

Statistical Analysis

We used logistic regression to explore the effects of romantic relational aggression for both males and females. Specifically, we estimated models examining gender differences in the effects of romantic relational aggression on IPV perpetration and IPV victimization. The relative contributions of the control variables and romantic relational aggression on IPV perpetration as well as IPV victimization among females were assessed. These models were then replicated for male IPV perpetration, victimization, and use of romantic relational aggression. These analyses were compared to examine the effects of romantic relational aggression relative to the effects of the control variables on predicting male and female perpetration and victimization of

IPV.

RESULTS

Table 1 demonstrates the prevalence of self-reported serious violence among participants in this study. About 11% of females were victimized by severe IPV at least once within the year prior to the interview, while 16% of males were victimized. Alternatively, 11% of males perpetrated IPV against their partners while 16% of females perpetrated IPV. These rates support Johnson's (1995) contention that studies which focus on the acts of violence in community samples find evidence of approximately equal proportions of female IPV perpetration compared to male IPV perpetration. Regarding romantic relational aggression, our findings indicate that females did not engage in romantic relational aggression significantly more often than males ($t = 0.18$).

Results from this study, as reported in Table 2 and Table 3, largely support findings from previous studies of IPV. As expected, across all models, males and females who were younger and who were single but cohabiting were more likely to engage in and be victimized by severe IPV. Race effects were also found and some economic and educational variables were significant predictors of IPV across male and female models. As also expected, romantic relational aggression increased the likelihood that both males and females would engage in *and* be victimized by IPV. Furthermore, the addition of romantic relational aggression to each model increased its explanatory power considerably.

Female IPV Perpetration and Victimization

Regarding female IPV perpetration and victimization, Table 2 shows that younger females and those who were not married but who lived with their partners were more likely to engage in IPV and be victimized by it. Having household incomes above the poverty level significantly reduced females' victimization but not their perpetration. Female African Americans were more likely to perpetrate IPV as well as be victimized by IPV than white women, but this race effect was reduced when predicting females' victimization and became insignificant when female romantic relational aggression was included in the model. Finally, females who had graduated college were significantly less likely to engage in

and be victimized by IPV.

With respect to romantic relational aggression, females engaging in this behavior often were significantly more likely to perpetrate violence as well as be victimized by IPV. All female romantic relational aggression coefficients were significant at the $p \leq .001$ level, and the addition of female romantic relational aggression into the models increased their explanatory power. Furthermore, the addition of female romantic relational aggression reduced the effects of female race and education on females' victimization. Specifically, female African American status became an insignificant predictor of females' IPV victimization when romantic relational aggression was introduced in the model, and the suppressing effect of college graduation on females' victimization was reduced when romantic relational aggression was included. Interestingly, significant predictors of female IPV perpetration remained unchanged when romantic relational aggression was added to the model.

Male IPV Perpetration and Victimization

Table 3 depicts the logistic regression analyses examining male IPV perpetration and victimization. Similar to females, males who were younger, unmarried but cohabiting with their partners, or African American were more likely to engage in and be victimized by severe IPV. These relationships were consistent across models and were not affected by the inclusion of male romantic relational aggression. Also, living in households which had incomes above the poverty level significantly reduced male IPV perpetration but not male victimization.

Males who were relationally aggressive with their partners were more likely to perpetrate and be victimized by IPV. As with females, male romantic relational aggression was highly related to violence across all models, with all coefficients reaching significance at the $p \leq .001$ level. Furthermore, the addition of male romantic relational aggression to the analyses increased the explanatory power of each model considerably. Hispanic males were more

likely to perpetrate violence when their romantic relational aggression was entered into the model. Finally, males who graduated high school were significantly less likely to engage in IPV, but this relationship disappeared when their romantic relational aggression was incorporated into the model. Other significant predictors of male IPV perpetration and victimization remained unchanged when male romantic relational aggression was included in the models.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings from this study provide preliminary evidence that romantic relational aggression may be relevant to IPV and victimization. In fact, we found that romantic relational aggression was a contributor to the involvement of both males and females in IPV as well as their own victimization.

Although these preliminary findings are noteworthy, this study is not without its limitations. First, we used only two measures to capture the concept of romantic relational aggression. We recognize the limits of assessing romantic relational aggression with only two measures, but given the lack of research regarding romantic relational aggression among adults, as well as the high face validity of the measures we chose to use, we feel that the measures used in the analyses are adequate reflections of romantic relational aggression. We do, however, recommend that additional or other measures of romantic relational aggression be considered in future studies.

