

Are There Gender Differences in Sustaining Dating Violence? An Examination of Frequency, Severity, and Relationship Satisfaction

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One topic of debate within the field of intimate violence involves the equivalence, or lack thereof, of male-perpetrated versus female-perpetrated violence. To inform this debate, we examined potential gender-related differences in the frequency of sustaining violence, the severity of violence sustained, and effects of violence on relationship satisfaction. Data were collected from 2 samples of heterosexual undergraduates in dating relationships. In both studies, men and women experienced violence at comparable frequencies, although men experienced more frequent moderate violence. Rates of severe violence were extremely low for both sexes across studies. In both investigations, only women experienced lower relationship satisfaction as a function of partner violence. In Study 1, relationship status moderated this effect, such that women in serious dating relationships were less satisfied than either women in less serious relationships or than men as a function of partner violence. In Study 2, women were less satisfied with violent relationships than men regardless of relationship status. We contend that gender-sensitive approaches to relationship violence are important to better understand and prevent both male- and female-perpetrated violence. Directions for future research efforts are outlined.

KEY WORDS: violence; gender; frequency; severity; relationship satisfaction.

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INTRODUCTION

Dating violence is a prevalent social problem that has gained much empirical attention over the recent past. One topic that has caused great controversy involves the equivalence, or lack thereof, of male-to-female versus female-to-male violence in heterosexual couples (e.g., Kurz, 1995; Straus, 1995). On one side of this debate, theorists argue that female-perpetrated violence is just as prevalent and harmful as male-perpetrated violence (Straus, 1995). These theorists contend that physical assaults by women constitute a major social problem equivalent to physical assaults by men. Gender and associated differences in dominance and social power are seen as peripheral to understanding the causes and consequences of intimate violence.

In contrast, theorists who take a gender-sensitive postulate differences between male-perpetrated versus female-perpetrated violence based upon the larger social context in which heterosexual couples function (Kurz, 1995). For example, women and men are socialized to be differentially dominant with romantic partners. Despite some changes toward egalitarianism, modern scripts for heterosexual interactions continue to emphasize male dominance (O'Sullivan & Byers, 1992; Rose & Frieze, 1989). These sociocultural factors influence the prevalence of violence against women; for example, men's patriarchal attitudes predict violence against their intimate female partners (e.g., Avni, 1991). Further, the level of threat associated with male-perpetrated versus female-perpetrated dating violence differs, largely because of men's overall greater physical size and strength. Men who threaten to aggress or who actually aggress against dating partners cause greater psychological intimidation and physical harm than women who engage in similar behaviors (e.g., Foshee, 1996; Makepeace, 1986; Vivian & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1994).

The purpose of the present research was to investigate gender-related differences in sustaining physical violence by a current dating partner. To the extent that women and men experience partner violence differently, it may be argued that gender-sensitive approaches are important and necessary to better understand and prevent both male- and female-perpetrated violence within heterosexual dating couples. Some research already has documented that women and men experience relationship violence differently. Drawing on this prior literature, three dimensions of physical victimization were identified as important to study: frequency, severity, and effects on relationship quality.

Relationship status also was investigated as a correlate of the frequency and severity of partner violence, as well as relationship quality subsequent

to violence. Much data suggest that violence is more likely to occur within more serious dating relationships (Makepeace, 1989; Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987). For example, 75–83% of women abused by their romantic partners are not assaulted until after making a major commitment to their abuser (McHugh *et al.*, 1993). Dating violence, when male-perpetrated, is judged to be more acceptable within the context of a serious, committed relationship than within a less serious relationship (Bethke & DeJoy, 1993). Cohabiting couples, who are committed enough to each other to live together, also are at particular risk for engaging in partner violence (e.g., Stets, 1991). Therefore, it appears important to study potential gender-related differences in the frequency, severity, and effects of partner violence within more and less serious dating relationships.

Frequency

Both women and men initiate violence against their intimate partners (Makepeace, 1986). In fact, some studies have found that females in dating relationships more frequently initiate violence than males. Capaldi and Crosby (1997) observed high school couples and found that 51% displayed some form of physical aggression (e.g., grabbing, shoving) during their interaction. In 4% of the cases, the male, but not the female, was the aggressor, whereas in 17% of the cases, the female, but not the male, was the aggressor. Dating violence tended to be mutual, however, such that both women and men in heterosexual relationships were both perpetrators and victims of intimate violence. Thirty percent of the couples observed by Capaldi and Crosby (1997) displayed acts of reciprocal violence during their interactions. In another study employing a self-report rather than behavioral assessment of violence, 66% of violent couples reported mutual violence (Gray & Foshee, 1997). Therefore, gender-related differences in the overall frequency with which men and women sustain dating violence frequency were not expected.

Relationship status may be related to the frequency of dating violence. As noted previously, dating violence is more likely to occur after partners have made a strong commitment to each other (Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987). Once such commitments have been made, violence may be seen as more acceptable (Bethke & DeJoy, 1993), and the frequency with which violent tactics are used may increase. Given that men are judged to be less responsible for engaging in dating violence in serious relationships but not casual ones (Bethke & DeJoy, 1993), women may be at more risk for sustaining violence within serious, committed dating relationships than within casual

relationships. That is, relationship status may moderate gender differences in frequency of sustaining violence, such that violence occurs more frequently against women in committed dating relationships.

