

AN APPLICATION OF MARITAL HORIZON THEORY TO DATING VIOLENCE
PERPETRATION

by

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Abstract

An individual's desire to marry and ideal age of marriage, two elements of the marital horizon theory, are examined in relation to dating violence perpetration, both physical assault and psychological aggression, in the present study using a sample of 611 college students from a large Midwestern university. Looking at the possible predictive power that the marital horizon variables might have on dating violence perpetration, above and beyond other known predictors of dating violence, could reveal an important area of investigation in both the emerging adulthood literature and the dating violence literature. Results indicate that victimization of dating violence accounted for the vast majority of the variance in perpetration of dating violence. Desire to marry emerged as a significant predictor of women's perpetration of psychological aggression only when the victimization variables were excluded from the regression equation.

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CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

The institution of marriage has seen many changes in the United States over the last few decades. These changes include a steadily rising age of first marriage, increasing cohabitation and divorce rates and technological developments (e.g., in vitro fertilization, birth control pills) that allow individuals to have greater control over child-bearing (Cherlin, 2005). In spite of these trends, marriage remains an ideal that most individuals in the United States aspire to, with 85% of adolescent girls and 77% of adolescent boys indicating that they expect to marry in the future (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2007). Surprisingly, these figures have actually increased over the years, up from 82% of adolescent girls and 73% of adolescent boys reporting their intention to marry in 1976. Despite these dramatic changes in marriage over the last 30 years, as well as the diminished social expectations for marriage, more emerging adults today intend to get married than in past decades.

Marriage continues to be a powerful socializing agent that has been shown to reduce emerging adults' participation in a variety of negative behaviors, including alcohol abuse (Leonard & Mudar, 2003) and illicit drug use (Homish, Leonard, & Cornelius, 2008). Recently, a marital horizon theory has been proposed that suggests emerging adults' perceived importance of marriage, desired timing of marriage, and criteria for marriage readiness work together to influence the length of emerging adulthood and the type of behaviors engaged in during this time period (Carroll et al., 2007). More specifically, the closer marriage is perceived to be (shorter marital horizon), the less likely emerging adults are to engage in various unhealthy individual and relational behaviors and the shorter their emerging adulthood period will be. For example, in recent research, individuals with a shorter marital horizon have lower rates of alcohol and illicit

drug use (Willoughby & Dworkin, 2008), are less accepting of pornography (Carroll et al., 2008), and less sexually permissive (Carroll et al., 2007). In addition, shorter marital horizons have also been shown to be positively related to child-centeredness and negatively related to willingness to have a child out-of-wedlock, spousal independence, and premarital cohabitation (Carroll et al., 2007).

While there is some evidence to suggest that emerging adults' beliefs and attitudes concerning marriage are associated with some of their risk-taking behaviors and family formation values, the relationship between emerging adults' marital horizon and their dating violence behaviors has not been investigated empirically.

Dating violence is a serious problem in the United States, with prevalence estimates ranging from 20% to 45% of all dating couples experiencing physical assault by one or both partners (Luthra & Gidycz, 2006) and as many as 80% to 90% of dating couples experiencing psychological aggression (Murray & Kardatzke, 2007). Current data suggests that the negative impact of dating violence is greater for women than for men (Cercone, Beach, & Arias, 2005; Clements, Ogle, & Sabourin, 2005), with more intense mental and physical health consequences for women including injury, chronic pain, gastrointestinal and gynecological problems, sexually transmitted diseases, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Campbell, 2002). This does not include the high levels of fear that women who experience dating violence may live with (Cercone, Beach, & Arias, 2005) and the tremendous toll it takes on relationship satisfaction (Katz, Kuffel, & Coblenz, 2002). While the effects are more deleterious for women, it is a problem that deserves the attention of all people to reduce the prevalence of this unfortunate aspect of dating relationships.

While marital horizon has not been examined in relation to dating violence prior to this

study, it is possible that, due to the socializing power of marriage, emerging adults' perpetration of dating violence behaviors will decrease as they approach marriage (Arnett, 1998b). This relationship may be an important link for exploration as a possible predictor of dating violence not yet explored in the literature. In that light, the current study seeks to identify the relationship between dating violence perpetration (physical and psychological) and both perceived marital importance and desired timing of marriage. This relationship will be examined in conjunction with several known predictors of dating violence perpetration identified in the literature: problematic alcohol use, having witnessed parental violence as a child, relationship length, relationship satisfaction, and dating violence victimization.

