

DATING VIOLENCE AND THE STAY/LEAVE DECISIONS
OF YOUNG WOMEN IN COLLEGE

by

SARAH ELIZABETH LYON

B.A., University of Kansas, 2004
M.S., Oklahoma State University, 2007

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Family Studies and Human Services
College of Human Ecology

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2014

Abstract

Ending a college dating relationship is common as college coeds begin trying on romantic relationships for size. Ending the relationship because the relationship has become violent can add more complexities to an already unpleasant task. This study was an attempt to better understand the stay/leave decisions for college women who were victims of dating violence and whether or not these decisions differed for college women who were involved in violent versus non-violent dating relationships. Structural equation modeling was used to explore the factors that influenced the likelihood of female college students' dating relationships to end using Choice and Lamke's (1999) two-part decision-making model. In summary, victims reported greater relationship distress, less attraction towards someone other than their partner, less relationship safety, lower relationship efficacy, less social support, and fewer good friends than non-victims. Results also indicated that college women's consideration of "Will I be better off?" was more important in the decision to leave a dating relationship than their perception of "Can I do it?" In addition, results from Multiple Indicators Multiple Causes (MIMIC) modeling found that, while victims believed they were more likely to be better off leaving their violent, dating partners, they felt less able to actually leave the relationship than their non-victim counterparts. MIMIC modeling also found that being a victim or not of dating violence did not predict breakup directly. These findings have important implications for prevention and treatment of dating violence and can be used to further the research in the area of dating violence, college students, and stay/leave decisions.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my children, Drew and Ava. Mama loves you.

Chapter 1 - INTRODUCTION

Dating violence is an alarming problem among college students around the world. As part of the International Dating Violence Study, Murray Straus (2004) gathered data from 31 universities in 16 countries. He found that between 17% and 45% of undergraduate college students perpetrated physical assault towards a dating partner. While both male and female students perpetrate and are victimized by partner violence, the focus of this study is on female victimization because research indicates that women are generally more likely to be injured in violent relationships than men (Capaldi, Shortt, Kim, Wilson, Crosby, & Tucci, 2009; Makepeace, 1981). Smaller-scale research projects using U.S. samples appear to be consistent with the prevalence rates found in Straus's study. In a recent study, 72% of college female participants reported experiencing at least one incident of abuse perpetrated by their partner, and 19% reported physical abuse (Edwards, Gidycz, & Murphy, 2011). In addition, Katz, Kuffel, and Coblenz (2002) discovered that nearly 47% of undergraduate college students at a U.S. university reported being in a relationship in which their partner was physically violent towards them. Twenty-six percent of women reported being in a relationship with repeatedly violent partners and 18% of women reported having once-violent partners. Similarly, Gryl, Stith, and Bird (1991) found that 34% of first-year college students experienced violence in their current, serious dating relationship, and Riggs and O'Leary (1996) also found roughly 30% of the undergraduate men in their study reported using some form of physical aggression against their partner. These findings would suggest that many college women have to decide whether or not staying in a violent dating relationship, one that is not yet committed to marriage or children, is worth the risks.

Research has shown that deciding to stay in or leave a violent dating relationship is not easy and can be riddled with questions of desire and achievability (Choice & Lamke, 1999). Rhoades, Stanley, Kelmer, and Markman (2010) found that the presence of physical aggression in romantic relationships was related to less dedication to the relationship and more perceived barriers to ending the relationship for daters and cohabiters ages 18-35. However, it is unclear how college women in dating relationships come to a decision regarding the status of their relationships. Given the negative outcomes that can occur in violent relationships, this study is an attempt to shed light on factors that influence female college students' decisions to stay in or

leave their dating relationships and whether or not those factors vary for those in violent vs. non-violent relationships.

Dating Violence Outcomes

Harry Stack Sullivan proposed that “our relationships with other people influence how we develop and what we are” (Muuss, 1996, p. 86). Experiencing violence in dating relationships during college can impact students’ development of a healthy sense of self (Amar & Alexy, 2005), their physical well-being, (Amanor-Boadu, Stith, Miller, Cook, Allen, & Gorzek, 2011; Harned, 2001), and the achievement of healthy intimate relationships (Kaura & Lohman, 2007). The following section will outline some of the numerous mental, physical, and relational outcomes of dating violence that victims are at more risk for experiencing, with specific emphasis on college student relationships.

Mental Health Risk Factors

The most prominent research on the impact of dating violence on one’s mental health has focused on females as victims. For example, Amar and Alexy (2005) studied 210 college women between the ages of 18 and 25 from two U.S. universities and found that victims of violence were more likely than non-victims to experience emotional distress as evidenced by anger, guilt, self-blame, fear, depression, betrayal, and emotional breakdowns.

Researchers also have examined the mental health risks correlated with dating violence victimization for high school through college-age females compared to same-age non-victims. For example, in their study of high school students, Banyard and Cross (2008) found that adolescent girls from grades seven through twelve who were victims of dating violence had higher levels of depression and suicidal thoughts than did students who did not experience dating violence. They also found a significant positive association between substance use and both physical and sexual dating violence victimization. In their sample of college students, Kaura and Lohman (2007) reported that female victims experienced depression and anxiety at higher levels than non-victims.

While we do know that men and women experience dating violence at similar rates (Straus, 2004), fewer studies have examined differences in mental health risks experienced by male and female college students who are victims of dating violence. Some research has shown that college men and women are likely to experience similar levels of mental health problems at

low levels of physical and psychological victimization, and at higher levels of violence, women tend to experience more severe outcomes (Harned, 2001). Furthermore, Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, and Sebastian (1991) found that female victims of dating violence were more likely to report fear and anxiety, emotional hurt, and feelings of wanting to protect themselves than male victims. However, a recent study looking at gender differences in the impact of dating violence on college men and women found that, overall, both male and female victims of dating violence experience mental and physical health consequences (Amanor-Boadu, Stith, Miller, Cook, Allen, & Gorzek, 2011). This study did not find that college women experienced more severe consequences than did college men. Within the context of collegiate studies, victims of dating violence also may experience academic withdrawal as a result of the physical and emotional effects of the violence (Harned, 2001). Negative educational outcomes such as changes in grades, decreased school attachment, and thoughts of dropping out were also associated with victimization for adolescents in grades 7-12 (Banyard & Cross, 2008).

Physical Health Risk Factors

As can be expected, some victims of dating violence suffer physical injuries. In Straus's (2004) study, rates of injuries sustained from dating violence ranged from 1.5% to 20%. Examples of injuries sustained as a result of dating violence include, but are not limited to, scratches, bruises, welts, black eyes, swelling or busted lips, sore muscles, sprains, pulls, genital injuries, and sexually-transmitted diseases (Amar & Gennaro, 2005).

Past studies of adult intimate partner violence (IPV) have found that women report sustaining more injuries than men (Makepeace, 1981). However, gender differences in physical injuries are less clear for college men and women in dating relationships. Recent research has found that college men and women did not differ in their experiences of injury as a result of dating violence, which suggests that both male and female victims of dating violence are at risk for experiencing injury. However, these researchers did find that as the severity of physical violence increases, so does the chance of minor and severe injuries, and their findings suggested that "when the severity of violence was high, females experienced a greater increase in minor injuries compared with males, whereas males experienced a greater increase in severe injuries compared with females (Amanor-Boadu et al., 2011, p. 339). Not surprisingly, Harned (2001) found that college women experience more physical injuries as the frequency of violence

increases. Of course, this risk also varies as different forms of violence are used in relationships. Amar and Gennaro (2005) found that victims of multiple forms of violence experience greater mental health effects and more physical injuries than victims of one form of violence. Taken together, these findings point to the need to gain more clarity on the physical impact of dating violence (i.e., injuries) on both male and female victims and examining further severity, frequency, and forms of violence.

Relationship Risk Factors

Changes in relationship connection and satisfaction also have been correlated with dating violence victimization. Some research indicates that college-age couples in violent relationships feel more disconnected and distant (Amar & Alexy, 2005) and experience greater conflict and ambivalence when compared to couples in non-violent relationships (Gryl et al., 1991). Rhoades et al. (2010) found that college students with a history of violence reported lower levels of dedication to the relationship than did college students in non-violent relationships. In Stith, Green, Smith, and Ward's (2008) meta-analysis of 32 studies on marital satisfaction and intimate partner violence in heterosexual relationships, a significant effect size of -0.27 signified that a negative relationship existed between intimate partner violence and marital satisfaction and that this relationship was stronger for female victims than for male victims. However, there are conflicting findings regarding the association between physical violence and relationship satisfaction for dating couples. For instance, Kaura and Lohman (2007) found that dating violence victimization was associated with lowered relationship satisfaction for both college men and women, but Amanor-Boadu et al. (2011) found that physical violence victimization had no significant impact on relationship satisfaction for either college men or women. Differences in these findings could be due to the amount of time that college students have been with their partners. Participants in the Amanor-Boadu et al. (2011) study were in relationships of one-month or longer, but the majority of participants in Kaura and Lohman's (2007) study had been with their dating partner for a considerable length of time (over 50% had been in a relationship for 6 months and longer).

Some studies have looked at how commitment level affects levels of satisfaction. Katz et al. (2002) found that the association between relationship quality and dating violence was not significant for either college men or women in less committed relationships. However, they did

find that relationship satisfaction was affected by dating violence if the women reported they were in committed relationships, and in this case, they did report lower levels of relationship satisfaction. The same result was not found for men.

In summary, research tells us that dating violence is associated with various physical, mental, and relationship outcomes for both women and men. It is plausible then that these outcomes could also impact the likelihood of a relationship to end by contributing to daters' structural and personal resources and constraints. While dating violence victimization is not exclusive to women, women are heavily impacted by dating violence, which could make the decision to end a romantic relationship more complicated than a non-victimized college woman who is thinking about breaking up with her boyfriend.

The Stay/Leave Decision-Making Process

The choice to stay in or leave an abusive relationship is complex and varied. Much research has been done to understand the factors that influence a married woman's decision to stay with or leave her abusive partner, often referred to in the literature as the stay/leave decision. Michael Strube's (1988) influential article on violent relationship termination addressed the empirical research done up to that time relating to factors that influence a woman's decision to leave an abusive relationship, the methodological limitations of the research, and theoretical models that may be useful in understanding this complex phenomenon. Strube (1988) concluded that our understanding of the decision to leave an abusive relationship was still weak.

Nearly two decades later, Rhatigan, Street, and Axsom (2006) critically reviewed theories explaining violent relationship termination, and based upon their review, they suggested that for clinicians to be able to develop effective interventions to reduce the negative effects and occurrence of intimate partner violence, we must better understand the processes of stay/leave decisions and identify the contributing factors in this process.

Research on the stay/leave decision of battered women has been controversial. Early research centered on a perspective that inherently pathologized women, often explaining women's decisions to stay or leave through their "masochistic" tendencies and negative personality traits, which, ultimately, over-simplified a very complex and risky process in terms of safety for the individual (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Rhatigan et al., 2006). This perspective has changed throughout the years as researchers have been asking different questions regarding

the stay/leave decision. Rather than focusing on the research question “why do women stay?,” which makes the assumption that women *should* leave their abusive relationships and that *not leaving* is somehow due to their own behaviors or personalities, researchers are now asking “how is it that some women are *able to leave*?” (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). This stance has helped to reduce the victim-blaming perspective that early researchers often took.

Quantitative studies examining women’s stay/leave decisions have generally looked at women’s structural constraints and psychological factors predicting whether a woman will stay in or leave an abusive relationship (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). However, it is difficult to compare findings across studies due to methodological limitations, such as differences in types of variables, sample size, non-random sampling procedures, time of measurement, and differences in how variables are operationalized (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). On the other hand, qualitative studies have attempted to make sense of the stay/leave decisions as a process rather than a single outcome. These studies tend to emphasize the question “how is she able to leave?” rather than “why does she stay,” like many of the quantitative studies do. Qualitative interviews with women highlight the complex process involved, often through cognitive and emotional shifts, and provide context to the factors that quantitative studies have found to be influential (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Few & Bell-Scott, 2002; Patzel, 2001). In this study, I sought to answer the question of “how is she able to leave” by using quantitative analyses to identify personal and structural factors that are important in the decision to end dating relationships for female college students involved in violent, dating relationships and to compare these factors with those of female college students who are not in violent dating relationships.

Purpose of the Study

Much is known about the decision to stay in or leave violent marital or cohabiting relationships (Choice & Lamke, 1999; Rosen & Stith, 1995; Truman-Schram, Cann, Calhoun, & VanWallendael, 2000), but less is known about the stay/leave decision for college women in violent dating relationships. To address this gap in the literature, the purpose of this study was to explore the factors that influence the stay/leave decision of female college students, specifically, the factors that are most predictive of the likelihood of leaving a dating relationship. A comparison was made of factors for both female victims of dating violence and non-victims of dating violence to see whether factors influencing the decision to end a relationship for a female

victim of dating violence in college differ from factors influencing the decision to end a relationship for non-victims. This study involved secondary data analysis. While we know that males and females experience intimate partner violence at similar rates, there were not enough male participants in the data set to be included in the analyses of this study. Therefore, the current study included a sample of female college students who were in violent or non-violent romantic relationships.

Context of College Students

Because this study focused on college students specifically, as opposed to samples of other people in violent relationships, it is important to understand the specific context of this phase of development and specifically to distinguish between those young people who choose to go to college and those who choose to pursue a different path. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2007) proposed that emerging adulthood is the time in a young person's life between the late teens through the mid to late twenties in industrialized societies. Past theories have suggested that the developmental period of young adulthood, between the late teens to 40s, was a time in which young people got married and entered the work force by their early twenties. However, Arnett (2007) sought to challenge this perspective by pointing out a phase between the late teens to mid to late twenties as a time when young people are trying on different roles. This may mean postponing marriage and family, experimenting with different jobs, and pursuing secondary education. He suggested the term *emerging adult* to describe the developmental phase in which people in their late teens to twenties are no longer adolescents but also are not fully in the adult role.

Researchers have examined differences between emerging adults who are college students and others who are non-students on perspectives towards reaching adulthood (Seiter & Nelson, 2011). Other researchers have looked at how contextual factors such as family social support (Kranstuber, Carr, & Hosek, 2012) and socioeconomic status (Wright & Bean, 1974) affect college student success. For example, in a comparison of 18-26 year old college students and non-college students in India, 61% of the college students and 59% of the non-students indicated that they felt they had reached adulthood, with students feeling more ambiguous about their adulthood status than non-students. Furthermore, on attributes of optimism, 70% of students compared with 42% of non-students felt their relationships were likely to be better than those of their parents, and on attributes of career achievements, 89% of students compared with 45% of

non-students believed their career achievements were likely to be greater than those of their parents (Seiter & Nelson, 2011). These reports were, of course, from students in India, and it is possible that these percentages may be different for Indian students and non-students than American students and non-students based upon differences in cultural values.

Access to social support may look different for college students than it does for their non-student peers. For example, Kranstuber et al. (2012) examined how parent-child interactions influence college student's worldviews and understanding of college. Their mixed methods study found themes of: work hard and/or play hard, college is un/necessary, my two cents, support and encouragement, and general advice. These themes seemed to center around positive advice, family/social support, and understanding of emotional needs. These themes were not found to affect student success in college, but the message characteristics and the relational satisfaction between the student and the parent were found to be significant predictors of student success, pointing to the impact of the relational aspect of the message rather than the content of the message. It is possible that messages to non-students may focus on other aspects of reaching adulthood, but this study looked only at messages from parents to their college-student children.