Severity

Overall, physical violence in dating relationships tends to be less severe than those in marital relationships. The most common violent behaviors include pushing, grabbing, shoving, slapping, or throwing something at a partner (Henton *et al.*, 1983; Riggs *et al.*, 1990). These behaviors are enacted by both women and men in dating relationships, although gender-related differences in violence severity are evident. Dating women sustain more severe partner violence and subsequently more physical injury than their male counterparts (Foshee, 1996; Makepeace, 1986; Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987, 1989).

Relationship status also appears to be strongly related to violence severity. Makepeace (1989) found that the “worst incidents” of violence occurred most often in steady dating relationships rather than in casual dating situations. Cohabiting couples, for example, were more likely to cause physical injury to each other than were noncohabiting couples. Therefore, available empirical evidence to date suggests that severe dating violence is likely to occur in more serious, committed dating relationships. Again, relationship status may moderate gender differences in violence severity, such that women in more committed relationships may experience the most severe partner violence.

Effects on Relationship Satisfaction

Dating violence only sometimes is related to declines in dating relationship quality. For example, Henton *et al.* (1983) found that about half of their sample of students in violent relationships felt that the violence adversely affected their relationships. Across entire samples, however, partner violence generally is unrelated to decreased relationship satisfaction (e.g., Capaldi & Crosby, 1997). In fact, Gray and Foshee (1997) found that over 90% of adolescents in violent dating relationships reported that their relationships were either “good” or “very good.”

Although researchers have not yet focused on gender-related differences in relationship quality subsequent to dating violence, gender-related differences in general psychological impact have been documented. Women experience more emotional distress subsequent to dating partner violence

than do men (Makepeace, 1986; Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987, 1989). Drawing from the marital literature, women experience higher levels of distress than do men subsequent to violence, even within mutually violent couples (Vivian & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1994). Therefore, women may be more likely than men to experience declines in relationship satisfaction following one or more episodes of dating partner violence.

Consideration of relationship status also could account for the inconsistent effects of partner violence on dating quality in previous studies. The impact of partner violence likely differs within more and less serious relationships. Specifically, when violence occurs in a serious relationship based on love and trust, the impact on relationship satisfaction is likely that much more damaging. As such, people in more committed violent relationships may display lower relationship satisfaction than do people in less committed relationships.

Finally, the possibility that relationship status would moderate gender-related differences in satisfaction with violent partners was examined. Given that women are at increased risk for sustaining violence after committing to their romantic partners (e.g., McHugh *et al.*, 1993), and given that women experience greater emotional distress subsequent to dating violence, a three-way interaction of partner violence, gender, and relationship status might emerge in predicting concurrent relationship satisfaction. Women in more committed relationships may experience lower relationship satisfaction following partner violence than either less committed women or men.

Hypotheses

The purpose of the current research was to examine gender-related differences in sustaining violence by a dating partner. We predicted that relationship status would moderate gender-related differences in violence frequency, violence severity, and the effects of violence on relationship satisfaction. Consistent with past research, it was hypothesized that women and men overall would report sustaining physical violence at comparable frequencies within ongoing dating relationships. However, we expected that women in more serious relationships would sustain more frequent and severe violence than did men in more serious relationships. Finally, it was hypothesized that participant gender, level of partner violence, and relationship status would interact to predict relationship satisfaction. Specifically, we expected that relationship satisfaction would be the lowest among women in serious, committed relationships who sustained higher levels of violence perpetrated by their dating partners. Data from two studies of undergraduate students in dating relationships were employed to test these hypotheses.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants

Undergraduates at a large northwestern state university ($N = 283$; 184 women, 103 men) were recruited from a subject pool for an anonymous study of "Communication and dating relationships." All were involved in an exclusive heterosexual dating relationship lasting at least 3 months. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25 ($M = 19$, $SD = 1.36$). Most self-identified as White or Caucasian (83%; $n = 240$), and the remainder self-identified as Black (2%; $n = 5$), Asian (5%; $n = 14$), Hispanic/Latino/Mexican (3%; $n = 8$), or "other" (7%; $n = 21$). The median annual parental income was \$70,000. The average length of participants' dating relationships was 1 year ($SD = 6$ months) and ranged from 3 months to "greater than 24 months." All self-identified as heterosexual.

Relationship status was based on participants' reported level of involvement with their dating partner. Thirty percent of participants ($n = 86$) were "casually" dating, whereas 42% of participants ($n = 123$) were "seriously" dating. Those who self-identified as either casually or seriously involved with their partners were classified as relatively less committed ($n = 203$) than participants who had "discussed living together or becoming engaged," (19%; $n = 56$), or who were "living together," "engaged," or both (8%; $n = 24$). Members of this latter group were classified as relatively more committed ($n = 80$) on the basis of their plans to remain a couple in the future. Each participant received credit toward fulfilling a class research requirement.

Materials

Partner violence was assessed using the *Conflict Tactics Scale* (CTS). Form N of the CTS (Straus, 1979) is an 18-item self-report measure that assesses the ways in which intimate partners resolve conflict. The moderate and severe physical violence subscales were used to assess the presence of physical aggression. Questions pertained to violence by the respondents' current dating partner during a conflict situation. A 7-point scale was used to indicate how frequently participants' current dating partner had engaged in each of nine violent behaviors. Representative items from the moderate and severe subscales are "Your partner threw something at you" and "Your partner used a knife or fired a gun," respectively. As recommended, items are weighted to reflect the severity of aggression. The CTS has been shown

to be both reliable and valid (Arias & Beach, 1987; Straus, 1979) and has been used extensively in studies of relationship violence.