Second, although the concept of relational aggression has been shown to be distinct from other forms of nonphysical aggression (see Linder et al., 2002), it could be argued that relational aggression is not conceptually distinct from emotional, verbal, or psychological aggression. Indeed, this is a valid argument and relevant to this study. In fact, the measures used to examine romantic relational aggression in this study were derived from a larger verbal/psychological aggression scale used in the Conflict Tactics Scale (see Straus, 1979). As such, our study is limited by the availability of only two measures with which to capture romantic relational aggression. However, this study is informative in that it took an initial step in examining the relationship between relational

aggression and IPV. As stated earlier, better measures of romantic relational aggression are needed to more accurately examine this relationship. Given the results of this study, it appears that romantic relational aggression may be a type of nonphysical aggression relevant to IPV and therefore worthy of further examination. Thus, future research should consider assessing scales which tap relational aggression as well as other forms of nonphysical aggression in the same model in order to determine their relative effects on IPV.

Third, the sample used here was restricted to adults who were cohabiting or who had cohabited with their significant others while married or dating, and who had children or who were the primary caretakers of children. It may be important for future studies to assess whether romantic relational aggression continues to be a significant predictor of IPV when it occurs in noncohabiting relationships or among couples who do not have children that influence their behaviors. Furthermore, interactions across different cultures may provide an avenue of study. While it was not examined directly in this study, it seems plausible that one's ethnicity may affect one's use of romantic relational aggression. Finally, it is important to note that since the data used for this study are cross-sectional, causal inferences regarding the relationship between romantic relational aggression and IPV cannot be proven conclusively. It may be that romantic relational aggression is used within relationships after the occurrence of IPV instead of prior to the occurrence of IPV; the data used in this study cannot specify this relationship. Future studies should use longitudinal data to disentangle these relationships.

These limitations aside, there may be several reasons to continue to study romantic relational aggression within intimate partnerships. First, previous studies suggest that nonphysical forms of violence, whether they are defined as psychological or not, are associated with partner violence (e.g., Hamby & Sugarman, 1999; Murphy & O'Leary, 1989; Stith et al., 2004; Straus & Sweet, 1992). Results from our study support this line of research. A better understanding of romantic relational

aggression may inform our current knowledge regarding the various nonphysical forms of aggression which are used in relationships, as well as their association with partner violence. For instance, the use of romantic relational aggression in a relationship may be a form of aggression employed by one or both partners in order to evoke certain behaviors from each other, while other forms of nonphysical aggression may evoke different behaviors between partners. Additionally, the intent of the aggression that is used in a relationship may be an important contributor of IPV (see Burleson & Denton, 1997, regarding communication intent and marital satisfaction); as such, it may be useful to examine romantic relational aggression as a style of interaction between partners that assumes intent (i.e., to damage the relationship). Third, romantic relational aggression is a relevant predictor of IPV, as demonstrated by its strong positive relationship with partner violence, and is therefore worthy of additional study. Fourth, findings from this study suggest that including romantic relational aggression along with variables often used to explain IPV—such as age, relationship status, ethnicity, education, and economic variables—may increase the explanatory power of models predicting this phenomenon. Finally, regardless of gender, romantic relational aggression appears to be an important factor in explaining both IPV perpetration and IPV victimization. Given this, we suggest that future research examines the relationship between romantic relational aggression and IPV in more detail. It may be that romantic relational aggression is used differently among couples of various ages, races, socioeconomic statuses, and educational backgrounds. That is, younger couples may use romantic relational aggression more often than older couples, while less educated couples may use it more often than more educated couples, and so forth. It may be of interest in future research to examine whether such variation in the use of romantic relational aggression differentially impacts couples' likelihood of engaging in IPV.

The results from this study lend support to the few studies that have been conducted on relational aggression in the field of psychology using college- aged adults in dating relationships. Results from those investigations indicate that both males and females in dating relationships are likely to use romantic relational

aggression (Linder et al., 2002). Our study reveals that males and females often engage in romantic relationally aggressive acts, but that there is no statistical difference in the frequency by which males and females engage in romantic relational aggression with their partner. This study also makes contributions in the understanding of romantic relational aggression by moving beyond young, college-aged adults, and using a sample of 2,807 ethnically diverse, cohabiting adults to assess the relationship between romantic relational aggression and IPV.

Our results also support the notion that romantic relational aggression may be correlated with negative qualities in relationships, such as distrust, jealousy, and manipulation (Grotzinger & Crick, 1996; Linder et al., 2002)—as suggested by the significant relationship between romantic relational aggression and IPV. These findings may lend support to the idea that relationship quality is an important factor contributing to the occurrence of partner violence within intimate partnerships. As such, it may be important to further explore the type and quality of relationships in which IPV occurs.