CHAPTER 2 - Literature Review

Emerging Adulthood

Arnett (2000) was the first to propose emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental period. With a theoretical foundation based on the work of Erikson (1968), Levinson (1978), and Keniston (1971), Arnett argues that there is a developmental period between adolescence and young adulthood that is distinguished by its independence from social roles and normative expectations. During the ages of 18 to 25, individuals have left the dependency of adolescence, but have not yet embraced the full responsibilities of adulthood (e.g., marriage, parenting, and financial independence). This allows for a distinctive period of exploration and identity development in the areas of love, work, and worldview. Arnett succinctly sums up this period of development by stating that emerging adulthood is a “time of life when many different directions remain possible, when little about the future has been decided for certain, when the scope of independent exploration of life’s possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course” (2000, p. 469).

The markers for adulthood are now much less concrete than they once were. A sense of personal responsibility is a more important indicator of adulthood to emerging adults now than marriage or having a child, which were once the normative events that punctuated the transition from adolescent to adult (Nelson et al., 2007; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Arnett, 1998a). Thus, the path toward adulthood is often a winding one. However, marriage remains an important part of that journey for the majority of emerging adults and the decision to marry can have a profound impact on their behavior.

Marriage has been shown to significantly decrease the occurrence of a wide variety of unhealthy behaviors (Arnett, 1998b), with a great deal of research focusing on illicit drug use

(Homish, Leonard, & Cornelius, 2008; Flora & Chassin, 2005; Leonard & Homish, 2005) and alcohol abuse (Leonard & Mudar, 2003; Mudar, Kearns, & Leonard, 2002; Mudar, Leonard, & Soltysinski, 2001). It has been suggested that marriage serves to reduce these unhealthy risk-taking behaviors because it is a socializing institution that possesses “requirements, implicit or explicit, for conforming to conventional societal norms” (Arnett, 1998a, p. 306). Marital horizon theory suggests it is not just getting married that impacts emerging adults’ behavior, but their attitudes and beliefs about marriage will influence their behaviors.

Marital Horizon Theory

Marital horizon refers to “a person’s outlook or approach to marriage in relation to his or her current situation” (Carroll et al., 2007, p. 224). Three separate components serve to comprise one’s marital horizon: 1) the importance of marriage in one’s current life plans, 2) the desired timing of marriage, and 3) the type of preparation required before being ready to get married. The principal idea of this theory is that one’s marital horizon is a central factor in determining both the length of emerging adulthood and specific behaviors (especially unhealthy behaviors) that occur during emerging adulthood (Carroll et al., 2007).

Importance of Marriage

While marriage is no longer considered to be a critical marker for adulthood, it is still perceived to be an important goal for emerging adults (Cherlin, 2004; Burgoyne & Hames, 2002; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001), with it possibly being even more important for men than for women (Kaufman & Goldscheider, 2007). Popenoe and Whitehead (2001) have reported that over 90% of emerging adults identify having a good marriage to be important to them and marriage is the ideal relationship that the vast majority of emerging adults aspire to have (Cherlin, 2005). According to marital horizon theory, the relative importance of marriage in

relation to other goals will impact emerging adults' current behaviors. The more central a goal marriage is, the more likely that individual will already conform to conventional societal norms and therefore, the less likely he or she will engage in various risk-taking behaviors.

Desired Marital Timing

There is relatively little research examining the influences on marital timing. One study has shown that premarital sexual relations are related to later marital timing for women, confirming the author's theory that women substitute premarital sexual liaisons for marriage during emerging adulthood (Gaughan, 2002). Economic disadvantage seems to hasten the entry into marriage for Whites, but delay marriage for Blacks (South & Crowder, 2000; Axinn & Thornton, 1992). In at least one study, parental divorce was predictive of earlier marriage in both White males and females (Keith & Finlay, 1988). Overall, emerging adults are delaying marriage until later in life, with the median age at first marriage for men in the United States currently at 27.4 years and 25.6 years for women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Other research has suggested that the perceived ideal age for marriage among emerging adults is 25 (Carroll et al., 2007). According to marital horizon theory, the farther away an individual is from his or her perceived ideal age for marriage, the more likely he or she is to engage in risk-taking behaviors. As an individual gets closer to his or her ideal age for marriage, he or she will engage in less risky behavior as the person begins aligning himself or herself more closely with the social expectations for marriage.