Dating relationship satisfaction was indexed by the *Quality of Marriage Index – Revised* (QMI-R; Norton, 1983). The QMI-R is a self-report measure of relationship satisfaction. The six items that comprise the QMI have an intercorrelation of .76 and represent a unidimensional construct tapping the evaluative aspect of marital satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). Scores range from 1 to 7. Very low scores have been associated with a shorter estimated future of the relationship. QMI scores are highly correlated with scores on the Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959) and Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), commonly used measures of relationship quality (Heyman *et al.*, 1994).

For the current investigation, questions were reworded to apply to dating, rather than marital, relationships. Numerous studies provide evidence for the validity for the QMI-R with dating samples (e.g., Katz *et al.*, 1997, 1998, 1999; Katz & Beach, 1997a,b) specifically, the QMI-R has been shown to be meaningfully associated with a variety of important outcomes, including depressive symptoms, social support, and reassurance seeking. Cronbach's alpha for the current sample was .94 for both women and men.

Procedure

In a small group format, participants were asked to complete a short assessment battery after providing informed consent. Participation was anonymous. After testing, a full debriefing was provided, and counseling referrals were provided in the event that anyone experienced distress as a result of their participation.

Results

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among the study variables are reported in Table I. Moderate partner violence was significantly and negatively related to relationship satisfaction among women only. Severe partner violence was infrequently endorsed.

Frequency and Severity of Partner Violence

Reported levels of physical violence (CTS-N) in dating relationships were high. In the current sample, about 47% of the participants ($n = 133$)

Table I. Study 1: Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations

	Women				Men		
	1.	2.	3.	4.	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
1. Moderate violence	—	.10	.06	-.19***	1.75	4.69	0-45
2. Severe violence	.38***	—	.13	.03	0.35	3.60	0-48
3. Relationship status	-.06	-.10	—	.30***	3.15	1.35	1-6
4. Relationship satisfaction	-.15	-.14	.43***	—	5.63	1.30	1-7
					4.16	7.29	0-32
					1.39	7.40	0-54
					2.79	1.10	1-6
					5.49	1.31	1.6-7.0

Note. Correlations for women ($n = 183$) are above the diagonal, whereas correlations for men ($n = 103$) are below the diagonal.

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

were involved in an ongoing dating relationship in which their partner had engaged in physical violence against them. The modal form of moderate violence endorsed was “threw something at me,” which was endorsed by 35% ($n = 99$) of the entire sample; the modal form of severe violence endorsed was “beat me up,” which was endorsed by 2% ($n = 6$) of the entire sample. Because only 6 women and 4 men sustained severe violence in their current relationships, only moderate violence served as a dependent variable in subsequent analyses.

We expected that overall, women and men would report having sustained moderate violence at comparable frequencies. Relationship status also was examined as a moderator of gender-related differences in sustaining violence. First, we compared the proportions of men versus women whose partners were nonviolent, violent once, or violent repeatedly. Frequency data revealed that comparable numbers of women and men reported incidents of partner physical violence. About 55% ($n = 102$) of the women had nonviolent partners, whereas 18% ($n = 33$) had once-violent partners, and 26% ($n = 48$) had repeatedly violent partners. Similarly, about 50% ($n = 51$) of the men had nonviolent partners, whereas 13% ($n = 13$) had once-violent partners, and 38% ($n = 39$) had repeatedly violent partners. A chi-square analysis indicated no significant gender-related differences in these group classifications, $\chi^2(2, n = 286) = 4.61, ns$.

Next, we compared men’s and women’s reports of sustaining violence within more and less committed dating relationships. Although somewhat positively skewed, the distribution of moderate violence scores was found to satisfy assumptions of normality necessary to implement inferential statistics. Further, the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met (Howell, 1992). Therefore, we conducted a 2×2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine gender-related differences in partner violence, as well as differences as a function of relationship status. Participant gender and relationship status were between-participants factors. Participants who identified themselves as either “casually” or “seriously” dating ($n = 203$) comprised the less committed group, whereas participants who were either planning to or currently living together or engaged comprised the more committed group ($n = 80$).

Significant gender-related differences emerged, $F(1, 283) = 11.57, p < .001$; omnibus $F(3, 283) = 4.23, p < .01$. Examination of cell means suggested that men reported having sustained greater mean levels of moderate violence ($M = 4.16$) than did women ($M = 1.75$). Significant main or interactive effects of relationship status were not obtained. In sum, approximately equal proportions of women and men sustained physical violence by their dating partners. Dating men experienced greater levels of moderate violence than did dating women. Levels of moderate violence sustained were independent of relationship status.

Partner Violence and Relationship Quality

Next, the effects of participant gender, overall level of partner violence, and relationship status on relationship quality were investigated. Specifically, we expected that levels of relationship satisfaction would be the lowest among women in serious, committed relationships who sustained higher levels of violence. To test this hypothesis, hierarchical multiple regression equations were conducted with relationship satisfaction as the criterion variable. To reduce potential problems with multicollinearity, all continuous variables were centered before being entered into regression equations. That is, for each case, scores for each variable were calculated as the deviations from the mean. This procedure reduces potential problems with linear dependence among main effect predictor variables (Cohen, 1978). Participant gender was dummy-coded (i.e., 1 = men, 2 = women).

Predictors were entered into the regressions in a hierarchical fashion. First, the main effects of participant gender, relationship status, and level of violence were entered in one step. Next, the two-way interaction terms were entered in a second step: Gender \times Relationship Status, Gender \times Partner Violence, and Relationship Status \times Partner Violence. Finally, a three-way interaction of Gender \times Relationship Status \times Partner Violence was entered in a third step. All two- and three-way interaction terms were calculated as the product of the two component variables.