Finally, financial characteristics may distinguish college students from non-students. Seiter and Nelson (2011) found that 84% of students as compared to 57% of non-students believed that their financial situation in adulthood was likely to be better than their parent's financial situation in adulthood. Perhaps this is due to believing that a college education may provide more career opportunities than a high-school education. In addition, Wright and Bean (1974) found that higher socioeconomic status (SES) as evidenced by family income, father's occupation, and mother's education was positively associated with increased predictability of academic performance and may be even more relevant for students from middle to upper-class backgrounds. It was suggested that this may be because students from an upper SES may not feel as pressured to work to support themselves as students from lower SES. This was an older study, however, and emerging adulthood most likely looked different at that time than it does today.

In summary, when examining the stay/leave decisions of college students in this study, it is important to recognize that there are contextual differences between this group and emerging adults who are not in college. These may include easier access to resources related to SES and social support as well as perceptions of future opportunities.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, a dating relationship is “a dyadic relationship involving meeting for social interaction and joint activities with an explicit or implicit intention to continue the relationship until one or the other party terminates or until some other more committed relationship is established” (Straus, 2004). In this study, victims of dating violence were limited to female college students who self-reported experiencing physical violence by their current partner.

Significance of the Study

Researchers have found that making the decision to end a dating relationship is hard to do and can lead to an increase in psychological distress and a decrease in life satisfaction (Rhoades, Dush, Atkins, Stanley, & Markman, 2011), even without the additional stressor of violence. The stay/leave decisions of women involved in violent relationships are complex, and many studies have attempted to understand factors that influence this decision as well as the general process of the decision. The majority of these studies have examined this phenomenon within the context of abusive, adult marital or cohabiting relationships. Less is known about the stay/leave decisions of female college students who have experienced dating violence. A greater understanding of the factors influencing the breakup decision for those in violent versus non-violent relationships will help guide therapists and other professionals who work with college women involved in violent dating relationships and can be useful in prevention efforts with college students in general. I hope to add to the existing research on dating violence by seeking to better understand the factors that most influence the decision for female college students to leave a violent dating relationship.

Theoretical Framework

Many theories, both general and specific to violence in intimate relationships, have been developed and applied to the stay/leave decision in abusive marital and cohabiting relationships (Rhatigan et al., 2006). For example, Strube (1988) reviewed four theories that may elucidate the stay/leave decision: learned helplessness, psychological entrapment, the investment model, and reason action/planned behavior. In addition, several researchers have applied behavior analytic approaches (Bell & Naugle, 2005), the theory of planned behavior (Byrne & Arias, 2004), the investment model (Truman-Schram et al., 2000), and the theory of traumatic bonding (Rhatigan

et al., 2006) to the stay/leave decisions of women in abusive relationships. In their critical review of theories explaining violent relationship termination, Rhatigan, Street, and Axsom (2006) suggested that general theories, like the investment model and reasoned action/planned behavior theory, are more predictive of the decision to terminate a violent relationship than the violence-specific theories like learned helplessness and traumatic bonding, yet no one theory has been identified as the gold standard. Choice and Lamke (1997, 1999) suggested an integration of the general and violent-specific theories, which they refer to as the two-part decision-making model, to best make sense of both women's stay/leave decisions and stay/leave decisions in abusive dating relationships. I chose to use the two-part decision-making model in this study because the model was created to explain the stay/leave decisions of people involved in violent relationships, yet the model is general enough to make sense for ending a non-violent relationship. Specifically, the variables in the model make sense for the stay/leave decisions of both victims and non-victims of dating violence, who I compared in this study.

Two-Part Decision-Making Model

Briefly, the mid-range model developed by Choice and Lamke (1997, 1999) (see Figure 1) is comprised of two questions deemed important in the stay/leave decision: "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?" Indicators of "Will I be better off?" are relationship distress, quality of alternatives, irretrievable investments, and subjective norm. Indicators of "Can I do it?" include personal and structural resources of the person. In Choice and Lamke's original two-part decision-making model, "Will I be better off" and "Can I do it?" predicted the likelihood of leaving the relationship. Indicators of the likelihood of leaving the abusive relationship are behavioral intentions, orientation toward future investment, and action taken towards leaving. In this study, I used the first two parts of Choice and Lamke's model "Will I be better off" and "Can I do it?" to serve as the independent variables and the decision to leave as the dependent variable.

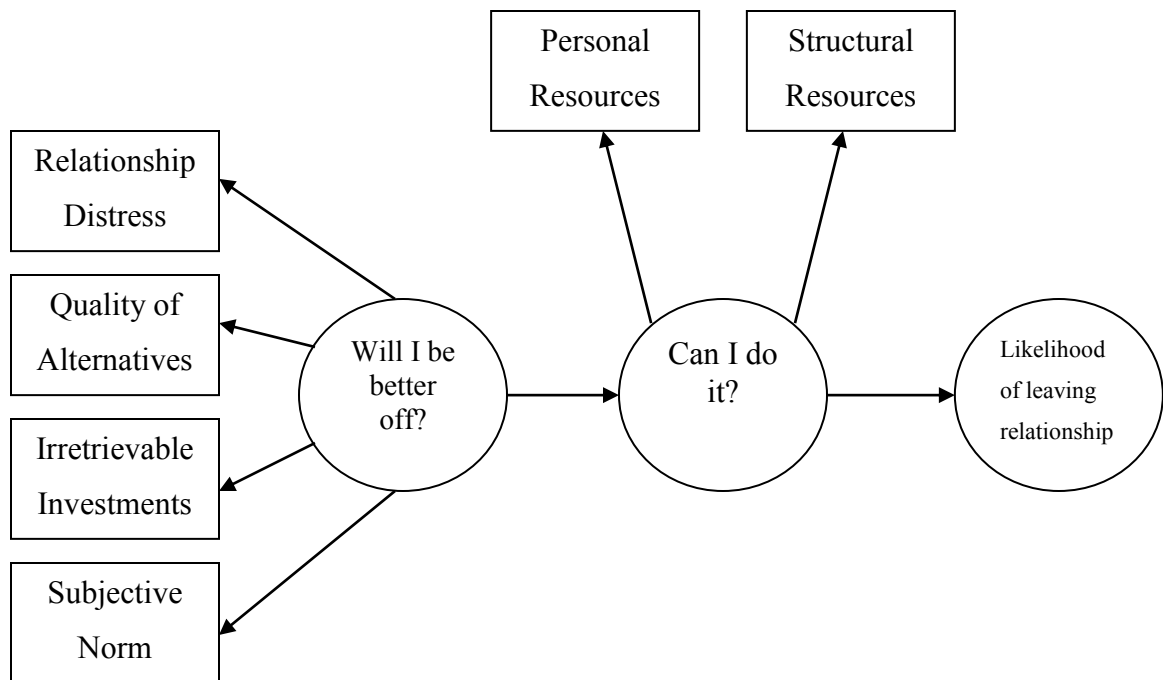


Figure 1-1. Two-part decision-making model.

According to the Two-Part Decision-Making model, the individual determines if she will be better off if she leaves the relationship, and then she determines if she can exit the relationship successfully and safely. In order to make this decision, a woman has to examine her satisfaction with the relationship that she is in, evaluate the quality of alternatives she has for herself, reflect on the amount of investment (time and effort) she has put into the relationship, and identify her subjective norm or her belief about what others would want her to do in her relationship along with her need to please others by going along with what they want (i.e., break up or stay together). These variables are combined with a woman’s evaluation of her personal and structural resources, such as self-efficacy, control, social support, and access to money, employment, and shelter, to help make the decision about whether to end the abusive relationship (Choice & Lamke, 1999).

Choice and Lamke (1999) tested their conceptual model using structural equation modeling with male and female undergraduate students who reported being in an ongoing heterosexual relationship and experiencing at least one act of violence from their partner. Their model explained approximately 87% of the variance in the intention to stay in or leave an abusive dating relationship. Furthermore, the question “Will I be better off?,” which includes

relationship distress, quality of alternatives, irretrievable investments, and subjective norm as indicators, appeared to be the most relevant question considered by those in abusive dating relationships and was the most predictive of the likelihood of leaving the relationship. The question “Can I do it,” as indicated by personal and structural resources, lacked construct validity, but the researchers suggested that the question “Can I do it?” may not be as relevant for those in dating relationships as it is in violent marital or cohabiting relationships or as relevant for those daters who have sufficient personal and structural resources. Perhaps this is because college students rely on their families for many personal and structural resources and those resources are much easier to acquire than for other victims of intimate partner violence. Perhaps severity of violence also has something to do with this finding. Choice and Lamke (1999) suggested that the model captured common couple violence rather than more severe types of intimate partner violence and that the question “Can I do it” may be more relevant for victims of severe violence. Another limitation of this study was that they tested intention to leave only, not the actual behavior of leaving the relationship. It was unclear whether the participants stayed in or left their abusive partners after the study concluded.

In the current study, Choice and Lamke’s (1999) model was used to examine female college students’ decision-making in their dating relationships. This study utilized the questions “Will I be better off?” and “Can I do it?” from the two-part decision-making model to guide the methodology, analysis, and interpretation of data. Given that deciding to end a relationship is complicated even in the best of circumstances, it is reasonable to think that some factors are similar for both victims and non-victims of dating violence but that some would also differ between the two groups. This model was helpful in determining the factors that are most predictive of the likelihood of leaving a relationship for those college women who have experienced dating violence vs. those college students who have not experienced dating violence.

This study goes beyond Choice and Lamke’s original study by examining if the factors in the two-part decision making model differ in their ability to predict impending relationship termination for those in violent vs. nonviolent relationships. This study also took Choice and Lamke’s study one step further through the use of longitudinal research, which they suggested would be a good next step for future research to test the model’s ability to predict actual breakup rather than just the intent to end the relationship. The next chapter reviews the current literature

on stay/leave decisions starting first by reviewing the available literature on abused women's stay/leave decisions and then stay/leave decisions of those in dating relationships.

Chapter 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

From cohabiting to engaging in sexual relations to saying “yes” to a marriage proposal, romantic relationships involve decision-making. This chapter includes a review of research related to decision-making in non-violent romantic relationships, in adult married and cohabiting relationships, and in dating relationships. The chapter concludes with identification of important research questions that were addressed in this study.

Decision-Making in Non-Violent Romantic Relationships

Partners in relationships make decisions about the relationship on a constant basis. However, these decisions may not be easy to make and may instead involve a process of “sliding” into a decision rather than “deciding” based on a number of factors (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006). Stanley et al. (2006) define the term sliding as “the phenomenon of moving through relationship transitions such as cohabitation without fully considering the implications” (p. 506). They hypothesized that “sliding” into cohabitation puts couples at greater risk for lower relationship quality than when couples make a clear and conscious decision because this can lead to a higher likelihood of constraints without necessarily increasing dedication to the relationship. In order to better understand the active decision-making processes of couples, Vennum and Fincham (2011) created the Relationship Deciding Scale (RDS) as a measure of relationship decisions. Three factors emerged as important parts of the decision-making process for young adults in romantic relationships: relationship confidence, knowledge of warning signs, and deciding. Positive relationships were found between the three subscales and the relationship characteristics of conflict resolution behaviors, conflict management, relationship efficacy, relationship satisfaction, dedication, and self-control. The relationship confidence subscale was found to be the most highly correlated with relationship efficacy, and the deciding subscale was most strongly correlated with self-control. The knowledge of warning signs subscale was strongly and inversely related to negative interactions.

Other research has attempted to identify the factors influencing the decision as to whether or not to end a dating relationship. Rhoades, Stanley, and Markman (2010) examined four aspects of relationship commitment: dedication, perceived constraints, material constraints, and felt constraints. They defined dedication as interpersonal commitment, perceived constraints as

social pressure or difficulty in ending the relationship, material constraints as living arrangements and shared items, and felt constraints as feeling trapped. Among these four factors, felt constraint was significantly associated with lower relationship adjustment, lower perceived likelihood of marriage, higher perceived likelihood of break-up, and less actual relationship stability. On the other hand, increased dedication, more perceived constraints, and more material constraints were associated with higher relationship adjustment, higher perceived likelihood of marriage, lower perceived likelihood of break-up, and less relationship stability. Lower relationship dedication, lower perceived constraints and material constraints, and increased felt constraints all predicted break-up eight months later.

These articles have highlighted the complexity of relationship termination in relationships. It is difficult to determine if violence was or was not a part of the relationships in the studies reviewed above because violence was not measured as part of the studies. Stay/leave decisions and the factors that go into these decisions could be considerably more complicated and stressful when dating violence is added to the mix. Similar to the concept of constraints in the literature on stay/leave decision-making in non-violent relationships, several barriers also have been found to affect the stay/leave decision in violent relationships.

Factors Affecting Stay/Leave Decision-Making in Violent Adult Relationships

Since Choice and Lamke's (1999) study examining the two-part decision making model with daters in abusive relationships, research has been scant on dating violence and stay/leave decision-making. Briefly, Choice and Lamke's two-part decision making model includes the questions "Can I do it?" and "Will I be better off?" as important components of the stay/leave decision. This section is comprised of personal and situational factors found in the literature that may be important indicators of "Can I do it?" and "Will I be better off?" In order to be able to understand more fully the factors affecting relationship breakup for female college students involved in violent dating relationships, the following section will review factors that were found in the literature to be influential in an adult woman's stay/leave decision if she has experienced intimate partner violence in her marital or cohabiting relationship. The factors will be broken down into two segments: personal factors and situational factors.

Personal Factors

Many factors, both personal and situational, have been found in the literature to be associated with the stay/leave decision for married women who have experienced intimate partner violence. As expected, McDonough (2010) found that when comparing battered women with non-battered women, battered women reported fewer rewards and greater costs in their relationships and greater desire for relationship alternatives than non-battered women. Relationship features, such as the nature of the violence, offender characteristics, previous history of abuse, and commitment to and satisfaction with the relationship (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Katz et al., 2006; Stroshine & Robinson, 2003; Truman-Schram et al., 2000); emotional responses, such as fear, social embarrassment, and loneliness (Hendy et al., 2003, Patzel, 2006); and psychological characteristics, such as locus of control and self-efficacy (Anderson & Saunders, 2003), have been found to serve as additional factors influencing this complex decision.

Relationship Features

Specific features of the relationship have been shown to play a role in a woman's stay/leave decision. These relationship features include the nature of the relationship, offender characteristics, previous history of abuse, commitment to and satisfaction with the relationship, and relationship safety. In studies identifying predictors of women's intentions to leave an abusive relationship, the nature of the violence is a feature frequently highlighted as a predictor and is usually measured by the severity and frequency of the violence (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). For example, Stroshine and Robinson (2003) found that women were more likely to attempt to leave their abusive partners when they reported a prior history of abuse with the same partner, a more severe level of abuse, and hospitalization due to the abuse. Since this study only looked at abuse history with the participants' current partners, it is unclear whether or not a history of abuse in other romantic relationships also correlates with ending the relationship. This finding is consistent with McDonough's (2010) study on factors that battered women consider when deciding whether or not to stay in abusive relationships and whether self-reports of the factors match up with their actual decisions. Both battered and non-battered women reported that violence intensity and frequency were most important in whether or not to stay in the vignette relationships.