Criteria for Marriage Readiness

There has been no research into emerging adults' perceptions of what the criteria are for marital readiness. The marital horizon theory posits that the emerging adult's belief about what criteria are necessary for marriage will greatly influence the desired timing of marriage and

possibly the relative importance of marriage to that individual. For example, if financial stability is a necessity for marriage, then many emerging adults will be more likely to wait until they finish college and have found stable employment before wanting to get married. Therefore, marriage will be much less important during college, and the timing of marriage will be later than an individual who does not hold that criteria to be necessary. Qualitative studies that could generate the criteria that emerging adults currently hold about marriage have been suggested as a first step in this area (Carroll et al., 2007).

The Marital Horizon Theory in Research

Given that this theory was proposed only recently, it has not been widely used in research. To date, three studies have applied this theory, and their findings represent preliminary empirical support for the validity of the marital horizon theory. Throughout the research, marital timing is operationalized through the question: “What is the ideal age for an individual to get married?” Therefore, “marital timing” and “ideal age for marriage” are synonymous.

Marital timing and marital importance have been shown to be related to substance use and sexual permissiveness, with those individuals holding later marital timing and regarding marriage as less important being more likely to engage in these behaviors (Carroll et al., 2007). Marital importance, as measured by whether or not the respondent wants to be married at the present time, is related to lower rates of binge drinking and marijuana usage in Whites (Willoughby & Dworkin, 2008), but was not a salient predictor for other racial groups. However, when grouped with other known predictors of these behaviors, desire to marry did not account for much additional variance explained in the linear regression model, ranging from no additional variance explained to an additional 2.1% of the variance explained. In addition, marital timing is positively related to acceptance (but not usage) of pornography, with those

wanting to delay marriage being more likely to find pornography acceptable (Carroll et al., 2008).

In regard to family formation values, marital timing and marital importance are related to child-centeredness, nonmarital cohabitation, out-of-wedlock childbirth, and spousal independence. Marital importance is negatively associated with endorsement of nonmarital cohabitation, out-of-wedlock childbirth, and spousal independence, but is positively associated with child-centeredness (Carroll et al., 2007). Later marital timing is associated with greater acceptance of nonmarital cohabitation in both men and women, but they differ in the other areas. Women with later marital timing reported less child-centeredness, greater consideration of having a child out of wedlock, and higher levels of spousal independence. For men, later marriage was associated only with less willingness to have a child out of wedlock (Carroll et al., 2007).

While the marital horizon theory has received some empirical support in regard to its relation to risk-taking behaviors and family formation values, this theory has yet to be applied to any other behaviors in emerging adulthood. Carroll et al. (2007) assert, “it is apparent that young people’s attitudes toward marriage may be associated with a wide range of values and behaviors in emerging adulthood” (p. 241). The current study seeks to extend marital horizon theory to a new area: dating violence. It is possible that this particular behavior might fall into the “wide range” of behaviors that might be influenced by emerging adults’ marital horizon.

Dating Violence

Defining “Dating Violence”

“Dating” has been defined as “a relationship in which two individuals share an emotional, romantic, and/or sexual connection beyond a friendship, but they are not married, engaged, or in

a similarly committed relationship” (Murray & Kardatzke, 2007, p. 79). There is a large body of literature pertaining to dating violence and defining the “violence” aspect of this construct is non-problematic. This is due in part to the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1979) and the revised version (CTS2) (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) that have been almost universally adopted by researchers seeking to operationalize and study this phenomenon (Kimmel, 2002). Dating violence encompasses physical assault, psychological aggression, injury, and sexual coercion (Straus et al., 1996).

While these four domains comprise different aspects of dating violence, the most commonly examined domain in the literature is physical assault (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001). The current study will explore only physical assault and psychological aggression. Physical assault includes a range of behaviors from grabbing or slapping on the minor end to choking, punching, and burning on the severe end. Psychological aggression is displayed through insulting, shouting, threatening the use of physical violence, and destroying the partner’s property. This literature review will focus on these two areas.

Prevalence of Physical Assault

The first study to deal specifically with dating violence was published in the early 1980s and revealed a shocking statistic: almost 20% of all college relationships are physically violent (Makepeace, 1981). It seems as if this figure might be on the low end, with most recent estimates ranging from 20% to 45% in the United States (Luthra & Gidycz, 2006; Lewis & Fremouw, 2001; Shook, Gerrity, Jurich, & Segrist, 2000). In a study that included college students from 31 universities worldwide, physical assault prevalence rates ranged from 17% in Portugal to 45% in the state of Louisiana (Straus, 2004).