In a first step, level of partner violence, $\beta = .17$, $p < .01$, and relationship status, $\beta = .34$, $p < .001$, emerged as significant main effects, overall $F(3, 283) = 16.45$, $p < .001$. In a second step, none of the two-way interaction terms significantly added to the model, overall $F(6, 280) = 8.97$, $p < .001$. In a third step, however, the three-way interaction of Participant Gender \times Relationship Status \times Partner Violence was significant, $\beta = -.38$, $p < .05$; overall $F(7, 279) = 8.49$, $p < .001$.

To explicate this three-way interaction, separate hierarchical regression analyses were conducted within groups of women and men. In a first step, women's relationship satisfaction was regressed on both level of partner violence, $\beta = -.20$, $p < .01$, and relationship status, $\beta = .30$, $p < .001$; overall $F(2, 181) = 13.50$, $p < .001$. In a second step, the Partner Violence \times Relationship Status interaction significantly added to the model, $\beta = -.15$, $p < .05$; overall $F(3, 180) = 10.69$, $p < .001$. To explicate this two-way interaction, groups of women in more committed relationships ($n = 56$) and less committed relationships ($n = 128$) were formed using the criteria outlined previously. Within the group of highly committed women, partner violence was significantly and negatively related to relationship satisfaction, $r(55) = -.49$, $p < .001$. In contrast, partner violence was unrelated to relationship satisfaction among less committed women, $r(128) = -.12$, *ns*.

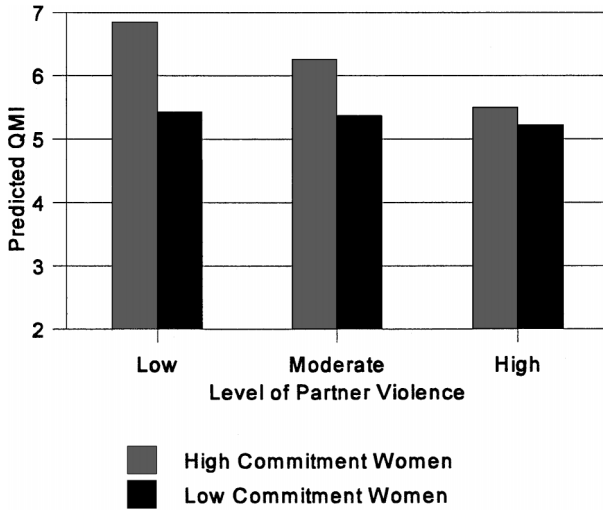
A different pattern of results emerged in predicting men's relationship satisfaction as a function of partner violence and relationship status. In a first step, relationship status, $\beta = .42$, $p < .001$, but not partner violence, $\beta = -.12$, *ns*, was associated with men's relationship satisfaction, overall $F(2, 100) = 12.87$, $p < .001$. In a second step, the Partner Violence \times Relationship Status interaction did not significantly add to the model, $\beta = .09$, *ns*; overall $F(3, 99) = 8.89$, $p < .001$. Although men in more serious, committed relationships experienced greater relationship satisfaction than did men in less serious relationships, partner violence was not associated with men's satisfaction, alone or in interaction with relationship status.

Predicted values for women's and men's relationship satisfaction scores were calculated by substituting in high, moderate, and low levels of partner violence into the regression equations calculated within gender and within relationship status. Low and high levels of partner violence were indexed as the mean level of violence plus or minus 1 standard deviation, whereas moderate violence was indexed as the mean. Results are depicted in Fig. 1. As can be seen, for women in highly committed relationships, predicted values for relationship satisfaction differed as a linear function of level of partner violence. Women in more violent relationships were less satisfied than women in less violent relationships. In contrast, relationship satisfaction did not differ as a function of partner violence for women in less committed relationships. Relationship satisfaction also did not differ as a function of partner violence for men in either more or less serious relationships.

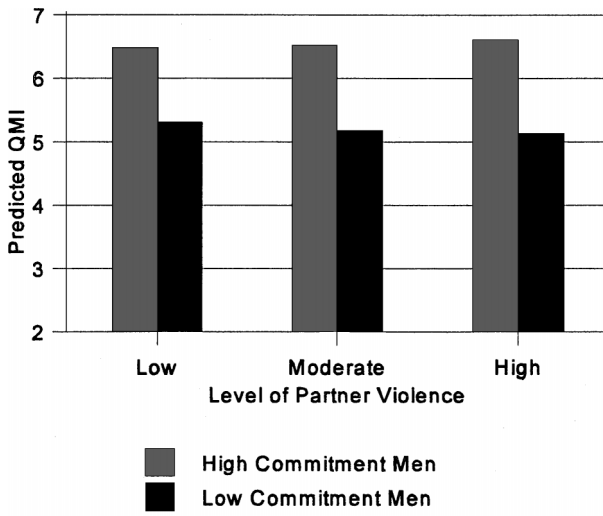
Discussion

The present findings suggest important gender-related differences in the experience of dating violence. Although similar proportions of women and men sustained physical violence by their dating partners overall, dating men reported sustaining higher levels of moderate violence than did dating women. Endorsements of severe violence were infrequent for both women and men and thus precluded our ability to make meaningful gender comparisons. However, a three-way interaction of participant gender, partner violence, and relationship status emerged in predicting concurrent relationship quality. Results suggested that only women in relatively committed relationships evidenced lower relationship satisfaction as a function of partner violence.