Secondly, Stroshine and Robinson (2003) found that characteristics of the offender were more important than the nature of the violence in predicting a woman's attempt to leave a violent relationship. They conducted a study looking at women who were in the process of leaving an abusive relationship and the role of offender characteristics in that process. They found that women whose partners had a current criminal status, kept weapons in their homes, and used or abused illegal substances were more likely to attempt to leave the relationship than were women whose partners did not have these characteristics. In addition, women whose partners stalked them were more likely to attempt to leave than women whose partners did not stalk them. However, the offender characteristic that appears to be most important in predicting women's intentions to leave their abusive relationship is keeping weapons in the home. Women whose partners kept weapons in the home were four times more likely to end the relationship than women whose partners did not keep weapons in the home (Stroshine & Robinson, 2003).

Studies also have explored women's history of abuse in other relationships as predictive of their stay/leave decisions. These histories could include violence experienced as a child, either directly as a victim or indirectly as a witness to abuse in their families, or in relationships as an adult (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). For example, childhood sexual abuse (CSA) survivors who were also survivors of adult domestic violence were more likely to report frequent separations from their partners, that their intentions to return to their abusive partners had to do with the emotional attachment they felt towards their partners, and that they were not more at risk for returning to their partner in the future than were non CSA survivors (Griffing, Ragin, Morrison, Sage, Madry, & Primm, 2005). This finding suggests that some survivors may not perceive themselves as more vulnerable to returning to the abusive relationship. In another study utilizing the same sample of women from the Griffing et al. (2005), those women who stated that emotional attachment would be a reason they would return to their abusive partners were more likely to have done so in the past (Griffing, Ragin, Sage, Madry, Bingham, & Primm, 2002). Another study found that women who witnessed interparental violence as a child were less likely to leave their abusive partners, despite their initial hypothesis that there would be no association between a woman's stay/leave decision and witnessing interparental violence as a child (Kim & Gray, 2008). Research also has suggested that women who have experienced violence in their families of origin have a higher tolerance for relationship violence and a lower likelihood of objecting to the violence because of their early experiences (Patzel, 2006).

Overall, findings concerning the predictive ability of relationship features are inconsistent in the literature. This may be due to the amount and type of violence a person has experienced throughout the entirety of their lives. For example, Rosen, Bartle-Haring, and Stith (2001) used Bowen's theory to understand the intergenerational transmission of dating violence and through structural equation modeling found that witnessing interparental violence or being a victim of violence from parents was positively associated with being a victim or perpetrator of dating violence but that these were also mediated by the concept of couple differentiation, or "the ability to tolerate fluctuations in closeness and distance" (p. 125). Social learning theory may indicate that family violence would be modeled and could lead to justifying the use of violence but not in all circumstances since many people who experience violence in their families do not go on to become either victims or perpetrators of violence (Tontodonato & Crew, 1992).

Studies also indicate that women with a higher level of commitment to their partners and to the relationship are more likely to stay in the relationship (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Truman-Schram et al., 2000). Women who have invested in the relationship (i.e., time, money, resources, and love) may feel obligated to continue in the relationship in order to justify the investment they have made. For instance, one study found that women who lived with their abusive partners were more likely to stay in the relationship while women who were more financially independent of their partners were more likely to leave their abusive partners (Kim & Gray, 2008). Katz, Kuffel, and Brown (2006) found that women who ended their verbally, sexually-coercive relationships at Time 2 (6-8 weeks after Time 1) felt less invested in and committed to their relationship than those who stayed in their relationships.

In addition, the amount of satisfaction a woman feels in the relationship may be a factor that she considers in the stay/leave decision. Katz et al. (2006) found that women who left their abusive dating partners reported significantly lower relationship satisfaction than women who stayed in their relationship. Patzel (2006) also found that for both heterosexual and homosexual females, having loving feelings towards their abusers was a factor that contributed to "holding back," or their ambivalence about leaving their partners, and ultimately their staying in the abusive relationship.

Finally, perceived relationship safety, which can include aspects such as positive communication of emotions, intimate safety (Cordova, Gee, & Warren, 2005), and self-disclosure (Solomon, Dekel, & Zerach, 2008), has been shown to be a component of relationship

satisfaction and dyadic adjustment (Brown, Banford, Mansfield, Smith, Whiting, & Ivey, 2012) and may also be a part of the stay/leave decision-making process. Brown et al. (2012) found that perceived relationship safety mediated the relationship between post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and dyadic adjustment, and they suggested the importance of addressing safety and security in relationships particularly for those who have experienced some sort of trauma. This can involve more emotional aspects of safety rather than the physical aspects of personal safety, which are outlined below.

Emotional Responses

Because an abused woman is at risk for harm when she leaves her partner (Jordan, Nietzel, Walker, & Logan, 2004), perhaps one of the most important factors that influences her decision-making process is the woman's perception of her personal safety, particularly in answering the question "Can I do it," a component of Choice and Lamke's (1999) two-part decision-making model. Personal risk assessments appear to be a significant factor in the decision to stay with or leave an abusive partner. Risk assessments are a "decision-making process through which we determine the 'best' course of action by estimating, identifying, qualifying, or quantifying risk" and several domestic violence risk assessments have been recommended in the literature (Nicholls, Desmarais, Douglas, & Kropp, 2007, p. 276). Fear can come either as a response to the abuse, of being alone if the woman decides to leave her abusive partner, or both situations (Patzel, 2006). Findings are mixed concerning abused women's fear responses and the impact of fear on the stay/leave decision. One study found that greater fear of harm was positively associated with a woman's decision to leave her abusive partner (Hendy, Eggen, Gustitus, McLeod, & Ng, 2003) while another study found that women with lower levels of fear were more likely to leave their partners (Kim & Gray, 2008). This could be due to the differences between samples, including where the women were in their decision-making process. For example, in the Hendy et al. (2003) study women who reported a greater fear of harm had already left their abusive partners and were residing elsewhere (i.e., crisis shelters) while in the Kim and Gray (2008) study, women were interviewed approximately one week to twelve months after the domestic violence incident. In the first sample, all the women had left, and in the other sample, some had left and some had not. Other researchers found that abused adult women from the community who were staying in crisis shelters reported more fear of harm in the relationships compared to college victims of dating violence (Hendy et al., 2003). This could be due to the

severity and frequency of violence that occurred between the women who had already left and gone to a crisis shelter and college victims. Hendy et al. (2003) reported that the women in the study who had reported more frequent violence had also indicated more concerns about leaving due to feelings of greater fear of harm.

Social embarrassment, or the feelings of shame and self-blame for being in an abusive relationship and having to seek help, has also been found to be positively associated with the choice to leave a violent relationship. Social embarrassment appears to be of particular concern in the decision to leave for abused women who have chosen to seek help at a crisis shelter when compared with college women who had and had not experienced violence. College women who had experienced violence compared to college women who had not experienced violence also reported greater social embarrassment (Hendy et al., 2003). It is also possible that social embarrassment may occur when other people witness the abuse. Stroshine and Robinson (2003) found that women were more likely to attempt to leave their abusive relationships when other people, such as friends, relatives, and police, witnessed the abusive acts. Hendy et al. (2003) suggested these differences in samples may be due to severity of violence rather than just frequency, meaning the type of violence that may occur before women make the decision to protect themselves in a domestic violence shelter is qualitatively different than women who are in relationships where the violence is not as severe. It makes sense, then, that as the violence increases in severity, so does the chance for involvement by others, thus increasing the chances for social embarrassment.

Researchers also found that a fear of loneliness factors into a woman's stay/leave decision, especially in deciding if she will be better off without her partner (Hendy et al., 2003). According to Hendy et al. (2003), the decision to stay in an abusive relationship was positively associated with a woman's greater fear of loneliness. When looking at group differences between college-age victims and non-victims of dating violence and battered women in shelters, women in crisis shelters reported feeling less fear of loneliness and being without their partners than did college women involved and not involved in abusive relationships (Hendy et al.). This difference may be because women in crisis shelters have already decided to take action against the violence in their relationship and are actively seeking to increase their social support system. Perhaps this is also due to differences in context of college students and battered women in shelters. College

students may be different in that they may have easier access to social support in terms of their families, peers, and college staff.

Psychological and Social Psychological Characteristics

Psychological and social psychological factors have been identified in quantitative research as factors influencing the stay/leave decision (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). The attributions that the woman makes of the abuse and the abuser play an important role in the stay/leave decision. For example, a woman may attribute her partner's possessiveness as protective and as a sign of his love (Chung, 2007), or the woman may perceive the behavior as negative. Furthermore, attributions of partner causality and responsibility are related to women's nervous reactions and intent to leave the abusive partner (Pape & Arias, 2000). For example, Patzel (2006) found that many abused women had difficulty labeling the abusive behavior as "abuse," often saw themselves as at fault, frequently blamed themselves for the behavior, and thought they could change or "fix" their partner. This view was identified by Few and Rosen (2005) as a "caretaker identity." In a study comparing women who have stayed in abusive relationships and women who have left them, attributing the abusive partner's violent acts as his fault was found to be significantly and positively related to leaving the relationship when compared with women who were still involved with their abusive partners (Truman-Schram et al., 2000).

Attributions have been found to mediate the relationship between intimate partner violence and the intent to leave an abusive relationship. As suggested previously in other studies, the nature of the violence in the relationship has been identified as a predictor of the intention to leave an abusive relationship (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Pape and Arias (2003) extended this finding in their study of the role of perceptions and attributions in an abused woman's stay/leave decision. They found that the relationship between perceptions that the violence will increase over time and the intent to leave the abusive partner permanently was mediated by the extent to which the women attributed their partner's behaviors as blame-worthy, malicious, selfish, stable, and global. In addition, Gordon, Burton, and Porter (2004) found that attributions affect women's stay/leave decisions indirectly through level of forgiveness. Specifically, they found that women who reported more severe acts of violence by their partners tended to attribute the acts as malicious and indicated a lower level of forgiveness towards their partners and that women who were more forgiving of their partners were more likely to report the intent to return

to their partners if they left (Gordon et al., 2004). These results suggest that the choice to stay in or leave the abusive relationship can be dependent on how victims make sense of the abuse.

Finally, a woman's confidence influences the stay/leave decision-making process, especially when considering the question "Can I do it?" One study found that abused women with higher levels of self-esteem were more likely to leave their abusive partners (Kim & Gray, 2008). Another study found that self-efficacy was associated with a woman's coping strategies and symptoms of depression and relationship trauma. Specifically, the fewer emotion-focused coping strategies utilized, the lower the depression score, the higher the post-sexual abuse trauma, and the greater the problem-focused coping, the greater the woman's confidence for leaving the abusive relationship. These findings suggest that coping strategies, mental health, and relationship experiences play an important role in a woman's confidence around the stay/leave decision (Lerner & Kennedy, 2000).

Summary

In summary, personal factors recognized in the literature as impactful to the stay/leave decisions of adult women in abusive marital or cohabiting relationships include features of the abusive relationships, emotional responses, and psychological and social psychological characteristics of the victims. Other factors that are less subjective also have been identified as an important part of the stay/leave decision. The next section explored situational factors and their impact on the stay/leave decision.

Situational Factors

In addition to personal factors, situational factors influence abused women's decision-making process and the belief that they can exit the relationship successfully. These factors, identified as personal and structural resources and barriers, taken together play a part in the stay/leave decision (Choice & Lamke, 1997, 1999).

Structural Resources and Barriers

Structural resources and barriers may play an even more important role in the stay/leave decision-making process than the subjective, personal factors for women in marital and cohabiting relationships. Many studies have looked at structural resources, like employment status and income, and have found that they are often the most predictive of leaving an abusive

relationship (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Fewer studies have looked at other barriers to leaving, such as child care needs, transportation, and social support (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). One study found that women who were more financially independent from their abusers were more likely to leave the abusive relationship (Kim & Gray, 2008) and another suggested that child care needs and financial problems were two concerns in women's stay/leave decisions (Hendy et al., 2003).

However, some structural barriers may not be as applicable to college couples as they are to married couples in violent relationships. For example, Hendy et al. (2003) reported that child care needs and financial problems were more of a concern for abused women in protective shelters than they were for college women, whether or not they experienced abuse. This is likely due to college women not being as likely to have children as married women or women in cohabiting relationships. Hendy et al. (2003) reported that the women in their study with children reported more concerns about leaving their violent relationships due to concerns about childcare needs. Furthermore, some college students have their parents to rely on for financial issues, so this may not be as significant of a concern when ending a dating relationship. In summary, while structural barriers and resources may be important for adult couples to consider, they may not be as applicable to college students simply because of their phase of life.

Personal Resources and Barriers

First, the perception of social support, either by family or peers, has been found to serve as a factor in women's stay/leave decisions. In particular, poor social support was a concern in the decision to leave an abusive relationship (Hendy et al., 2003; Patzel, 2006). Hendy et al. (2003) found the decision to leave was negatively associated with social support. Social support can also serve as a coping mechanism to deal with the relationship, but the perception of support from friends and family may be an important part of disclosing the abuse and ultimately in making the decision to stay in or end the relationship (Patzel, 2001). Therefore, it is plausible that a woman who does not perceive that she has adequate social support, either by family or peers, would believe that she would struggle to exit the relationship successfully.

The extent to which the police or other institutions are involved in the abusive relationship has been shown to influence the stay/leave decision. In their study on the role of offender characteristics in the decision to end an abusive relationship, Strohshine and Robinson (2003) found that women whose partners had been arrested or prosecuted were more likely to

attempt to leave their abusive relationships compared to women in situations where there was not a formal police or criminal justice system response. Furthermore, police responses to reports of domestic violence were significantly and positively associated with women's attempts to end their relationships, i.e., when the police were involved, victims were up to twice as likely to leave than when the police were not involved (Stroshine & Robinson, 2003). One should consider the severity of violence when law enforcement is involved. It seems reasonable that the severity of violence warranted law enforcement involvement in some way and that in some way having law enforcement involved in the situation helped victims to realize the severity of the situation and view ending the relationship as the only option for ending the violence (Stroshine & Robinson, 2003). It also could be that the woman who has made the decision to call the police for help is already showing signs of dissatisfaction with the relationship.

Summary

Briefly, situational factors have been identified as important components of the stay/leave decisions of adult women in abusive marital and cohabiting relationships. Particularly, structural resources and barriers have been recognized as some of the most predictive factors of the intention to leave an abusive relationship. Personal resources and barriers, such as social support, are also a concern of women making the decision to leave an abusive relationship. Ultimately, what Choice and Lamke (1997) suggested is that a woman who has multiple structural and personal resources in her life will feel better about leaving the relationship than a woman who has more structural and personal barriers. The above section reviewed factors found to be important in the domestic violence literature, focusing on women who are married or living with their partners. The subsequent section includes an exploration of the existing research on dating violence among college students and stay/leave decisions.

Young Adult Dating Violence and Stay/Leave Decisions

Within the last few decades, dating violence has emerged as a social issue that has captured the attention of researchers, policy makers, and practitioners, yet more research is needed to make sense of the dynamics of violent dating relationships as well as to develop intervention strategies (Levy, 1990). The context of college daters may differ from that of married or cohabiting women, and intervention strategies should be developed to attend to the specific developmental issues of college students. While many researchers have sought to

understand the empirical factors influencing the stay/leave decisions of adult women in marital and cohabiting relationships and to develop theories to better explain this multifaceted process, fewer studies have examined the stay/leave decisions of college students involved in violent dating relationships specifically. Statistics show that roughly 17-45% of undergraduate college students experience physical violence in their dating relationships (Straus, 2004). Continued research in this area is important to understand what factors are involved in college students' decisions to end their violent dating relationships.