In the dating violence literature, there are numerous studies that have found perpetration

rates to be equal among men and women (Kaura & Lohman, 2007; Straus, 2006; Katz, Kuffel, & Coblenz, 2002). Some research has suggested that female perpetration of dating violence might even be more common than male perpetration (Scott & Straus, 2007; Luthra & Gidycz, 2006; Archer, 2000). This finding has also been noted in a comprehensive review of the dating violence literature (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001). In an experimental study, female-initiated violence was perceived to be more acceptable than male-initiated violence (Reese-Weber, 2008). While women might be more likely to commit dating violence, men are far more likely to inflict an injury from the violence (Archer, 2000).

Predictors of Physical Assault Perpetration

A careful review of the dating violence literature has revealed the following items to be predictors of physical assault perpetration: problematic alcohol use, having witnessed parental violence as a child, relationship length, relationship satisfaction, and dating violence victimization.

Problematic Alcohol Use

The problematic consumption of alcohol has consistently been linked to physical assault perpetration for both men and women (Luthra & Gidycz, 2006), with earlier consumption (during adolescence) being a stronger predictor than later consumption (during emerging adulthood) (Chen & White, 2004). Several reviews of the professional literature have also reported this as a predictor of perpetration (Murray & Kardatzke, 2007; Lewis & Fremouw, 2001; Pittman, Wolfe, & Wekerle, 2000).

Witnessing Parental Violence

Research using data from the Rutgers Health and Human Development Project, a nationally representative sample of adolescents who were followed through their adolescent and

emerging adulthood years, found that individuals who witnessed physical assault in their parents' relationship as a child were more likely to perpetrate physical assault against a dating partner (Chen & White, 2004). This finding is echoed elsewhere in the literature (Luthra & Gidycz, 2006; Pittman, Wolfe, & Wekerle, 2000; Shook et al., 2000), with the possibility that this may be a stronger predictor for males than females (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001).

Relationship Length

There is some research that suggests the longer a relationship lasts, the greater the likelihood of experiencing physical assault (Luthra & Gidycz, 2006). Longer relationships might be indicative of a more serious relationship or they might simply provide a greater time frame in which dating violence could occur. It has also been proposed that the longer a relationship lasts, the higher the level of expressed negativity will be, which often leads to violent behaviors (Marcus & Swett, 2002).

Relationship Satisfaction

There are relatively few studies that look at relationship satisfaction in conjunction with dating violence. However, one study found low levels of relationship satisfaction to be predictive of physical assault in dating relationships (O'Leary, Malone, & Tyree, 1994) and a separate study found relationship satisfaction to be a significant predictor of physical assault for women (Baker & Stith, 2008). In addition, low relationship satisfaction has been correlated with physical assault (Lundeberg, Stith, Penn, & Ward, 2004; Katz, Kuffel, & Coblenz, 2002), but correlational data fails to demonstrate that low relationship satisfaction predicts physical assault. Therefore, using relationship satisfaction as a predictor for physical assault has support in the literature.

Dating Violence Victimization

One recent study examining predictors of dating violence found that the most salient predictor for men and women's perpetration of physical assault was their partner's use of physical assault and psychological aggression (Baker & Stith, 2008), which has been reported in similar studies as well (Luthra & Gidycz, 2006). For women, past victimization, even with a different partner, is predictive of future perpetration of physical assault against a dating partner (Graves, Sechrist, White, & Paradise, 2005).

Prevalence and Predictors of Psychological Aggression

Most of the literature pertaining to dating violence deals specifically with physical assault, with very little attention focused on psychological (verbal) aggression (Shook et al., 2000). A review of the literature in relation to psychological dating violence showed prevalence rates ranging from 80% to 90% of all couples experiencing some form of psychological aggression (Murray & Kardatzke, 2007; Shook et al., 2000). In addition, this is the most common form of aggression for females to display (Nelson, Springer, Nelson, & Bean, 2008). This is a potentially important area for further exploration due to the fact that "the negative effects of psychological abuse on the victim's self-esteem and recovery far outweigh the immediate effects of physical violence" (Neufeld, McNamara, & Ertl, 1999, p. 126).

Some preliminary predictors of perpetration of psychological aggression are experiencing psychological aggression as a child from parents and problematic alcohol consumption (Shook et al., 2000). A separate study found predictors of physical assault in dating relationships (problematic alcohol use, relationship length, etc.) to also accurately predict psychological aggression (Hammock & O'Hearn, 2002). Therefore, the predictors for physical assault (described above) will also be used as predictors of psychological aggression in this study.