This gender-related difference in relationship quality subsequent to violence is consistent with research documenting women's greater psychological



(a)



(b)

Fig. 1. Relationship satisfaction as a function of respondent gender, level of partner violence, and relationship status.

distress subsequent to partner violence and women's greater risk of physical injury relative to men (Foshee, 1996; Makepeace, 1986; Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987, 1989; Vivian & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1994). As predicted, however, relationship status moderated this gender effect; the association between partner violence and relationship quality was not significant for either men or women in less committed relationships. We speculate that men's relationship satisfaction generally remained unchanged because female-perpetrated violence, which tended to be moderate, may involve less intimidation and harm than do male-perpetrated violence. Further, it may be that for less committed individuals, partner violence is less distressing because recipients are less invested in their partners; violence may represent less of a breach of trust and love than in a more serious relationship.

An important limitation of this study involves the lack of assessment of violence perpetration. It is unclear how many participants who sustained physical violence also perpetrated aggression against their partners. Given that violent relationships generally are mutually violent (Gray & Foshee, 1997), violence perpetration is important to assess. No known research to date has examined whether men or women are more likely to report involvement in one-sided versus mutually violent dating relationships. It is further unclear whether dating partners who perpetrate as well as sustain physical violence endorse lower relationship satisfaction relative to those involved in one-sided violent relationships. Gray and Foshee (1997) found no differences between young adults in one-sided versus mutually violent relationships in ratings of their relationships as either "good" or "very good," but more sophisticated methods of assessing relationship quality potentially could yield different findings.

STUDY 2

In this follow-up study, we attempted to replicate the findings obtained in Study 1, using a more comprehensive measure of physical violence, the CTS-2 (Straus *et al.*, 1996), and an additional index of relationship quality. Further, we investigated gender-related differences in dating violence perpetration. Most violent dating relationships are mutually violent, and these couples tend to engage in higher levels of aggression than other violent couples (Gray & Foshee, 1997). The results of Study 1 suggested that women may be prone to experience declines in relationship satisfaction as a function of dating partner violence, especially when involved in a relatively serious dating relationship. As such, women who engage in as well as sustain partner violence may be least satisfied with their dating relationships.

Method

Participants

Undergraduates ($N = 123$; 78 women, 45 men) were recruited from a large northwestern state university as part of a longitudinal study of dating violence prevention entitled, "Dating attitudes and behaviors." All were currently involved in an ongoing dating relationship. The mean age of participants at Time 1 was 19 years old and ranged from 18 to 26. The sample was predominantly White ($n = 101$, 83%), and the remainder of the sample self-identified as Asian/Pacific Islander ($n = 11$, 9%), Black ($n = 4$, 3%), Hispanic/Latino ($n = 3$, 3%), or other ($n = 2$, 2%). The reported average annual income of the participants' parents ranged between \$60,000 and \$80,000. The average length of participants' dating relationships was 10 months ($SD = 6$). Sexual orientation was neither specified in the inclusion criteria nor assessed in this study, and so it is unclear how many participants were involved in gay/lesbian relationships.

Twenty-nine percent of participants ($n = 35$) indicated that they were casually dating their current partner, whereas 47% of participants ($n = 58$) stated that they were seriously dating. Those who self-identified as either seriously or casually involved with their current partners were classified as relatively less committed ($n = 93$) than participants who had discussed living together or becoming engaged, (16%; $n = 20$), or who were living together, engaged, or both (7%; $n = 9$). Members of this latter group were classified as relatively more committed ($n = 29$) to their dating partners. All participants received course credit for their participation.

Materials

As in Study 1, relationship satisfaction was assessed with the QMI-R (Norton, 1983). Estimates of internal consistency in this study were adequate; Cronbach's alpha was .91 for both women and men. In addition, participants were asked to rate on 9-point Likert scales the degree to which they characterized their dating relationship as both "loving" and "caring." These two ratings were significantly correlated, $r(118) = .70$, $p < .001$, and therefore summed, to create an alternative index of relationship quality. The average loving/caring score in this sample was 15.86 ($SD = 2.57$, range 3–18). Although loving/caring scores were significantly correlated with QMI-R scores, $r(118) = .65$, $p < .001$, the association was moderate, suggesting that these variables were assessing related but different aspects of relationship quality.

Dating violence victimization and perpetration was assessed via the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS-2; Straus *et al.*, 1996). The CTS-2 is a 78-item scale, which asks respondents to indicate how often certain behaviors are used by respondents and their partners during conflict situations. Responses are scored on an 8-point scale, ranging from 0 (*This has never happened*) to 6 (*More than 20 times in the past year*). There is an additional response option indicating 7 (*Not in the past year, but it did happen before*). The CTS-2 is scored by adding the midpoints for the response categories chosen by the participant (Straus *et al.*, 1996). Midpoint scores range from 0 to 25. For Category 7 (*Not in the past year, but it did happen before*), responses were scored as 1 (*yes*; Straus *et al.*, 1996). Questions pertain to the presence of psychological, physical, and sexual abuse in dating relationships. The moderate and severe subscales for both victimization and perpetration of physical violence were used in this study. Relative to the original CTS, the CTS-2 has enhanced content validity and reliability (Straus *et al.*, 1996).

Procedure

Participants met in small groups to complete a battery of self-report measures as part of a larger study of violence prevention among college students. After providing informed consent, each was assigned a random number to ensure confidentiality and encourage honest responding. After completing participation in two additional research sessions several weeks later, a full debriefing was provided, along with counseling referrals and a list of local resources to assist with interpersonal violence.