Stay/Leave Decision as a Process

Some qualitative studies have looked at the stay/leave decision-making process. Rosen and Stith (1995, 1997) interviewed young women about their experiences in leaving their abusive dating relationships. They identified several themes that emerged throughout the interviews to help explain this multifaceted process: seeds of doubt, turning points, reappraisals, objective reflections, self-reclaiming actions, paradigmatic shifts, and last straw events. Briefly, seeds of doubt refer to thoughts that the relationship would not work before the women consciously had that realization. Turning points were specific events that played a role in the decision to leave. Objective reflections occurred when the women looked at their relationships from a detached point of view. Reappraisals occurred when the women evaluated their relationships. Self-reclaiming actions were actions that the women took to take back control in their lives. Paradigmatic shifts occurred when the women changed their thinking to wanting to leave the relationship, and last straw events were events that precipitated the final decision to end the relationship. Their findings point to the personal nature of the stay/leave decision-making process that often occurs through cognitive and emotional shifts. Women, who primarily were involved in psychologically violent dating relationships as emerging adults, also spoke about leaving their relationships as a process, and the researchers identified four stages in the termination process: assessment of the relationship, separation from partner, reestablishment of social networks, and declaration of self-empowerment (Few & Scott, 2002).

Factors Influencing Stay/Leave Decisions in Violent Dating Relationships

Much of the research in stay/leave decisions has focused on samples including adult married and or cohabiting partners. Less research has examined factors influencing the stay/leave decisions of college students in violent dating relationships. The following section will review

the current research on relationship features, emotional responses, social and social psychological characteristics, and personal resources and barriers found to influence the stay/leave decisions of college students.

Relationship Features

Like women in marital and cohabiting relationships, relationship satisfaction has been found to affect the stay/leave decisions of women in dating relationships. Edwards et al. (2011) found that for undergraduate college women, reports of leaving the relationship at Time 2 (10 weeks after Time 1) were predicted by less commitment, less satisfaction, and less psychological distress at time 1 of the study. Conversely, they found that greater investment in the relationship, greater satisfaction with the relationship, and poorer quality of alternatives predicted greater commitment to the dating relationship, which then predicted women's decisions to stay with their partners at Time 2. They also found that greater psychological distress and greater satisfaction directly predicted women's decisions to stay with their partners at time 2 of the study. This may suggest that women who experience greater psychological distress in their dating relationships do not have the confidence in themselves to end the relationship.

Emotional Responses

Emotional responses, such as social embarrassment and hope, are relevant to college students as well as married women. College women who have experienced violence in their relationships reported that social embarrassment was a primary concern compared to their peers who were not in violent relationships (Hendy et al., 2003). Hope has also been identified as a common emotional response and an influential factor in the stay/leave decision. Hendy et al. (2003) found that the hope that things will change did not significantly differ between women in shelters and college women who did or did not experience violence, but they did find that college women with violence in their relationships reported more hope that things will change when compared to college women without violence in their relationships. Perhaps age and experience have something to do with this factor, which suggests that couples who are younger and have less experience than their adult counterparts, may have higher hopes that things will change in the relationship, and these hopes may affect their decision to end a violent dating relationship.

Psychological and social psychological characteristics

Similar to the findings in the research on stay/leave decisions among married and cohabiting partners, attributions of partner behavior and self-esteem have been found to influence the intent to leave the relationship for college women in dating relationships. Rhatigan and Nathanson (2010) found that women who reported greater negative and fewer positive attributions were more likely to indicate an intention to leave, and conversely, women who endorsed fewer negative and more positive attributions of partners' behaviors in hypothetical vignettes were more likely to indicate an intent to stay in the relationship. Women's positive attributions for partners' behavior were also negatively associated with feelings of self-esteem. Rhatigan, Shorey, and Nathanson (2011) found that more PTSD symptoms were indirectly related to fewer alternatives through the feeling of increased shame and lower self-efficacy and that fewer alternatives then predicted greater commitment to the relationship. These findings suggest that a college student's self-esteem is important in the decision to remain in or leave a violent dating relationship. For instance, a woman who does not attribute her partner's behavior as negative or who does not feel confidence in herself may be more likely to remain committed to her partner and then stay at greater risk for continued abuse.

Personal Resources and Barriers

Lack of social support from peers might be an especially important factor for college students when making the decision to stay in or leave a violent dating relationship. In a qualitative study conducted by Few and Bell-Scott (2002), six heterosexual Black college women who disclosed their psychologically abusive dating relationships to their friends experienced some difficulty because some of their friends were unhelpful, also involved in violent dating relationships, or posing as future dating partners. However, Choice and Lamke (1999) found that the question "Can I do it," which contains social support as part of the indicator of personal resources and barriers, lacks construct validity and may not have been as relevant for college daters as opposed to women in marital or cohabiting relationship. It seems reasonable that social support would also be important for college students as peers are often a very important system in their lives. It just might be that social support looks different for college students than it does for married or cohabiting victims.

Research Sample and Questions

Much is known about domestic violence in marital relationships and the factors that influence the victim's decision to stay in or leave an abusive marital or cohabiting relationship. The literature identifies personal factors, such as features of the relationship, emotional responses, and psychological characteristics, as well as situational factors, such as structural and personal resources, as influential factors in the stay/leave decision-making process. The majority of the literature has identified these factors within the context of marital or cohabiting relationships. Less is understood about the factors that influence the decision-making process of college students in violent dating relationships. Furthermore, some situational factors, such as financial problems and child care concerns, may not be applicable to college students in violent dating relationships. Choice and Lamke (1999) even proposed that the question "Can I do it?" may not be as relevant to college students in dating relationships. These findings suggest that for college students, some factors differ from those influencing adult stay/leave decisions due to their phase of life.

What we do know is that stay/leave decision-making in violent relationships is complex and involves the analysis of many personal and situational factors. What we know less about are the variables that factor into their decisions to stay in or leave violent dating relationships and how these compare to the factors involved in stay/leave decision-making in non-violent relationships. Family and peer networks are often two of the most influential social networks in a young person's life and, therefore, likely to influence their stay/leave decisions (Choice & Lamke, 1999). Research has shown that young adults in college are more likely to seek help informally through their friends rather than through formal mental health services (Sabina, Cuevas, & Rodriguez, 2014). Parent and peer experiences with relationship aggression, their relationship history, and relationship values or beliefs can either serve as a resource or constraint when making the decision to end a relationship, and aspects of these influences can be found in the questions "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?" Because there is a paucity of literature explaining how social resources influence the stay/leave decisions of women in abusive relationships, Choice and Lamke (1999) suggested that researchers further their understanding of the impact of social influences, including family and friends, on a college student's stay/leave decision.

In hopes of addressing some of these concerns, I attempted to answer the following research questions in this study: (1) How do victims and non-victims differ on factors related to leaving a dating relationship? (2) In using Choice and Lamke's (1999) two-part decision-making model as a theoretical framework, what factors influence college age women's evaluation of "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?" (3) What factors influence a female college student's decision to leave a dating relationship? (4) How do victims and non-victims differ in their perceptions of whether they would be better off leaving and their ability to leave their relationship, and the likelihood that their relationship will end by the end of the semester? In the next chapter, I will review my research questions and hypotheses along with the methods, including the sample and data analysis plan, I used to answer my research questions.

Chapter 3 - METHODS

This chapter describes the methods I used to identify the factors that were most important in the stay/leave decisions of college-age female victims versus non-victims of dating violence. First, I present my research questions and hypotheses. Next, I describe the data set that I used including how the data were collected in the original study as well as the demographics of the sample I used in this study. Finally, I describe the measures and statistical analyses I used to test my hypotheses.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to explore the stay/leave decisions of females involved in violent, dating relationships in college in comparison to those who were not involved in violent, dating relationships using Choice and Lamke's Two-Part Decision-Making model (1999) as a guide. More specifically, first I desired to know if victims and non-victims differed on factors related to leaving a dating relationship. Secondly, I wanted to know what factors influenced college age women's evaluation of "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?" Then, I sought to learn what factors influenced a female college student's decision to leave a dating relationship. Finally, how do victims and non-victims differ in their perceptions of whether they would be better off leaving and their ability to leave their relationship, and the likelihood that their relationship will end by the end of the semester?

I considered variables related to two latent constructs in the Two-Part Decision-Making model: "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?" Variables making up "Will I be better off" included the indicators relationship distress, quality of alternatives as measured by "attraction towards others," lack of irretrievable investments as measured by "lack of commitment" and subjective norm as measured by "approval seeking." Variables making up "Can I do it?" included personal resources as measured by "social support, friends in college, relationship efficacy, and relationship safety," and structural resources as measured by "cohabitation." I predicted that, like Choice and Lamke's (1999) study of abusive dating relationships, "Will I be better off" would be more predictive of breakup than "Can I do it," because dating relationships tend to have fewer structural barriers to ending the relationship than marital or cohabiting relationships. I also predicted that social support would be more representative of "Can I do it?"

for this population because of the importance of peer groups and family networks for college-age students in dating relationships (Choice & Lamke, 1999). Lastly, being a victim of dating violence adds a dimension of complication to any break-up. Therefore, I predicted that victims would be more likely to perceive themselves as better off leaving their partners and to perceive themselves as less able to leave their partners than non-victims.

Participants and Data Collection Methods

Similar to the Choice and Lamke (1999) study, this study used structural equation modeling to test the hypothesized relationships. Structural equation modeling is often used to test how constructs are theoretically linked and the directionality of significant relationships (Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow, & King, 2006). The next section describes the data set being used, data collection methods from the original study, the sample gained from the data set, and the measures being used in this study.

Data Collection Methods Used in Project RELATE

This study involved secondary data from the Project RELATE study. Data were gathered in the spring semester of 2009 from undergraduate students in an introductory family relations course at a large, Southern university in the United States. This was a 3 credit-hour course available to all university students and, therefore, reflects students from a variety of areas of study. Students were given several options for course credit. Those who chose to participate in the study completed on-line questionnaires including a battery of assessments at three time points: the beginning of the semester, 7-weeks, and 14-weeks after the beginning of the semester. IRB approval was obtained through the university, and data were collected over the course of several semesters. For the purpose of my study, I used the data from three time points, (beginning of the semester, 7-weeks, and 14-weeks after the beginning of the semester.)

Sample

The initial sample consisted of 977 students in an introductory family relations course during the spring 2009 semester. First, to increase reliability, participants who missed more than two control questions or who completed the survey in less than thirty minutes, likely not taking enough time to read and understand the questions, were removed. In addition, participants who did not complete the survey at times two and/or three also were removed.

Because this study is examining college women involved in violent and non-violent dating relationships, students not in dating relationships were removed. This included students who were married at the time of the survey ($n = 3$) as well as college students who indicated they were not currently in a relationship ($n = 368$). This resulted in a sample size of 413 college students (344 females and 69 males). Since this study only looked at females involved in violent dating relationships, males ($n = 69$) were further removed, resulting in 344 females.

Next, I determined the percentage of female participants who reported being victims of physical dating violence by their current dating partner at time one. Eleven female participants did not indicate whether or not they had ever experienced violence, so they were also removed to end up with a final sample size of 333 females. Of these 333 female college students, 27% ($n = 89$) reported being involved in a physically abusive dating relationship. This group will be further described as victims and the other as non-victims.

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the samples of victims of dating violence ($n = 89$) and non-victims of dating violence ($n = 244$). The average age of victims of dating violence was 19.4 ($SD = 1.4$) years of age. In the victim sample, approximately 38% were freshmen, 30% were sophomores, 26% were juniors, and 7% were seniors. In the victim sample, 62.9% described themselves as Caucasian, 14.6% described themselves as African American, 14.6% described themselves as Latino, 5.6% described themselves as Mixed, and 2.2% described themselves as European. About 99% of victims were in a heterosexual relationship, and 87.5% were living separately from their partner. Almost 24% indicated they had been in the relationship for 0-6 months, and 36% had been in the relationship for 7-12 months. More than half (64%) of the victim sample reported they had been in the relationship for a year or longer. Of the 89 victims, 14.6% reported their relationship ending at time two, or seven weeks after the start of the semester. Additionally, 19.1% reported breaking up at time three, or fourteen weeks after the beginning of the semester. In total, 33.7% of victims broke up.

Of the non-victims, the average age was 19.6 ($SD = 1.9$) years, and approximately 32% were freshmen, 35% were sophomores, 22% were juniors, and 11% were seniors. Almost three-quarters of the non-victim sample characterized themselves as Caucasian (74.2%) while the remainder of the sample was African American (9%), Latino (8.2%), East Asian (0.8%), Southeast Asian (0.8%), European (0.4%), and Mixed (4.5%). The majority of non-victims (98%) were in a heterosexual relationship, and 93% of the sample lived separately from their

partners. About 35% of non-victims reported that they had been in the relationship from 0-6 months, about 15% reported they had been in the relationship for 7-12 months, and about 50% reported they had been in the relationship a year or longer. Of the 244 non-victim participants, 19.3% reported their relationship breaking up at time two of the study (7 weeks after the start of the semester). Additionally, 6.9% reported breaking up at time three (14 weeks after the start of the semester). In total, 26.2% of non-victims broke up.

Measures

Participants in the study completed measures from a battery of online assessments. However, not all of the measures were utilized in this particular study. The measures identified as potential predictors of the decision to leave their partners served as the independent variables and were measured at time one. See Appendix A for a list of the specific items and their response options from the measures used in this study. Participants also provided demographic data at time one and then reported at times two and three whether the romantic relationship they had indicated at time one had ended. This data served as the dependent variable called breakup. If needed, items were recoded, and scale scores were computed. Cronbach's alphas were computed for each measure and for each group (victims and non-victims).

Victims and Non-Victims

Five items from the Modified Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS-2; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) were used to determine whether or not the participants were victims of dating violence. Participants were asked to mark how many times in the past eight weeks a list of things that might happen when differences with their partners occurred. Participants were asked to answer the questions with reference to their current romantic partner. Participants indicated on an 8-point Likert scale ranging from *once in the past eight weeks* (1) to *this NEVER happened* (8) whether their partners threw something at them, twisted their arm or hair, pushed or shoved the participant, grabbed the participant, or slapped them. Items scored as *this NEVER happened* (8) were recoded to 0 to show as frequency of violence increased so did how the items were coded. Finally, items were further recoded to indicate that anyone who answered that these behaviors occurred at any point in time (scores 1 through 7) were recoded as *victims* (1) while those who had not experienced any violence were coded as *non-victims* (0).

Will I Be Better Off?

The original Two-Part Decision-Making Model latent construct “Will I be better off?” included four indicators: relationship distress, quality of alternatives, irretrievable investments, and subjective norm. In this study, these indicators were represented by relationship distress, attraction towards others, lack of commitment, and approval seeking.