NOTES

1. We acknowledge that the use of two variables to capture romantic relational aggression is a limitation; however, given that this is an exploratory analysis, we feel that our attempt to measure both types of behaviors (i.e., sulking and doing something to spite the other partner) captures a pattern of behavior rather than an isolated instance and at least partially addresses this limitation. Further, the two measures are highly correlated at $r = .45, p \leq .001$.
2. White males and females were left out of the models as reference groups.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for independent and dependent variables (n = 2,807).

Measures	\bar{x}	sd	Range	
			Min	Max
Dependent Variables				
Female IPV perpetration	.16	.37	0.00	1.00
Female IPV victimization	.11	.32	0.00	1.00
Male IPV perpetration	.11	.32	0.00	1.00
Male IPV victimization	.16	.37	0.00	1.00
Independent Variables				
Single and cohabiting	.20	.40	0.00	1.00
Household above poverty level	.51	.50	0.00	1.00
<i>Female Variables:</i>				
Female age	33.53	7.61	15.00	73.00
Female Hispanic	.51	.50	0.00	1.00
Female African American	.21	.41	0.00	1.00
Female unemployed	.44	.50	0.00	1.00
Female high school graduate	.46	.50	0.00	1.00
Female college graduate	.13	.34	0.00	1.00
<i>Male Variables:</i>				
Male age	36.13	8.46	15.00	73.00
Male Hispanic	.52	.50	0.00	1.00
Male African American	.21	.41	0.00	1.00
Male unemployed	.07	.24	0.00	1.00
Male high school graduate	.42	.49	0.00	1.00
Male college graduate	.14	.34	0.00	1.00
<i>Romantic Relational Aggression:</i>				
Female relational aggression	6.58	9.75	0.00	50.00
Male relational aggression	6.54	10.17	0.00	50.00

Table 2: Logistic regression model predicting female IPV perpetration and female IPV victimization.

Measures	Female perpetration		Female victimization	
	IPV ^a b (se)	IPV b (se)	IPV ^a b (se)	IPV b (se)
Constant	.27 (.32)	-.36 (.34)	-.89* (.35)	-1.43*** (.37)
Independent Variables				
Single and cohabiting	.80*** (.12)	.66*** (.13)	.59*** (.14)	.46*** (.14)
Household above poverty level	.16 (.13)	.19 (.13)	-.41** (.14)	-.42** (.15)
Female age	-.07*** (.01)	-.07*** (.01)	-.03*** (.01)	-.03** (.01)
Female Hispanic	-.14 (.15)	.13 (.16)	-.19 (.17)	.02 (.18)
Female African American	.95*** (.15)	.92*** (.16)	.40* (.18)	.35 (.18)
Female unemployed	-.03 (.12)	-.04 (.12)	-.02 (.13)	-.03 (.13)
Female high school graduate	-.11 (.13)	-.16 (.14)	-.21 (.14)	-.24 (.15)
Female college graduate	-.58* (.23)	-.52* (.01)	-.72** (.28)	-.66* (.28)
Female relational aggression		.06*** (.01)		.04*** (.01)
Nagelkerke R ²	.15	.22	.07	.11

*p ≤ .05 **p ≤ .01 ***p ≤ .001.

^aModel excluding romantic relational aggression.

Table 3: Logistic regression model predicting male IPV perpetration and male IPV victimization.

Measures	Male perpetration		Male victimization	
	IPV ^a b (se)	IPV b (se)	IPV ^a b (se)	IPV b (se)
Constant	-1.15*** (.34)	-1.86 (.36)	-.12 (.30)	-.66* (.32)
Independent Variables				
Single and cohabiting	.55*** (.14)	.46*** (.14)	.82*** (.12)	.78*** (.13)
Household above poverty level	-.39** (.14)	-.44** (.14)	.08 (.12)	.07 (.13)
Male age	-.03*** (.01)	-.03*** (.01)	-.06*** (.01)	-.06*** (.01)
Male Hispanic	.05 (.19)	.40* (.20)	-.08 (.16)	.19 (.17)
Male African American	.78*** (.19)	.88*** (.20)	.92*** (.16)	1.00*** (.17)
Male unemployed	.34 (.20)	.08 (.22)	.30 (.19)	.07 (.21)
Male high school graduate	-.29* (.14)	-.29 (.15)	-.08 (.13)	-.06 (.13)
Male college graduate	-.38 (.25)	-.19 (.26)	-.12 (.21)	.06 (.22)
Male relational aggression		.06*** (.01)		.06*** (.01)
Nagelkerke R ²	.08	.17	.13	.21

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

^aModel excluding romantic relational aggression.

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