Results

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations are reported in Table II. As can be seen, levels of moderate partner violence were low, but variable. The moderate violence variable was transformed using a logarithmic transformation so that the distribution of data would meet the assumptions required for inferential statistics. As can be seen in Table II, the transformed moderate partner violence variable was significantly related to lower relationship satisfaction among women only. No women and only one man reported sustaining severe violence. Because of the extreme infrequency with which severe violence was endorsed, this variable was not considered further in subsequent analyses.

In the current sample, about 33% of the participants ($n = 39$) were involved in an ongoing dating relationship in which their partner had

Table II. Study 2: Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations

						Women			Men		
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
1. Moderate violence	—	—	-.01	-.32**	-.29**	0.27	0.70	0-2.5	0.62	0.93	0-3.3
2. Severe violence	.18	—	—	—	—	0.00	0.00	—	0.09	0.36	0-2
3. Relationship status	.20	.19	—	.22*	.24*	2.95	1.13	1-6	2.47	1.10	1-6
4. Relationship satisfaction	.08	.16	.16	—	.75***	5.63	1.30	1-7	6.06	0.82	3.0-7.0
5. Loving/caring	.08	.19	.33*	.52**	—	15.97	2.42	3-18	15.66	2.84	6-18

Note. Correlations for women ($n = 78$) are above the diagonal, whereas correlations for men ($n = 45$) are below the diagonal. A logarithmic transformation was performed on the moderate violence variable in order to reduce skewness.

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

engaged in at least one episode of physical violence against them. Frequency data revealed that comparable numbers of women and men had violent dating partners. About 73% ($n = 57$) of the women had nonviolent partners, whereas 13% ($n = 10$) had once-violent partners, and 14% ($n = 11$) had repeatedly violent partners. Similarly, about 58% ($n = 26$) of the men had nonviolent partners, whereas 13% ($n = 6$) had once-violent partners, and 29% ($n = 13$) had repeatedly violent partners. Chi-square analysis indicated no significant gender-related differences in these group classifications, $\chi^2(2, n = 123) = 4.19, ns$.

Consistent with findings reported by Gray and Foshee (1997), the majority of participants who reported experiencing partner victimization also reported violence perpetration. Of those participants who reported that their relationship was physically violent, 36% ($n = 14$) reported victimization only, 10% ($n = 4$) reported perpetration only, and 54% ($n = 21$) reported both sustaining and perpetrating physical violence. No gender-related differences in classification within a one-sided versus mutually violent relationship emerged in a chi-square analysis, $\chi^2(2, n = 123) = 3.72, ns$.

Next, we conducted two 2×2 ANOVAs to examine differences in both victimization and perpetration as a function of participant gender and relationship status. Moderate violence sustained (after the logarithmic transformation) and violence perpetrated served as separate dependent variables. Relationship status was indexed via relative groupings of participants based upon their commitment to their dating partners. Participants who identified themselves as either casually or seriously dating ($n = 93$) comprised the less committed group, whereas participants who were either planning on or currently living together, engaged, or both, comprised the more committed group ($n = 29$).

Significant gender-related differences emerged with respect to sustaining moderate violence, $F(1, 119) = 7.43, p < .01$; omnibus $F(3, 119) = 2.88, p < .05$. Examination of untransformed cell means (which are more easily interpreted than transformed means) suggested that men reported sustaining greater mean levels of moderate violence ($M = 2.42$) than did women ($M = 0.55$). No significant main or interactive effects of relationship status were obtained. Further, no significant gender-related differences emerged with respect to perpetrating moderate violence, alone or in interaction with relationship status.

To summarize, dating men sustained greater levels of moderate violence than did dating women. Contrary to prediction, level of violence sustained was unrelated to relationship status. No differences between dating men and women were obtained with respect to perpetrating dating violence, either alone or in interaction with relationships status.

Gender, Victimization, Relationship Status, and Relationship Quality

We next examined the effects of participant gender, level of partner violence, and relationship status on relationship quality. Specifically, we expected that levels of relationship satisfaction would be the lowest among women in serious, committed relationships who sustained higher levels of partner violence. To test this hypothesis, hierarchical multiple regression equations were conducted. Level of relationship satisfaction was assessed via the QMI-R and via ratings of the relationship as loving/caring; each served as a separate criterion variable. To reduce potential problems with multicollinearity, all continuous variables were centered before being entered into regression equations to reduce problems with linear dependence among main effect predictor variables (Cohen, 1978). Participant gender was dummy-coded (i.e., 1 = men, 2 = women).

Predictors were entered into the regressions in a hierarchical fashion. First, the main effects of participant gender, relationship status, and level of violence were entered in one step. Next, the two-way interaction terms were entered in a second step: Gender \times Relationship Status, Gender \times Partner Violence, and Relationship Status \times Partner Violence. Finally, a three-way interaction of Gender \times Relationship Status \times Partner Violence was entered in a third step. All two- and three-way interaction terms were calculated as the product of the two component variables.

Relationship satisfaction as assessed by the QMI-R was the first criterion variable investigated. In a first step, only relationship status predicted relationship satisfaction, $\beta = .23$, $p < .02$; overall $F(3, 117) = 2.79$, $p < .05$. In a second step, the two-way interaction of participant gender and partner violence significantly added to the model, $\beta = -.31$, $p < .01$; overall $F(6, 114) = 2.89$, $p < .02$. In a third step, the predicted three-way interaction of Participant Gender \times Relationship Status \times Partner Violence did not emerge, $\beta = -.14$, $p > .36$, *ns*; overall $F(7, 113) = 2.83$, $p < .01$.