Relationship distress. Funk and Rogge’s (2007) Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI) was used in this study to measure participants’ perceptions of relationship distress in their current relationship. The CSI included four items examining satisfaction, rewards, warmth and comfort, and happiness in participants’ current relationship on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from *worse than all others* (1) to *better than all others* (6) for satisfaction, from *not at all* (1) to *very much or extremely* (6) for rewards, from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6) for warmth and comfort, and from *extremely unhappy* (1) to *perfect* (7) for happiness. Items were recoded negatively, and scale scores were computed with higher responses indicating less relationship satisfaction and therefore greater relationship distress. Cronbach’s alpha was .93 for non-victims and .95 for victims of dating violence.

Attraction towards others. Four items from the survey were used to measure participants’ attraction toward others. The original scale consisted of eleven items examining participants’ attraction to other people. Exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring with oblique rotation revealed one factor, and Cronbach’s alpha for non-victims was .95 and for victims was .96. Participants were asked to think of a person over the past two months that they were most attracted to besides their current partner and respond to questions such as “How attractive do you find this person,” “How attractive do you think this person found you,” “How much arousal did you feel in their presence,” and “How much time did you spend thinking about this person?” Responses were coded to indicate not at all attractive (1) to extremely attractive (8) on the first two items and none (1) to a great deal (8) on the last two items. Scale scores were summed so that higher responses indicated greater attraction towards someone other than the participant’s partner.

Lack of commitment. Lack of commitment was measured by the Commitment Inventory (Stanley & Markman, 1992), which asked students to indicate their level of agreement with four statements: “My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life,” “I may not want to be with my partner a few years from now,” “I like to think of my

partner and me more in terms of ‘us’ and ‘we’ than ‘me’ and ‘him/her’,” and “I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter.” Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Items 1, 3, and 4 were reverse coded with item 2 being left the same. Scale scores were computed, and responses were coded so higher scores reflected less commitment to the relationship. Cronbach’s alphas were .78 and .79 for non-victims and victims, respectively.

Approval seeking. Lastly, the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (Leary, 1983) was used to measure approval seeking in this study. Twelve items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *very little* (1) to *very much* (5). Items were coded so that a higher score indicated a greater need to seek other’s approval. Examples of the items include “Sometimes I think I am too concerned with what other people think,” “I am afraid that others will not approve of me,” and “If I know someone is judging me, it tends to bother me.” For non-victims, the Cronbach’s alpha was .95, and for victims, the Chronbach’s alpha was .97.

Can I Do It?

The “Can I do it?” factor was created as a latent construct made up of two indicators: personal resources and structural resources. In this study, social support, relationship efficacy, good friends in college, and relationship safety were used to measure personal resources. Cohabitation was used to measure structural resources.

Personal resources. The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980) was used to measure participant’s perceptions of social support. Eight of the twenty items measured the support participants receive in their social relationships on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *I have never felt this way* (1) to *I have often felt this way* (4). Examples of the scale’s items include: “I feel isolated from others” and “I lack companionship.” Two items were recoded so that all items were ranked in the same direction, and all items were then reverse coded such that higher scale scores reflected more social support to make interpretation of results easier. For non-victims, Cronbach’s alpha was .83, and for victims, Cronbach’s alpha was .82.

Baker and Siryk (1986) constructed a 20-item scale used in this study to measure adjustment to college. Items were coded such that higher scores indicated better social adjustment on a 5-point Likert scale. Participants were asked to indicate how much each statement describes them on a scale ranging from *very poorly* (1) to *very closely* (5). Specifically for this study, I was interested in participants’ perceptions of having good friends in college. An

exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring with oblique rotation revealed that two items representing social adjustment loaded strongly ($>.40$) together on one factor. These two items included “I have several close social ties at college,” and “I have some good friends or acquaintances at college with whom I can talk about any problems I have.” Scores were summed so that higher scores indicated stronger endorsement of participant’s perceptions of having friends in college. Cronbach’s alpha for non-victims was .61, and Cronbach’s alpha for victims was .63.

Relationship efficacy was measured by 7 items (Fincham, Harold & Gano-Phillips, 2000) asking participants to indicate their perceived level of ability in resolving conflict with their partners. Participants rated their level of agreement with each statement with responses ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Examples of these items were: “When I put my mind to it I can resolve just about any disagreement that comes up between my partner and I,” and “I am able to do the things needed to settle our conflicts.” Five items were recoded and scores were summed so that higher scores reflected greater relationship efficacy (Vennum & Fincham, 2011). Cronbach’s alphas for non-victims and victims were .86 and .86, respectively.

Relationship safety with their current partner was measured by five items. Participants indicated on a five-point Likert scale their levels of agreement ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Participants indicated “I feel safe...” regarding disagreeing with their partner, telling the partner about goals and dreams, sharing innermost beliefs with the partner, asking the partner for things that are wanted, and letting the partner know their feelings. An exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring with oblique rotation revealed that all five items loaded strongly ($>.40$) on one factor. Items were summed with higher scores reflecting greater feelings of relationship safety. Cronbach’s alpha for non-victims was .86 and for victims was .87.

Structural resources. One item asking whether participants are living separately or together with their current partner was used to examine the structural resource of cohabitation. This question was a dichotomous variable with the two options of *living separately* (0) or *living together* (1).

Breakup

In the original two-part decision-making model by Choice and Lamke (1999), the dependent variable was the likelihood of leaving the relationship. The current study measured whether the relationship actually ended rather than the intent or likelihood of it ending, referred to as breakup. Breakup was analyzed through a single question asking participants to report whether or not they were still in the relationship they were in at the beginning of the semester. This question was asked 7-weeks and 14-weeks after the beginning of the semester. This dependent variable was coded 0 for no breakup and 1 for breakup.

Methods of Analysis

I used SPSS and Mplus software to analyze data gathered from the surveys. Bivariate and multivariate tests were used including one-way ANOVA tests, chi square tests, and structural equation modeling. Again, the purpose of this study was to explore the stay/leave decisions of college females involved in violent, dating relationships and those who were not involved in violent, dating relationships. One-way ANOVA tests were used to answer the first research question: (1) How do victims and non-victims differ on factors related to leaving a dating relationship? Structural equation modeling was chosen as a method of analysis to address the following research questions: (2) What factors influence college age women's evaluation of "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?" (3) What factors influence a female college student's decision to leave a dating relationship? (4) How do victims and non-victims differ in their perceptions of whether they would be better off leaving and their ability to leave their relationship, and the likelihood that their relationship will end by the end of the semester?

Structural equation modeling was used to test the hypothesized relationships in the conceptual model between "Will I be better off," "Can I do it," and breakup. The model was analyzed in Mplus 5.0 (Muthen & Muthen, 1998-2007) using maximum likelihood estimation method (MLE) and full information maximum likelihood (FIML) to handle missing data.

Research Question 1

My first research question was "How do victims and non-victims differ on factors related to leaving a dating relationship." To answer this question, one-way ANOVA tests were used to determine significant differences in means between victims and non-victims of dating violence

on each of the predictor variables. These tests were used to address the differences of victims and non-victims as a precursor to determining how the model operates differently for each group. One-way ANOVA requesting Welch's F was used because this will account for violations of homogeneity of variance due to the sample sizes being unequal.

Research Question 2

The first step was to evaluate the fit of the measurement part of the model using unit loading identification and to revise it, if necessary, to obtain an adequate fit (see Figure 3-1). This step was done to address my second research question: What factors influence college age women's evaluation of "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?" To determine if the model was a good fit to the data, the standardized factor loadings of the indicators of "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?" were examined such that indicators with significant factor loadings greater than or equal to .3 were kept in the model. Factor loadings that were not significant or were less than .3 signified that the latent variable did not account for variance in these indicators and the model needed to be modified. To support these decisions, residual variances and R-square statistics were examined to determine the amount of variance in the indicators accounted for by the latent variables. High residual variances and low R-squares were used to further support that an indicator did not fit as a measurement component of that latent variable. To assess the modified model, the BIC (Bayesian Information Criterion) and the AIC (Akaike Information Criterion), were examined. The AIC is a goodness of fit measure that is corrected for model complexity, meaning that the measure takes into account the number of parameters that have been estimated. The BIC is also comparable to the AIC and is a more conservative measure of the parameters, and its use is suggested when the sample size is large and the number of parameters is small (Field, 2009). AIC and BIC values decrease as model fit increases. Past research has indicated that rates of breakup may vary by relationship length, age, and race (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Felmler, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990; Hummer & Hamilton, 2010). To account for this, relationship length, age, and race were included as controls in the model.

Research Question 3

After the measurement part of the model was determined to be a good fit for the data, I assessed the structural components of the model to address my third research question: Which factors influence a female college student's decision to leave a dating relationship? To test this

research question, I used logistic regression in SEM to examine which independent variables were significantly related to breakup at $p \leq .05$. To further understand the relationship of the latent factors with breakup, the log odds ratio as well as the amount of variance explained by the model was examined. Specifically in this study, a significant odds ratio (e^b) with a value below 1 means that the independent variable decreases the odds of breakup while an odds ratio that is greater than 1 means that the independent variable increases the odds of breakup (DeMaris, 1995). The difference between the odds ratio and one multiplied by 100 provides the percent change in the odds of breaking up for every one unit increase or decrease in the independent variable. The amount of variance in breakup explained by the model (R^2) was also examined. The R^2 value was multiplied by 100 to give a percentage of the amount of variance explained. The remaining percentage would indicate variability in breakup accounted for by variables other than the independent variables (Field, 2009).

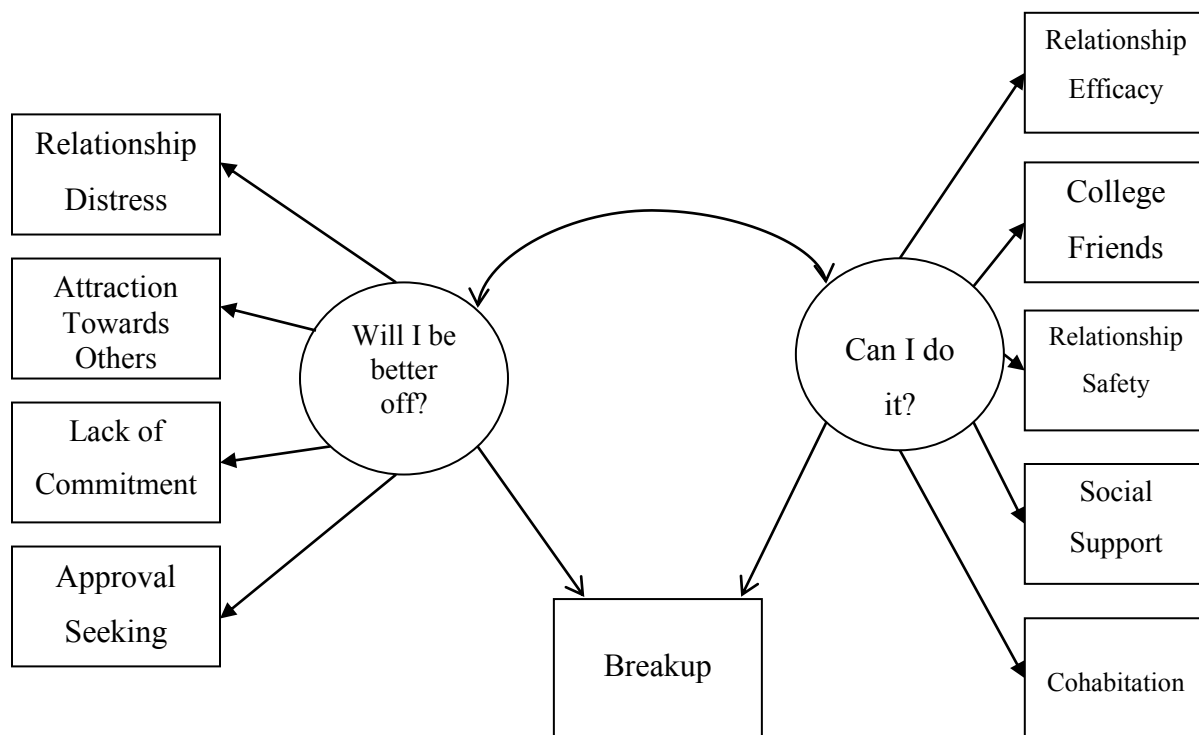


Figure 3-1. Proposed Model.

Research Question 4

Once I determined a reasonably good model for the whole sample, a Multiple Indicators Multiple Causes (MIMIC) model was performed. This step addressed my fourth research question: How do victims and non-victims differ in their perceptions of if they would be better off leaving and their ability to leave their relationship, and the likelihood that their relationship will end by the end of the semester? MIMIC modeling was used to determine if relationship violence predicts the latent factors (Kline, 2005). First, I looked at the variances for the latent factors “Will I be better off?” and “Can I do it?” to determine if they were significant. Significant variances indicated there was sufficient variation in the factor scores to add a cause indicator, which in this case, was whether or not the participant was in a violent relationship. A significant path coefficient from the cause indicator (violence) to the latent factors indicates that the value of these latent variables varies by whether or not the dating relationship was violent. Since the cause indicator, violence, is dichotomous with 0 = non-violent and 1 = violent, a positive value would indicate a higher standing on these factors for participants in violent relationships whereas a negative value would indicate a lower standing on these factors for participants in violent relationships compared with participants in non-violent relationships.

Chapter 4 - RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the analyses. First, chi-square statistics were used to compare differences in rates of breakup between victims and non-victims. To address my first research question, “How do victims and non-victims differ on factors related to leaving a dating relationship,” one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests compared differences in relationship distress, attraction towards others, lack of commitment, approval seeking, relationship efficacy, college friends, relationship safety, social support, and cohabitation between victims and non-victims of dating violence. Next, structural equation modeling was used to address my final three research questions: (2) What factors influence college age women’s evaluation of “Will I be better off?” and “Can I do it?” (3) What factors influence a female college student’s decision to leave a dating relationship? (4) How do victims and non-victims differ in their perceptions of whether they would be better off leaving and their ability to leave their relationship, and the likelihood that their relationship will end by the end of the semester? Results of the structural regression models were presented after the characteristics of victims and non-victims of dating violence.

Characteristics of Victims and Non-Victims of Dating Violence

I used cross-tabulations (Table 4-1) and ANOVAs (Table 4-2) to compare the characteristics of victims and non-victims of physical dating violence. I first determined the percentage of missing data, which was less than 3%. Missing data were handled by mean imputation by group. Although using mean imputation can result in an underestimation of variables’ standard error, it is not expected to influence results when the rate of missing data is less than three percent (Grace-Martin, 2009). Because group sizes were unequal, Welch’s *F*-statistic was requested for the ANOVAs which is an alternative *F*-ratio that adjusts *F* and residual degrees of freedom to be robust when homogeneity of variances is violated (Field, 2005).

Chi-square analyses were utilized to determine whether rates of breakup differed between victims and non-victims of dating violence. There was no significant association between breakup and victim status, $\chi^2(1, N = 333) = 1.80, p = .18$ (see Table 4-1), suggesting that

participants who were victims of dating violence were not more likely to break up than participants who were not victims of dating violence.

Table 4-1. Crosstabulations for victims and non-victims

Variables	Victims (<i>n</i> = 89)		Non-victims (<i>n</i> = 244)		<i>X</i> ²	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%			
Breakup					1.800	1	.180
Breakup	30	33.7	64	26.2			
No breakup	59	66.3	180	73.8			

Note. The percentages are for within the victim and non-victim groups.

