

Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a serious problem among college students. Because IPV does not occur in a vacuum, it is important to understand its developmental antecedents and precursors in developing efficacious prevention programs. The study of more subtle and frequently occurring forms of aggression that may indicate one's trajectory toward IPV holds considerable promise. This study focused on romantic relational aggression, a variable known to predict IPV but which has received limited attention in the college environment. Specifically, we examined relational aggression in the context of college students' romantic relationships, exploring the role of gender, sex role attitudes, acceptance of couple violence, and the propensity to experience anger.

Introduction

This study examined how predictors of Interpersonal Violence (IPV), specifically gender, sex role egalitarianism, acceptance of couple violence, and trait-anger, predict relational aggression intimate partnerships.

Hypothesis 1: Trait anger will be positively correlated with dating relational aggression perpetration.

Hypothesis 2: Gender will moderate the relationship between sex role egalitarianism and dating relational aggression.

Hypothesis 3: Acceptance of couple violence will predict dating relational aggression, independent of trait anger and sex role egalitarianism.

Table 1

Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Trait Anger, Sex Role Egalitarianism, and Acceptance of Couple Violence on the Perpetration of Dating Relational Aggression

	Beta	ΔR ²
Step 1		.24**
Trait Anger	.43**	
TESR	.20**	
Step 2		.10**
Trait Anger	.29**	
TESR	.10	
ACVS	.36**	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Note. TESR = Traditional-Egalitarian Sex Roles Scale; ACVS = Acceptance of Couple Violence Scale.

Relational Aggression in College Students' Dating Relationships

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Methods

260 college student volunteers of traditional age (18-25) who reported involvement in a romantic relationship during the past year completed a survey including the Perpetration subscale of the Dating Relational Aggression Scale (DRAS-P; Ellis, Crookes, & Wolfe, 2009), Traditional-Egalitarian Sex Roles Scale (TESR; Larson & Long, 1988), the Trait Anger subscale of the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory-2 (Spielberger, 1999), and the Acceptance of Couple Violence Scale (ACVS; Foshee, Fothergill, & Stuart, 1992).

Results

Correlational analyses revealed that trait anger, acceptance of couple violence, and sex role attitudes were related to romantic relational aggression. Participants higher in trait anger, more accepting of couple violence, and with more traditional sex role attitudes were more likely to engage in romantic relational aggression. Respondents with more traditional sex role attitudes also tended to be more accepting of couple violence.

Hierarchical multiple regression indicated that the acceptance of couple violence predicted the perpetration of romantic relational aggression, independent of both trait anger and sex role egalitarianism (see Table 1). Trait anger also contributed to the prediction of romantic relational aggression on the final step of the model.

Moderated multiple regression was used to test the hypothesis that participant gender would moderate the relationship between sex role egalitarianism and the perpetration of romantic relational aggression. As can be seen in Table 2, there was no evidence of moderation, as the TESR x gender interaction term was not significant.

Table 2

Standardized Beta Coefficients and Change in R-Squares for Moderated Multiple Regression of Sex Role Egalitarianism, Gender, and Sex Role Egalitarianism x Gender on the Perpetration of Dating Violence

	Beta	ΔR ²
Step 1		.05**
TESR	.23**	
Step 2		.02*
TESR	.25**	
Gender*	.14*	
Step 3		.00
TESR	.19	
Gender	.14*	
TESR x Gender	.08	

*Gender coded 0 = female/1 = male

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Note. TESR = Traditional-Egalitarian Sex Roles Scale.

Conclusions

The acceptance of couple violence predicted romantic relational aggression, independent of trait anger and sex role egalitarianism. While the correlational nature of the study prevents causal interpretation, this finding is consistent with the possibility that individuals with less negative attitudes toward couple violence would be more likely to engage in romantic relational aggression. Participant gender and sex role egalitarianism predicted romantic relational aggression among college students. However, gender did not moderate the relationship between sex role egalitarianism and relational aggression. This suggests that some of the gender differences previously reported for physical aggression may not hold for relational aggression. Overall, results have implications for counseling in that intervention designed to reduce problem anger, change maladaptive attitudes toward violence, and enhance sex role egalitarianism may be valuable in the prevention and treatment of relational aggression among college students.