Next, participants' ratings of their dating relationships as loving/caring served as the criterion variable. In a first step, relationship status was a significant predictor, $\beta = .29$, $p < .01$; overall $F(3, 117) = 3.87$, $p < .01$. In a second step, the two-way interaction of participant gender and partner violence emerged as a significant predictor of loving/caring ratings, $\beta = -.24$, $p < .05$; overall $F(6, 114) = 2.92$, $p < .02$. In a third step, the predicted three-way interaction of Participant Gender \times Relationship Status \times Partner Violence was not revealed, overall $F(7, 113) = 2.51$, $p < .02$.

To explicate the significant two-way interaction of Gender \times Partner Violence, separate correlation analyses were conducted within groups of women and men. As reported in Table II, partner moderate violence was significantly and negatively associated with women's relationship satisfaction

as assessed by the QMI-R, $r(77) = -.35, p < .002$, as well as ratings of their relationships as loving/caring, $r(77) = -.25, p < .05$. In contrast, partner moderate violence was not associated with men's relationship satisfaction either as assessed by the QMI-R, $r(44) = .11, ns$, or as assessed by ratings of their relationships as loving/caring, $r(44) = .05, ns$.

Gender, Victimization, Perpetration, and Relationship Quality

Finally, we examined the effects of participant gender, overall level of partner violence, and level of own violence as predictors of concurrent relationship quality. Specifically, we expected that levels of relationship satisfaction would be the lowest among women in serious, committed relationships who both sustained and perpetrated higher levels of violence.

In a first step predicting relationship satisfaction (QMI-R scores), all variables were entered as main effects. The overall model was nonsignificant, overall $F(3, 117) < 1, ns$. In the second step, the two-way interactions of Gender \times Victimization, Gender \times Perpetration, and Victimization \times Perpetration were added to the model. Only the Gender \times Victimization interaction was significant, $\beta = -.63, p < .02$; overall $F(6, 114) = 2.28, p < .05$. In the third step, the three-way interaction of Gender \times Victimization \times Perpetration was not a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, overall $F(7, 113) = 2.05, p = .05, ns$. In predicting loving/caring ratings, none of the regression models were significant, Step 1: overall $F(3, 117) < 1, ns$; Step 2: overall $F(6, 114) < 1, ns$; Step 3: overall $F(7, 113) < 1, ns$. Therefore, results did not support the hypothesis that either women or men in mutually violent dating relationships would endorse significantly lower relationship quality than those in either one-sided violent or nonviolent relationships.

Discussion

As in Study 1, comparable numbers of women and men sustained physical violence by their partners overall. In addition, the majority of men and women who sustained violence reported involvement in mutually violent relationships. Men sustained higher levels of moderate violence than did women by their dating partners. Also as in Study 1, relationship status was unrelated to levels of violence sustained. In addition, no gender-related differences emerged with respect to perpetrating violence, either alone or in interaction with relationship status.

As predicted, gender-related differences were revealed on both measures of relationship quality; sustaining partner violence was associated with

lower relationship quality among women, but not among men. Contrary to prediction, neither relationship status nor violence perpetration moderated this gender-related difference in relationship quality. That is, women in this sample experienced lower relationship quality than did men subsequent to partner violence, regardless of their level of commitment and regardless of their own violent behavior.

These gender-related differences in relationship satisfaction associated with sustaining physical violence are consistent with past research demonstrating the greater negative consequences of partner violence for women relative to men (Foshee, 1996; Makepeace, 1986; Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987; Vivian & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 1994). In this study, relationship status did not emerge as a moderator of this gender effect. This null finding may be due to the relatively small sample, the low prevalence of violence, or both. Alternatively, this could be due to our operationalization of commitment, given that our sample was divided into *relatively* more and less committed groups. People who identify themselves as casually or seriously dating have somewhat more uncertain futures together as a couple than people who have discussed living together or becoming engaged, or who actually were living together, engaged, or both. However, having plans for a future together is only one way of operationalizing relationship commitment, and many of the “serious” daters may also have had future plans together as a couple without discussing either cohabitation or marriage. If so, our operationalization of commitment would work against our a priori predictions and therefore increases our confidence in our findings consistent with these predictions.

Although both perpetration and victimization of violence were measured in this study, one limitation of our assessment of mutually violent couples involves the issue of violence initiation versus self-defense. It is unclear how many participants are in couples in which both partners initiate violence and how many are in couples in which only one partner initiates violence and the other responds in self-defense. This qualitative difference in “perpetration” of violence could lead to distinct findings with respect to gender-related differences in frequency, severity, and effects of violence on relationship satisfaction in future research.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Physical violence in dating relationships remains a sobering and prevalent problem. In these studies, 47 and 33% of participants reported involvement in an ongoing romantic relationship marked by physical violence. Across both investigations, women and men reported sustaining partner violence at similar frequencies overall, although men in both studies reported

experiencing significantly higher levels of moderate violence than did women. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that women may engage in low levels of violence as often or more often than men (Capaldi & Crosby, 1997). Rates of severe violence in ongoing relationships were low across both studies that precluded our ability to make meaningful gender-related comparisons.