Research Question 1

My first research question looked at how victims and non-victims differed from each other on factors related to breakup of a dating relationship. I found several differences between victims and non-victims on the model variables. Results indicate that there are significant differences between victim and non-victim reports of feelings of attraction towards someone other than their partner, relationship distress, relationship safety, having good friends, relationship efficacy, and social support (See Table 4-2). Victims reported greater relationship distress ($M = 9.42, SD = 4.36$) than non-victims ($M = 7.77, SD = 3.70$), Welch's $F(1, 136.82) = 10.07, p < .01$. In regards to attraction towards others, victims reported less attraction towards someone other than their partner ($M = 21.08, SD = 6.66$) than non-victims ($M = 22.60, SD = 5.97$), $F(1, 150.58) = 3.97, p < .05$. In terms of personal resources, victims reported less social support ($M = 24.49, SD = 4.53$) than non-victims ($M = 25.99, SD = 4.40$), $F(1, 145.35) = 7.39, p < .01$; less relationship safety ($M = 21.53, SD = 4.11$) than non-victims ($M = 22.50, SD = 3.65$), $F(1, 62.27) = 4.36, p < .05$; fewer good friends ($M = 7.61, SD = 2.09$) than non-victims ($M = 8.21, SD = 1.81$), $F(1, 23.45) = 6.58, p < .01$; and lower relationship efficacy ($M = 35.08, SD = 8.33$) than non-victims ($M = 39.68, SD = 7.72$), $F(1, 1382.08) = 22.22, p < .001$. Victims and non-victims did not differ in their reports of approval seeking or lack of commitment.

Table 4-2. Analysis of variance results for victims and non-victims (N = 333)

Model Variables	Victim (n = 89)		Non-victim (n = 244)		F	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
Relationship Distress	9.42	4.36	7.77	3.70	10.07*	.002
Attraction Towards Others	21.08	6.66	22.60	5.97	3.97	.047
Social Support	24.49	4.53	25.99	4.40	7.39	.007
Relationship Safety	21.53	4.12	22.50	3.65	4.36	.038
Good Friends	7.61	2.09	8.21	1.82	6.58	.011
Relationship Efficacy	35.08	8.33	39.68	7.72	22.22	.000
Approval Seeking	33.00	12.95	31.04	11.40	1.78	.183
Lack of Commitment	15.46	3.18	15.57	3.03	0.09	.764

Note. *Welch's F-statistic used when variances between groups were not homogenous.

Testing the Proposed Model

Before testing the proposed model, I examined the correlations between the variables in order to identify potential issues with multicollinearity. These correlations were divided into non-victims (see Table 4-3) and victims of dating violence (see Table 4-4). No correlations were above .80 or .90, so I determined that there were no problems with multicollinearity in the data (Field, 2009).

Table 4-3. Correlations among variables in the structural equation model – non-victims

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	1.00									
2.	-.30**	1.00								
3.	-.04	.04	1.00							
4.	-.20**	.25**	.33**	1.00						
5.	-.74**	.26**	-.03	.19**	1.00					
6.	.14*	-.08	-.13*	-.35**	-.12	1.00				
7.	.59**	-.24**	.02	-.06	-.43**	.11	1.00			
8.	-.54**	.36**	.08	.30**	.50**	-.30**	-.28**	1.00		
9.	-.08	.13*	-.26**	-.03	.07	.07	-.19**	.02	1.00	
10.	.44**	-.06	.07	-.02	-.37**	-.01	.31**	-.26**	-.13*	1.00

Note. 1 = Relationship Distress, 2 = Relationship Safety, 3 = Good Friends, 4 = Social Support, 5 = Attraction Towards Others, 6 = Approval Seeking, 7 = Lack of Commitment, 8 = Relationship Efficacy, 9 = Cohabitation, 10 = Breakup. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 4-4. Correlations among variables in the structural equation model – victims

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	1.00									
2.	-.35**	1.00								
3.	-.37**	.40**	1.00							
4.	-.35**	.37**	.46**	1.00						
5.	-.79**	.28**	.34**	.37**	1.00					
6.	.12*	-.12	-.13	-.58**	-.17	1.00				
7.	.58**	-.12	-.10	-.00	-.39**	-.05	1.00			
8.	-.46**	.34**	.26*	.47**	.43**	-.34**	-.29**	1.00		
9.	-.23*	.05	-.04	.10	.21*	.06	-.24*	.10	1.00	
10.	.23*	.15	-.04	.12	-.17	-.21	.44**	-.08	-.20	1.00

Note. 1 = Relationship Distress, 2 = Relationship Safety, 3 = Good Friends, 4 = Social Support, 5 = Attraction Towards Others, 6 = Approval Seeking, 7 = Lack of Commitment, 8 = Relationship Efficacy, 9 = Cohabitation, 10 = Breakup. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Research Question #2

Structural equation modeling was used for the remainder of the research questions. First, the proposed measurement components of the model were tested to determine what factors influence college age women's evaluation of "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?" The initial proposed model consisted of attraction towards others, relationship distress, lack of commitment, and approval seeking as indicators of "Will I be better off?" and relationship efficacy, good friends, relationship safety, social support, and cohabitation as indicators of "Can I do it?" The model controlled for relationship length, age, and race. The proposed measurement model did not adequately fit the data, AIC = 15725.87, BIC = 15855.35. As can be seen in the Table 4-5, the factor loadings for lack of commitment, approval seeking, college friends, and cohabitation were very low ($< .3$), suggesting that the latent factors account for little variance in these indicators. This finding was further supported by the very high residual variances ($> .90$) for lack of commitment, cohabitation, friends, and approval seeking. The covariance between the latent variables was negative and significant ($\beta = -.70, p < .01$).

Table 4-5. Standardized Coefficients for the Proposed Model.

Indicator	Latent Variable	<i>B</i>
Relationship Distress	Will I be better off?	.93**
Attraction Towards Others	Will I be better off?	.02**
Lack of Commitment	Will I be better off?	.61**
Approval Seeking	Will I be better off?	-.17**
Relationship Efficacy	Can I do it?	.75**
College Friends	Can I do it?	.31**
Relationship Safety	Can I do it?	.52**
Social Support	Can I do it?	.50**
Cohabitation	Can I do it?	.06

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

Based upon these results, I determined that modifications to the measurement part of the model were necessary before examining the structural components. Past research has indicated

that attraction towards others, approval seeking, college friends, and cohabitation are important in the stay/leave decision-making process (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Few & Bell-Scott, 2002; Hendy et al., 2003; Kim & Gray, 2008; Truman-Schram et al., 2000); therefore, these variables were represented in the model as manifest variables rather than as indicators of the latent variables. In the modified model 1, the indicators that are still present under the latent variables “Will I be better off?” and “Can I do it?” are relationship distress and lack of commitment (Will I be better off?) and relationship efficacy, relationship safety, and social support (Can I do it?).

In summary, results indicated that the latent variable “Will I be better off” was indicated by relationship distress and lack of commitment, and the latent variable “Can I do it” was indicated by relationship efficacy, relationship safety, and social support for college-age women (see Figure 4-1).

Research Question #3

Structural equation modeling was used to test the hypothesized relationships between the latent variables “Will I be better off” and “Can I do it” and breakup. Controlling for relationship length, age, and race, I next examined the relationship between breakup and the latent variables “Will I be better off?” and “Can I do it?” as well as the manifest variables of attraction towards others, approval seeking, college friends, and cohabitation to answer my third research question: What factors influence a female college student’s decision to leave a dating relationship?

As can be seen from Figure 4-1, the factor loadings for the indicators of the latent variables “Will I be better off” and “Can I do it” were all above .3 and significant, indicating that the latent factors account for variance in these indicators. The control variables were not significantly related to breakup. The latent variable “Will I be better off” was significantly predictive of breakup, but the latent variable “Can I do it” was not found to be significantly predictive of breakup in modified model 1. In addition, the manifest variables attraction towards others, college friends, and cohabitation were not significantly predictive of breakup while approval seeking was significantly predictive of breakup. With the variables attraction towards others, approval seeking, college friends, and cohabitation added as manifest variables, the AIC and BIC decreased from 15725.87 and 15855.35, respectively, to 9202.88 and 9300.93. The smaller values suggest that the model is a better fit to the data (Field, 2009). Additionally, $R^2 =$

.256, indicating 26% of the variance in whether or not participants break up can be explained by modified model 1.

In order to construct a more parsimonious model, the non-significant manifest variables (attraction towards others, college friends, and cohabitation) were removed from modified model 1 to create modified model 2. The AIC and BIC increased slightly from 9202.88 and 9300.93 to 9379.06 and 9466.16, respectively. The path coefficients for “Will I be better off?” and “Can I do it?” all remained above .3 and were significant. Results indicate that controlling for relationship length, age, and race, the latent variable “Can I do it,” ($\beta = .04$, *ns*), was not a significant predictor of breakup in this sample of college-age women, even after modifying the original proposed model. However, the latent variable “Will I be better off” was significantly and positively related to breakup ($\beta = .48$, $p < .01$). In terms of the odds ratio ($e^{.48} = 1.30$), results indicate that for every one unit increase in “Will I be better off,” the odds of breakup increased by a factor of 1.30 or by 30%. The manifest variable “approval seeking” was also found to significantly predict breakup ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$, odds ratio = $e^{.18} = 1.03$), suggesting that a one unit increase in approval seeking increased the odds of breakup by a factor of 1.03 or 3%. Of the control variables, relationship length and race were not significantly related to breakup, but age was significantly related to breakup ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .05$), indicating that younger students were more likely to break up than older students. From modified model 1 to modified model 2, the amount of variance predicted by the entire model increased slightly from $R^2 = .256$, or 26%, to $R^2 = .280$, or 28%.

In sum, my hypothesis that “Will I be better off” is more predictive of the likelihood of leaving the relationship than “Can I do it,” was supported. Although approval seeking was predictive of breakup as a manifest variable, it was not an indicator of “Will I be better off?” as initially expected. Furthermore, the other manifest variables (attraction towards others, college friends, and cohabitation) were not indicators of their expected latent variables nor were they predictive of breakup in this population and were removed from the model for parsimony.

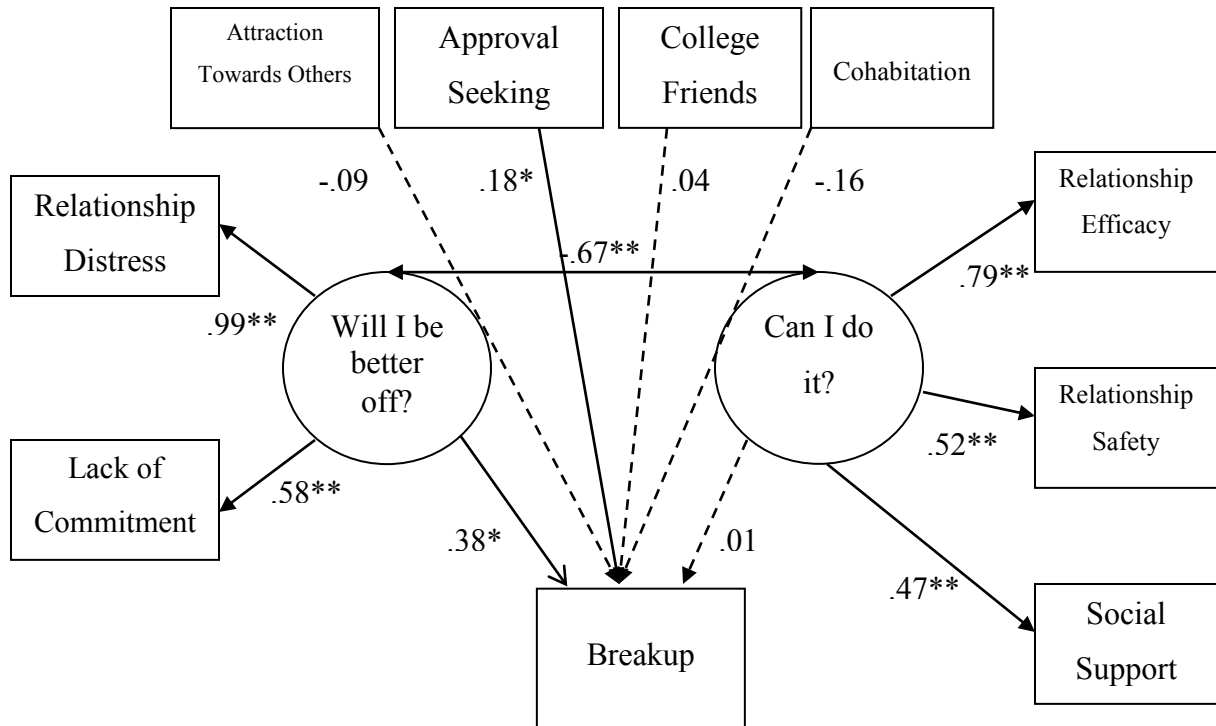


Figure 4-1. Modified model 1: Factors predicting breakup in combined sample.

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Path coefficients are standardized coefficients

Research Question #4

A MIMIC (Multiple Indicators Multiple Causes) model was used to examine if being in a non-violent versus violent relationship accounts for variance in the latent factors and breakup. This analysis was used to answer my fourth research question: How do victims and non-victims differ in their perceptions of whether they would be better off leaving and their ability to leave their relationship, and the likelihood that their relationship will end by the end of the semester? See Figure 4-2 for the path coefficients of the final model. Results indicate that victims rate higher on the latent variable “Will I be better off?” ($\beta = .18, p < .01$), but they rate lower on the latent variable “Can I do it?” ($\beta = -.32, p < .01$) compared with non-victims. In other words, victims are more likely to believe they would be better off leaving their violent dating partners but feel they are less able to leave compared to non-victims of dating violence. Furthermore, after controlling for relationship length ($\beta = -.08, ns$), age ($\beta = -.18, p < .01$), and race ($\beta = .01$,

ns), the latent variables “Will I be better off” and “Can I do it,” and the other manifest variable, results indicate that whether someone is a victim of dating violence or not does not predict breakup directly ($\beta = .02$, ns). However, from modified model 2 to the final model, the amount of variance explained by the final model increased from $R^2 = .280$, or 28%, to $R^2 = .392$, or 39%. This may suggest that being a victim or not of dating violence is indirectly related to breakup through the latent variable “Will I be better off,” which was significantly predictive of breakup.

In sum, my prediction that victims would be more likely to perceive themselves as better off leaving their partners and to perceive themselves as less able to leave their partners than non-victims was supported although my prediction that victim status would be directly related to rates of breakup was not. While these results cannot suggest that any particular factor is more important for victims than non-victims, these results do suggest that victims feel like they are more likely to be better off leaving their partner but are less able to leave the relationship than their non-victim counterparts.

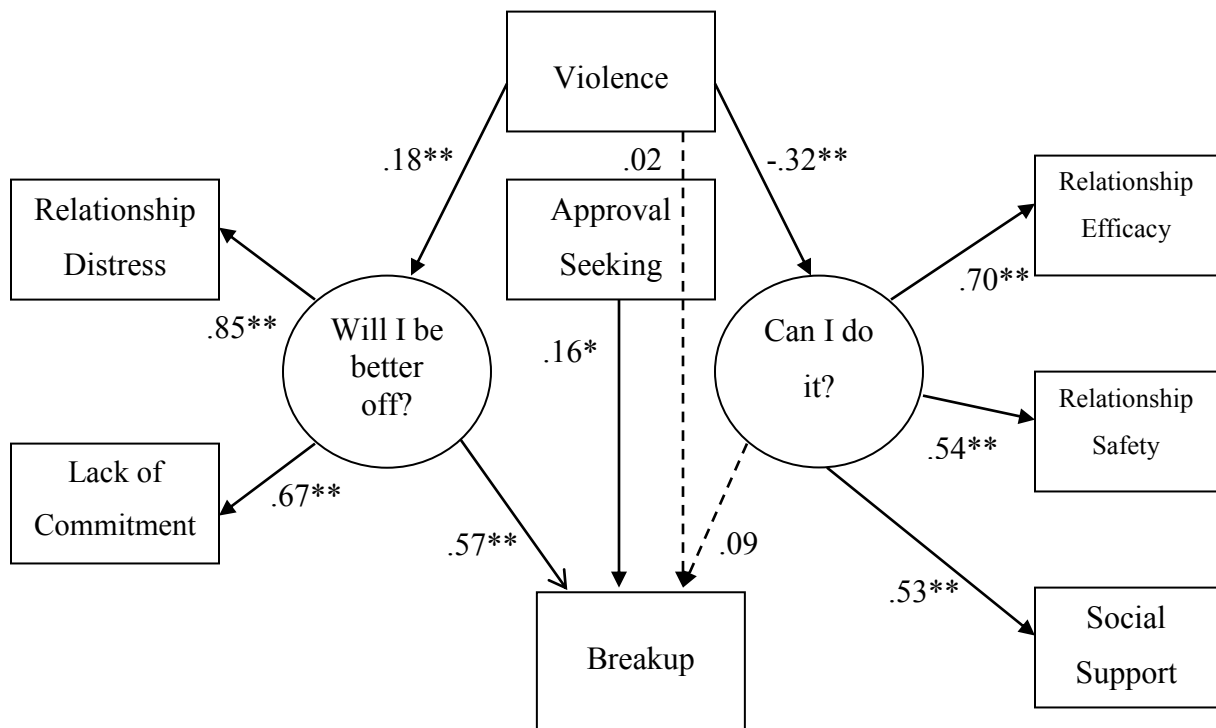


Figure 4-2. Final model: Impact of victim status on factors leading to breakup.

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. Path coefficients are standardized coefficients.

Chapter 5 - DISCUSSION

Ending a college dating relationship is common as college coeds begin trying on romantic relationships for size. Ending a college dating relationship because the relationship has become violent can add more complexities to an already unpleasant task. The purpose of my study was to explore the factors that influenced the stay/leave decisions of female college students, specifically, the factors that were most predictive of the likelihood their dating relationship would end using Choice and Lamke's (1999) two-part decision-making model. First, I examined whether the factors leading to the breakup of a dating relationship differed significantly between victims and non-victims. I then used structural equation modeling to identify the personal and situational factors that were most important in the questions of "Will I be better off" and "Can I do it," to learn what factors influenced a female college student's dating relationship to end, and finally to examine how victims and non-victims differed in their perceptions of whether they would be better off leaving and their ability to leave their relationship, and the likelihood that their relationship would end by the end of the semester.

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings from my study, how they relate to my research questions, and how they fit with previous research on intimate partner violence and stay/leave decisions. Finally, I will discuss the strengths and limitations of this study, suggestions for future research, and implications for treatment and prevention of intimate partner violence.

Characteristics of Victims and Non-Victims of Dating Violence

Preliminary analyses examined characteristics of victims and non-victims of dating violence. Approximately 27% of female college students in this study reported experiencing some form of physical violence in their dating relationship. This finding appeared consistent with other findings in the literature (Gryl, Stith, & Bird, 1991; Riggs & O'Leary, 1996). Comparing college women who were victims of dating violence and college women who were not victims of dating violence, I found no significant association between being a victim or not of dating violence and breakup, meaning that college-age women in dating relationships were not more likely to break up if they were victims of dating violence than if they were in a non-violent relationship. While there was not a significant difference in the likelihood of breakup for those in violent versus non-violent relationships, many factors could influence individuals in a dating

relationship to break up, and these factors could serve as constraints already in dating relationships but even more so in violent, dating relationships, in which victims likely are distressed. For example, the participants in this study experienced rather minor forms of intimate partner violence instead of more severe forms. The participants were also young women in college, who likely have not had many romantic partners or a lot of experience in romantic relationships, especially ones characterized by conflict. It is plausible that while they were distressed by the violence in their relationships, in their minds, the relationship was not “bad enough” to initiate a breakup. They also may have been hopeful that the relationship would change or that they could “fix” their partner (Hendy et al., 2003). I found that several factors influenced the questions that college age women in violent dating relationships may ask themselves: “Will I be better off?” and “Can I do it?” The following sections will make clear the differences between victims and non-victims on these factors and show which factors are most important in the breakup of their relationship.

Research Question 1

My first research question examined differences between victims and non-victims of dating violence on factors related to ending a college dating relationship. There were differences on several personal and situational factors. Of the specific personal factors, victims reported greater relationship distress, less attraction towards someone other than their partner, less relationship safety, and lower relationship efficacy than non-victims reported on these measures. Differences on situational factors included victims reporting less social support and fewer good friends than non-victims. These results were consistent with those found in the literature regarding mental health and relationship risk factors (Edwards et al., 2011; Kaura & Lohman, 2007). They make sense given that young people in violent relationships would feel less safe with their partners, greater distress within the relationship, and also fewer feelings of control and having any impact on the relationship. Victims of intimate partner violence also can feel isolated from social support, such as friends and family, and one’s perception of support has been found to be important in disclosing the abuse and deciding to stay in or end the relationship (Patzel, 2001). What is interesting is that while the victims clearly were distressed in their violent, dating relationships and reported less perceived support, their relationships were not more likely to have ended than non-victims’ relationships were to have ended. Perhaps the nature of the violent

relationship somehow takes victims away from their main sources of social support. For instance, they may feel less able to share experiences in their relationships with their friends, and their family may be miles away (Patzel, 2001). In addition, the violent partner may try to convince the victim that the only support she has is him, leaving her feeling alone and with few options for support. Without the support and encouragement of close family and friends, victims may find ending the relationship difficult.

Research Question 2

Structural equation modeling was used to examine the personal and situational factors that influence college-age women's evaluations of "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?" Initially, the proposed model with all the variables used as indicators of the latent variables did not yield significant results. Therefore, I made the decision to modify the model by representing attraction towards others, approval seeking, college friends, and cohabitation as manifest variables and keeping relationship distress and lack of commitment as indicators of the latent variable "Will I be better off?" Relationship efficacy, relationship safety, and social support were used as indicators of the latent variable "Can I do it?" Therefore, the model ended up changing quite a bit from Choice and Lamke's (1999) original two-part decision making model. This modification to the proposed model made more sense because the variables later identified as manifest variables (attraction towards others, approval seeking, college friends, and cohabitation) are all potential external constraints to ending a dating relationship while the other two variables used to identify "Will I be better off?" are more indicative of a dater's evaluation of how well the relationship works for her. For example, it could be that approval seeking better fits as a manifest variable because it appeared to be more about getting the approval of someone else versus one's personal evaluation.

Findings from this study showed that the latent variable "Will I be better off" was indicated by relationship distress and lack of commitment, and the latent variable "Can I do it" was indicated by relationship efficacy, relationship safety, and social support for college-age women. In other words, when victims consider whether they will be better off, they think about how distressed they are in the relationship and the amount of commitment they have to the relationship and to their partner. These findings were consistent with those found in a meta-analysis of factors found to be predictive of non-marital romantic relationship dissolution (Le,

Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010). In this meta-analysis, relationship factors such as commitment and satisfaction were found to be predictors of actual relationship dissolution. Furthermore, like Choice and Lamke's (1999) model, relationship distress appeared to be the strongest indicator of "Will I be better off?"

When participants considered whether or not they could end the relationship (Can I do it?), they tended to consider their personal resources, such as the amount of control they have within the relationship, their safety, and whether or not they have sufficient social support surrounding them. Structural resources appeared to be less of a factor for college students as the one variable (cohabitation) representing the model's structural resources did not appear as an indicator of "Can I do it?" at all. Either this is not a good representation of the structural resources of college students, or structural resources may not impact college students' relationships to break up as significantly as they do married/cohabiting women. In married or cohabiting relationships, structural factors commonly considered are income, employment status, children and child care needs, all of which most college-age students have fewer concerns about and, therefore, may not be as applicable (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Hendy et al., 2003). In Choice and Lamke's (1999) study with college students in dating relationships, they examined shared income and expenses, shared material possessions, shared living arrangements, and participant's perceptions of how these resources helped to maintain their relationships. My study did not include participants who were married, and the average age was under 20 years old, implying that they likely did not have children yet. There just may not be as many structural factors to look at in college relationships, or for college students, stronger indicators of structural resources could be shared friends or shared activities. For example, college students often have friends who are in the same social circle, so this may serve as a structural barrier when a student is considering breakup.

What did appear as important in the question "Can I do it?" amongst college-age women was their perception of social support in the form of companionship and feeling others are close to them. The perception of poor social support has been found in the literature to be associated with a more difficult time leaving an abusive relationship (Hendy et al., 2003; Patzel, 2006). Since college students very often have support from their families and friends, perhaps social support is more reflective of important resources for "Can I do it?" than the couple's living arrangements. Relationship safety appeared to be comparable to social support as an indicator of

“Can I do it.” However, relationship efficacy appeared as the strongest indicator of “Can I do it?” For college students, a feeling of control over their relationships and their ability to manage them may help them to feel more hopeful that things will change and about their abilities to do the actual breaking up, if they choose to do so (Hendy et al., 2003). In a study of physical abuse and relationship termination in a non-college sample (Raghavan, Swan, Snow, & Mazure, 2005), decreased relationship efficacy was found to be associated with a greater likelihood of separating from the abused woman’s partner. However, a notable finding in my study was that greater feelings of relationship efficacy were related to greater feelings of “Can I do it” (i.e., can I break up?), not necessarily to actual breakup.

Research Question 3

To determine what factors influenced a female college student’s dating relationship to end, I controlled for relationship length, age, and race and examined the relationship between breakup and the latent variables “Will I be better off?” and “Can I do it?” as well as the manifest variables of attraction towards others, approval seeking, college friends, and cohabitation. Attraction towards others, college friends, and cohabitation did not significantly predict break up while approval seeking did predict breakup. Approval seeking as a predictor of breakup is interesting in that it could be due in part to the stage of life of college age women. For example, college students are in a period of their lives in which they are developing their identities and seeking to become a part of peer and professional groups. Research has indicated that perceived emotional support from peers and parents is significant for young people adjusting to college (Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2013). Dating relationships are often a part of a college woman’s life. Because college women are more likely to live in a community (sorority house or dormitory) where others observe the treatment they receive from their partners than do older women, they may be more likely to feel judged or pressured by peers to leave these relationships. Therefore, women who are higher in approval seeking may break up with their abusive partners to receive approval from their friends. Therefore, the ending of a violent or non-violent dating relationship may have more to do with a college woman’s need to seek approval of their peers than their own feelings of being attracted towards another person, whether or not they have friends, or whether or not they are living with their partner.

Secondly, in examining the factors that influenced a female college student's dating relationship to end, the latent variable "Will I be better off," which included relationship distress and lack of commitment as indicators, appeared to be more predictive of breakup than the latent variable "Can I do it?" This is what I predicted, and this finding is consistent with Choice and Lamke's (1999) results of the two-part decision-making model, who also found that "Can I do it?" was not meaningful for college students. From this study, results indicated that after controlling for relationship length, age, and race, the latent variable "Can I do it" was still not a significant predictor of break up, even after modifying the original model. For college students, the decision really may be more about "ending" the relationship rather than "leaving" the relationship. "Leaving" seems to imply more a situation of "escaping" the relationship rather than making the choice to break up and "end" the relationship. This explanation could be because dating relationships may have fewer structural barriers to ending the relationship than married or cohabiting relationships. However, this is difficult to determine since my study did not have a good measure of structural barriers. In addition, it could be explained by the low severity of violence the participants reported. The question "Can I do it?" might be more relevant for victims of more severe forms of violence as opposed to common couple violence (Choice & Lamke, 1999).

In summary, the model in my study was modified from Choice and Lamke's (1999) original two-part decision-making model to fit college women in violent, dating relationships. The finding that "Can I do it?" did not predict breakup remained consistent with Choice and Lamke's findings, and many of the resources and barriers that were included in the original model as indicators of "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?" were not found to be predictive of breakup and ultimately moved as manifest variables in this model. Based on the results of my study and the modifications to the model, it could be that the two-part decision-making model really does not fit well with the context of college students in violent, dating relationships.

Research Question 4

Lastly, I sought to determine how victims and non-victims differed in their perceptions of whether they would be better off leaving, their ability to leave their relationship, and the likelihood that their relationship would end by the end of the semester. A MIMIC model provided results about how victims and non-victims scored on "Will I be better off?" and "Can I

do it?” As expected, findings indicated that victims scored higher on “Will I be better off?” and lower on “Can I do it?” than non-victims scored. In other words, victims felt they were more likely to be better off without their current dating partner but perceived themselves as less able to end the relationship than non-victims. This makes sense given that victims also felt greater relationship distress, less attraction towards someone other than their partner, less safe in their relationship, less able to manage their relationship, and less social support than non-victims. It is possible then that victims perceive greater barriers than non-victims perceive to breaking off the relationship even if they feel they would be better off without their partner (Rhoades, Stanley, Kelmer, & Markman, 2010). However, after controlling for “Will I be better off?” and “Can I do it?” as well as the manifest variable “approval seeking,” breakup was not directly predicted by whether a person was a victim of dating violence or not. This finding is notable because it could be that breakup status may not be directly predicted by whether or not a person is a victim of dating violence but instead is indirectly predicted by the question that was found to be most important in the stay/leave decision of college-age females: “Will I be better off?” Since the participants in this study experienced less severe forms of relationship violence as identified by the CTS items used in this study and our inability to know if they also experienced more severe violence, it could be possible that young adults in college do not take the presence of less severe relationship violence such as “common couple violence” and the potential associated risks as seriously as we may like them to, which may explain how they are not any more likely to break up than non-victims were in this study.

Implications for Treatment and Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence

Most previous research has focused on treatment and prevention of intimate partner violence among adults in married or cohabiting relationships. The results of this study can be used to guide therapist’s treatment efforts with young women involved in violent, dating relationships, university dating violence prevention efforts, and policy changes regarding dating violence. In this study, I found that college women who were victims of dating violence differed from their non-violent counterparts in many important ways. Victims were more distressed in their dating relationships, were less attracted to other people, felt less safe in their relationships, felt less able to manage their relationships, had fewer good friends, and felt less social support than non-victims. This has implications for their success in college, their mental health, and their

future relationships. Therapists working with college women who have disclosed dating violence can develop treatment plans that address these specific issues by helping the victims become aware of the level of distress and the lack of safety that they are experiencing in the relationship and helping them understand the lack of efficacy they feel in the relationship. They should also help them develop friends and build social support.