In contrast, we predicted and found support for the hypothesis that women would experience lower relationship satisfaction subsequent to partner violence than did men. It has been well-documented that women experience greater psychological distress and physical injury as a result of dating partner violence (e.g., Foshee, 1996; Makepeace, 1986). To date, however, gender-related differences in the effects of violence on dating relationship quality have not been reported. In Study 1, a three-way interaction of gender, partner violence, and relationship status emerged. Women in more serious, committed relationships who sustained higher levels of partner violence endorsed the lowest levels of relationship satisfaction. In Study 2, relationship status did not moderate gender-related differences in relationship quality. Regardless of their relationship status, women but not men evidenced significant negative associations between levels of partner violence and two different indices of relationship quality. In both studies, level of physical victimization was unrelated to men's relationship satisfaction.

What accounts for women's lower relationship satisfaction as a function of partner violence? Future research may investigate mediators of this gender-related difference in relationship satisfaction subsequent to partner violence. Given that partner violence causes greater emotional distress for women than that for men (Makepeace, 1986; Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987, 1989), we speculate that this difference may account for the significant relationship between partner violence and relationship quality among women. Other possibilities also remain open for investigation, however. It may be that women, but not men, generally feel intimidated from behaving assertively with partners following an episode of partner violence. In turn, increased submissiveness or passivity could decrease the likelihood that victimized women directly communicate their needs and preferences to their partners, which decreases the likelihood that their needs will be met. Relationship satisfaction also may differ as a function of gender-related differences in motives for dating violence. Instrumental violence, enacted with the intent to dominate or control, may be more common among men, with greater impact on their partner's feelings about the relationship (Neidig & Friedman, 1984). And finally, because men in serious relationships are viewed as less responsible for violence than women in serious relationships (Bethke & DeJoy, 1993), women in serious relationships may be more likely to blame themselves for "provoking" partner

violent behavior than their do male counterparts, leading to lower relationship satisfaction.

It seems important to consider the larger context of conflict in which dating violence occurs to better inform a gender-sensitive theoretical stance. For example, women generally are socialized to maintain connectedness with others, whereas men are socialized to maintain high levels of autonomy (Nadien & Denmark, 1999). These gender-related tendencies may be differentially associated with violent tactics during conflicts. To the extent that women take a more active role in maintaining responsibility for relationships and may feel that their partners are unwilling to be minimally involved in resolving relationship issues, female-perpetrated violence may occur. In contrast, to the extent that men attempt to keep distance from their female partners and feel that those boundaries are threatened by requests for increased involvement in resolving issues, male-perpetrated violence may occur. In other words, perhaps male partner passivity/withdrawal during conflict situations is related to female perpetration, whereas female criticism/demandingness is related to male-perpetrated violence. Although it is important to keep in mind that not all women and men are strongly socialized according to traditional gender roles, different types of conflict behaviors may precipitate female-perpetrated versus male-perpetrated violence generally.

Another contextual factor that warrants future study involves the presence of psychological abuse in dating relationships. Although some research has been conducted with dating couples (e.g., Jezl *et al.*, 1996; Kasian & Painter, 1992), little is known about the frequency of psychological abuse and its effects on relationship quality within a dating population. Because psychological abuse is often associated with negative sequelae for women in marital or cohabiting relationships (Arias & Pape, 1999; Follingstad *et al.*, 1990; Marshall, 1996), it seems important to study the sequelae among dating women as well as men. For example, it would be interesting to note possible gender-related differences with regard to perpetration and victimization of psychological aggression, as well as its effects on relationship quality.

Also of interest for future inquiry is the examination of the types of interpretations made by women and men about partner violence. Different interpretations, in turn, may predict declines in relationship quality, relationship termination, or decreases in subjective investment in/commitment to the relationship. If there exist gender-specific tendencies to interpret violence as indicative of being controlled or being loved, for instance, such interpretations may predict different relationship outcomes for men versus women who are victimized by dating partners. And finally, future research

is needed to address dating violence among people from more varied racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Studies of relationship violence among gay and lesbian dating couples also are needed. Without such efforts, it will remain unclear whether our current understanding of dating violence can be generalized to more diverse populations.

Gender-related differences in self-defense behaviors may be an important topic to pursue as well. Although it is frequently assumed that women are more likely to reciprocate violence as a means of self-defense, to our knowledge this assumption has not been studied within nonmarried populations. Furthermore, it may be of interest to investigate those factors that predict restraint from physical retaliation in formerly violent couples who have discovered different ways of resolving conflict. Such discoveries may provide useful information to be incorporated into violence prevention programs. It should also be noted that prevention programs aimed at reducing physical violence in dating relationships may be more effective when they incorporate information about gender-related differences in violence and its effects. For example, education about the inappropriateness of women's use of even mild forms of aggression may be important to include. This information may help to prevent female-perpetrated violence and also may reduce defensiveness among young men.

In conclusion, gender-related differences exist with respect to the frequency with which women and men sustain dating violence, as well as the effects of violence on relationship quality. Dating men experienced higher levels of moderate violence than did women. In contrast, women but not men in violent relationships experienced lower relationship satisfaction, especially when more committed to their partners. These findings provide support for the utility of a gender-sensitive view of dating violence. Although we strongly believe that neither male-perpetrated nor female-perpetrated violence is acceptable, we also believe that studying dating violence from a gender-sensitive perspective will be fruitful in advancing basic knowledge about dating violence and in designing effective prevention programs. Further investigation is required, however, to fully understand the complex dynamics of an everpresent and harmful method of conflict resolution among dating couples.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Jillyn Swanda and Katherine Lindley for their assistance with data collection and the comments of two anonymous reviewers on an earlier draft of this paper.

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