In addition, it would be helpful for therapists to understand that breaking up for women in violent, dating relationships is related to relationship distress and lack of commitment, and understanding the factors that contribute to a college female's violent dating relationship to end could help therapists identify more effective interventions (Rhatigan, Street, & Axsom, 2006). Therapists can determine what their client's goal is (i.e., to stay together or to break up) and then assist them in their decision to break up or to improve their relationship. For example, if a student wanted to stay in the relationship with their partner, then the therapist could encourage couples therapy to increase their relationship satisfaction and improve their conflict resolution skills in order to end the violence and stay together. If the student wanted to break up with their partner, then therapists could focus their assessment and interventions on the questions "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?" and the indicators that make up these two variables more specifically. Interventions focusing on "Will I be better off?" could include discussion of relationship distress and how to increase satisfaction in the dating relationship as well as discussion of commitment levels in the relationship. Interventions targeting "Can I do it?" could include helping the clients to identify ways to increase their social support systems, communicating their feelings to family and friends, identifying community resources for victims of dating violence, helping them to deal with safety concerns, and helping them to better manage their relationships and respond to conflict differently. Even though "Can I do it?" was not predictive of breakup directly, helping a student who is interested in ending the violent relationship could be helpful for students by helping them to focus on improving their own decision-making skills (i.e., relationship efficacy). Approval seeking was also found to be a predictor of breakup, so therapists could help their clients evaluate the possible negative reactions from others, such as friends and family, and then help their clients to listen to what their friends are trying to say to them. If the client's friends are trying to encourage the client to end the relationship because they are worried about their friend's safety, then therapists would want to help their clients to listen and consider their friends' concerns.

Universities can assist in prevention efforts by promoting healthy dating relationships and helping to encourage seeking personal and structural resources by their students, like those identified in the two-part decision-making model, such as social support. In this study, I found that the likelihood of breaking up did not differ for victims and non-victims, so it would be important to help all students identify and develop healthy relationships, rather than targeting only those in violent relationships. Psychoeducational dating violence prevention programs could be provided through freshmen orientation, classes, or even campus support groups, and these programs could help explain that less severe violence has risks just like more severe violence does. Another form of prevention strategy could focus on bystander prevention and helping those not in violent dating relationships better understand dating violence as well as better assist their peers when dating violence happens (Palm Reed, Hines, Armstrong, & Cameron, 2014). This may be important as one research study has shown that students who have been educated about dating violence are more likely to attempt to intervene in dating violence victimization and perpetration situations among their friends (Branch, Richards, & Dretsch, 2013). Universities could help promote activities designed to help strengthen and expand a college woman's social circle and discourage isolation and withdrawal. College sororities could educate their members about dating violence, provide emotional support to their members, and better understand the stay/leave decision-making process. Finally, college institutions could review and modify their existing policies regarding on-campus dating violence to help promote a violence-free campus.

To summarize, the results found in this study can be used in a variety of ways to help prevent and treat dating violence among college-age females. Therapists can use this information to help improve their therapeutic practices, and universities can use this information to help improve their prevention efforts as well as for policy change.

Strengths and Limitations

Several strengths and limitations emerged throughout this study, and the findings described above should be viewed in light of these limitations. This section will discuss what this study has added to the research base, limitations to the study, and suggestions for future research.

Limitations

The results of this study should be considered in light of several limitations. A primary limitation of this study was that it was conducted using secondary data analysis from a pre-

existing data set. This resulted in several limitations including sample size and composition as well as the measures used in the study. For example, the sample included only college students. Their age, developmental context, and educational status may not generalize to the overall population of young adults. In addition, I initially wanted to compare not only victims and non-victims of dating violence on factors in the two-part decision-making model but also males and females. While the data set had sufficient females to use in the analyses, there were not enough males to include in the analyses. Furthermore, the sample was primarily composed of Caucasian college students in heterosexual relationships, which limits generalizability to participants of other cultures as well as participants in homosexual dating relationships. While the sample was quite representative of the national demographics of college students, more research should be done with racial and sexual minority students.

Although this study looked at actual breakup rather than behavioral intent, and I was able to identify those participants whose relationships had ended after the beginning of the semester, what I was not able to identify is whether the person that the participant broke up with is the same person they indicated was their partner at the beginning of the semester. It could be possible that at time two, they broke up with the person they indicated they were in a relationship with at time one but started another relationship and then broke up with this person at time three, or the end of the semester. I was also not able to identify to what degree the participant was part of the decision to end the relationship, such as whether the participant or the participant's partner (or a mutual decision) ended the relationship. This did have implications for my initial research question to identify the factors that influenced a female college student's decision to leave a dating relationship. Instead, what I found was what factors influenced the likelihood the relationship would end, rather than the participant's decision to leave. Further research would benefit from making these questions clearer. In addition, breakup was the only outcome that was considered with the participants' violent, dating relationships. It could be that breakup is not necessarily the only positive outcome for college students in violent, dating relationships. However, this study did not take into account other positive outcomes, such as repairing the relationships so that they are less distressed or removing triggers to the violence, such as substance use (Banyard & Cross, 2008).

Because analyses were conducted using a pre-existing data set, there were limitations on how I was able to measure the latent variables "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?" and their

indicators. I was not able to choose the measures I felt most accurately represented relationship distress, quality of alternatives, irretrievable investments, subjective norm, personal resources, and structural resources. In regards to the indicators of “Will I be better off,” the items used to measure quality of alternatives asked about the participant’s attraction towards someone other than their partner. Although Choice and Lamke’s (1999) study also included a similar measure about participants’ perceptions of the person he or she would most likely be with if they were not with their partner, they also included a measure examining the ease of finding an alternative partner. It could be that the items in my study measured thoughts of infidelity rather than actual perceptions about whether there were other partners out there that they could have a healthy relationship with and whether they perceived these other partners were even attainable. Furthermore, the measure in this study used to examine irretrievable investments appeared to examine only one possible aspect of the types of investment one puts into a romantic relationship, which was dedication to the relationship. While the measure did reflect investments like commitment to the relationship, it did not reflect more concrete investments, like shared purchases, income and expenses. However, these may not be as relevant to college students in violent, dating relationships. In terms of the latent variable “Can I do it,” only one variable was used to reflect structural resources, whether or not the participant was living with her partner, and this may not be the most accurate representation of structural resources that are most important to a college student. Perhaps shared resources such as friends or activities could be used in future studies as indicators of structural resources.

Furthermore, only a portion of the Conflict Tactics Scale was used as a measure of dating violence in this dataset. As a result, questions assessed only minor violence as opposed to more severe forms of intimate partner violence, such as kicking, biting, beating, and threatening with a weapon. It could be that participants did experience severe violence in their relationships, but it was just not measured in this study. It would be interesting to see how the model operates differently when looking at minor violence compared with severe violence. Perhaps parts of the model that were not as relevant for college daters with minor violence would be more relevant for those involved in dating relationships characterized by severe forms of violence. It could be that the latent variable “Can I do it?” reflects more of the questions and needs of women in more severely violent relationships.

Strengths

Despite the limitations, this study added important pieces to existing research on dating violence and stay/leave decisions. Choice and Lamke's (1999) study on the stay/leave decision-making process in abusive dating relationships used college students who had experienced at least one act of violence directed towards them by a partner. One of the major strengths of this study is that it extends the work of Choice and Lamke (1999) in a couple of ways. First, it extends their work by looking at how their model of two-part decision-making operates for victims as well as non-victims. Choice and Lamke (1999) did not apply their model to college students who were not victims of dating violence. With research examining the increased risks for mental health issues, physical injuries, and changes in relationship satisfaction as a result of dating violence, it may be assumed that college women in violent dating relationships may have a more difficult time making a stay/leave decision because of the added complexities of intimate partner violence. In my study, I was able to determine that victims feel they are more likely to be better off without their partner and less able to end the relationship than non-victims.

This study also extends Choice and Lamke's work by having the data available to examine the actual ending of the relationship rather than the behavioral intent to end the relationship. Choice and Lamke (1999) recommended that longitudinal research be conducted in order to see if the model predicted actual stay/leave behavior in abusive relationship. This study was an attempt to do just that. The data set included questions at time two (7 weeks) and time three (14 weeks) after the beginning of the semester about whether or not the participants had broken up with their partner rather than just considering breaking up with their partner.

Ultimately, what this study did add to the research base on stay/leave decisions of college students was that Choice and Lamke's two-part decision-making model really does not appear to fit well for this population (i.e., college students in dating relationships). Perhaps further research using this model for college students in dating relationships would not be useful. What this study did help solidify was that future research should look at other models, or new models should be created to help explain the stay/leave decisions of college age women.

In summary, while there were several limitations, this study has extended Choice and Lamke's (1999) work on the stay/leave decisions of college students in several very important ways. This addition to the existing research base then provides important opportunities for future research.

Suggestions for Future Research

Several suggestions for future research emerged from this study. Based upon results from the previous research questions, I recommend that the model be revised to better fit the context of college students in violent dating relationships. For female college students, perhaps “Will I be better off?” is more indicative of how well they perceive their relationship is working for them as evidenced by relationship distress and lack of commitment but attraction towards others, approval seeking, college friends, and cohabitation would be better suited as manifest variables because they are better described as external constraints to ending the relationship rather than actual indicators of “Will I be better off?” or “Can I do it?” Secondly, the construct “Can I do it?” needs to be reframed to fit the context of college students better. Currently, “Can I do it?” implies a question of constraints and resources, and while that appears to fit the context of married and cohabiting women experiencing intimate partner violence, it does not appear to fit the lives of college students in this study or in Choice and Lamke’s (1999) study. Perhaps a different question would fit better, or there might be entirely different indicators of “Can I do it?” for college students. If structural and personal resources and supports are less of a problem for college females to obtain and if the violence is in a less severe form, as seen in this study, then maybe the more relevant question for female college students who determine they are better off without their violent partner is “How am I going to do it (break up)?”

Realistically, it could also be that Choice and Lamke’s (1999) two-part decision-making model really does not apply to the population of college students in violent, dating relationships like it applies to married or cohabiting women. Future research should consider other, more applicable models to apply to dating violence. Furthermore, it could be helpful to begin with a qualitative study that includes individual interviews with college women to gain more insight into the breakup of their violent, dating relationships, and this information could then be used to create a new model of dating violence and stay/leave decisions that includes a context more relevant to college students, such as their family of origin experiences, attachment to others, and their own sense-of-self.

In addition, little research has been done on male experiences with dating violence and particularly their experiences leaving a violent, dating relationship. Data show that males are victims of dating violence at similar rates as females, and while there is considerable research on males as perpetrators of abuse, there is limited research on male’s experiences as victims.

Shorey, Febres, Brasfield, and Stuart (2012) found in their study of male dating violence, victimization, and adjustment that psychological victimization was associated with increased PTSD symptoms and decreased relationship satisfaction more so than physical violence victimization. While this is a great step in beginning to understand male experiences of dating violence, it is important that further research be conducted to help better understand the stay/leave decision-making experiences for males in violent dating relationships. For instance, Hendy et al. (2003) suggested that further research be conducted to identify whether men's decisions to leave violent relationships differ from women's decisions to leave violent relationships.

Future research studies should also could be designed with clearer, better measures to specifically address when and by whom the break ups happened so that true longitudinal data could be gathered. Also, further research should look at the stay/leave decisions of male and female students involved in violent dating relationships that are characterized by more severe forms of violence since both partners may be engaging in severe forms of dating violence (Straus & Gozjolko, 2014). It is plausible that the factors affecting their decision to leave the relationship would differ from the factors that impacted the current study's participants. Future research also could look at college students in violent, dating relationships who chose to stay together and repair their relationships rather than break up. Future research could compare victims and non-victims of dating violence on the indicators of "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?" Due to there being not enough victims in this particular sample, there was concern that the sample size of this study would not allow for a comparison to be made of victims and non-victims on "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?" Finally, research could be done to help identify current practices and policies of colleges related to dating violence, their impact on college students, and to identify how their practices and policies could be improved to help promote healthy, dating relationships.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study contributed to existing research on dating violence and stay/leave decisions in several ways. First, I identified ways in which victims and non-victims differed on factors related to breakup of violent college dating relationships. As expected, victims experienced greater relationship distress, less attraction towards someone other than their

partners, less relationship safety, lower relationship efficacy, less social support, and fewer good friends than non-victims. This study also found that “Will I be better off” was determined by relationship distress and lack of commitment and that “Can I do it?” was indicated by relationship efficacy, relationship safety, and social support for college-age women. Consistent with Choice and Lamke’s (1999) results, I found that the question “Will I be better off” was more important in predicting actual breakup than the question “Can I do it” for college students. Finally, I found that victims believed they were more likely to be better off without their current partner but less likely to believe that they could end the relationship than non-victims. It is my hope that these results will help provide some insight into what was already known about how victims and non-victims of dating violence in college end their romantic relationships. Breaking up is already “hard to do” without the additional burden of partner violence.

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Appendix A - SCALE ITEMS

Will I Be Better Off?

Relationship Distress

Couples Satisfaction Index

In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

Worse than all others (1) to better than all others (6)

How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?

Not at all (1) to very much or extremely (6)

I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner.

Strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6)

Please select the answer which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

Extremely unhappy (1) to perfect (7)

Attraction Towards Others

Attraction Towards Others Questions

How attractive do you find this person?

Not at all attractive (1) to extremely attractive (8)

How attractive do you think this person found you?

Not at all attractive (1) to extremely attractive (8)

How much arousal did you feel in their presence?

None (1) to a great deal (8)

How much time did you spend thinking about this person?

None (1) to a great deal (8)

Lack of Commitment

Commitment Inventory

My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life.

I may not want to be with my partner a few years from now.

I like to think of my partner and me more in terms of “us” and “we” than “me” and “him/her.”

I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter.

Strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) on all four items

Approval Seeking

Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale

Sometimes I think I am too concerned with what people think.

I worry about what kind of impression I make on people.

I am afraid that people will find fault with me.

I am concerned about other people’s opinions of me.

When I am talking to someone, I worry about what they may be thinking of me.

I am afraid that others will not approve of me.

I am usually worried about the kind of impression I make.

I am frequently afraid of other people noticing my shortcomings.

I worry what other people will think of me when I know it doesn’t make any difference.

It bothers me when people form an unfavorable opinion of me.

I often worry that I will say or do the wrong things.

If I know that someone is judging me, it tends to bother me.

Very little (1) to very much (5) on all twelve items

Can I Do It?

Personal Resources

Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale – for Social Support

I lack companionship.

There is no one I can turn to.

I am an outgoing person.

I feel left out.

I feel isolated from others.

I can find companionship when I want it.

I am unhappy being so withdrawn.

People are around me but not with me.

I have never felt this way (1) to I have often felt this way (4) on all eight items

Good Friends in College

I have several close social ties at college.

I have some good friends or acquaintances at college with whom I can talk about any problems I have.

Very poorly (1) to very closely (5) on both items

Relationship Efficacy Questions

I have little control over the conflicts that occur between my partner and I.

There is no way I can solve some of the problems in my relationship.

When I put my mind to it, I can resolve just about any disagreement that comes up between my partner and I.

I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems that come up in my relationship.

Sometimes I feel that I have no say over issues that cause conflict between us.

I am able to do things needed to settle our conflicts.

There is little I can do to resolve many of the important conflicts between my partner and I.

Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7)

Relationship Safety Questions

I feel safe disagreeing with my partner.

I feel safe telling my partner about my goals and dreams.

I feel safe sharing all my inner most beliefs with my partner.

I feel safe asking my partner for things I want from him/her.

I feel safe letting my partner know exactly how I feel.

Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5)

Structural Resources**Cohabitation**

My partner and I are: Living separately Living together.