Marriage and Dating Violence

The link between marital violence and dating violence has not received very much attention in the professional literature to date (Shorey, Cornelius, & Bell, 2008). While it may be hypothesized that perpetration of dating violence would naturally lead to violence in marriage, prevalence rates indicate this may not be the case. Prevalence estimates of domestic violence that focuses on physical assault (including cohabitation) range from as low as 9% to as high as 30% (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), which is somewhat lower than rates for dating violence. This relationship still remains unclear, however, due to little research and conflicting findings. One study using the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health found that women were most likely to experience intimate partner violence in cohabiting relationships (both victimization and perpetration), while men were most likely to experience violence in marriage (Brown & Bulanda, 2008).

Applying the marital horizon theory to dating violence perpetration could serve as an important first step in bridging the gap between dating violence and marital violence. This could serve to explain, to some degree, why perpetration of physical assault and psychological aggression decreases modestly in marriage relationships as compared to dating relationships. As part of marriage's socializing power, it is likely that the closer an individual perceives himself or herself to be to marriage, the less likely he or she would be in a violent dating relationship. This is due to the fact that few, if any, people would want to make a lifelong marital commitment to a partner that perpetrates physical assault or psychological aggression against his or her loved one. Also, violence in marriage is not socially acceptable in the United States. This application of marital horizon theory could potentially provide only a piece of the larger puzzle as to why violence decreases in marriage. More specifically, this theory is unable to explain why some

relationships stay violent into marriage, in spite of the socializing role that marriage plays.

In addition, one's marital horizon has been shown to be associated with various risk-taking behaviors. While dating violence is not considered a risk-taking behavior, certain risk-taking behaviors (problematic alcohol use, in particular) are known predictors of dating violence. It is highly probable that a connection may exist with dating violence. The importance that one places on marriage and the distance one considers himself or herself to be from marriage might serve as an important factor in the prediction of dating violence perpetration. Therefore, the current study seeks to answer the following research question:

1. To what extent can prediction of psychological aggression and physical assault perpetration in dating relationships be further enhanced by knowing one's marital importance and marital timing, above and beyond other known predictors of dating violence, including alcohol use, having witnessed parental violence as a child, relationship length, relationship satisfaction, and dating violence victimization?

Based on the review of the literature in the areas of emerging adulthood, marital horizon theory, and dating violence outlined above, I shall test the following hypotheses:

1. Marital importance and ideal age of marriage will be a significant predictor of physical assault, even when coupled with the known predictors of physical assault.
2. Marital importance and ideal age of marriage will significantly enhance the prediction of psychological aggression, even when coupled with the known predictors of psychological aggression.

CHAPTER 3 - Method

Study Design

This study used data collected in 2008 from students at a large Midwestern university. A 237-item survey was distributed to undergraduates in sociology, human nutrition, marketing, political science, and family studies and human services classes. Demographic information such as gender, education level, age, race, parents' education levels, family income, and parents' marital status was requested for background information. Questions were also asked regarding the participant's dating status and general relationship information. Only respondents that had been in a relationship for at least one month were asked to complete the scales pertaining to dating relationships (The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale, The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, etc.). The relationship scales were to be answered in regard to their current or most recent partner.

Sample

The sample consists of 272 males (44.5%) and 339 females (55.5%) who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study by completing a survey for research purposes (see Table 1 for demographic information). Nearly 25% of the participants are between the ages of 18 and 19 years, with 49.4% falling between the ages of 20 and 21. Just over 23% are between the ages of 22 and 23 years and the remaining 3.6% are between 24 and 25. Almost 40% of the students are freshman or sophomores, with the remaining 60% being comprised of upperclassmen (juniors and seniors). Less than 1% of the participants were in graduate school. The vast majority of the participants (88.4%) are European American, with 5.6% self-identifying as African American, 2.5% as Latin American, 1.6% identified as Asian, and the remaining 2.0% were classified as Native American or another race not listed.

Nearly 86% of the sample is currently or has been in a dating relationship that has lasted at least one month. The remaining 14% have never been in a relationship that has lasted at least one month and were instructed to skip the sections of the survey pertaining to dating relationships. Of those that have dated for more than one month, 37.4% are currently single, 24.6% are dating, 32.5% consider himself or herself to be in a committed relationship (intend to stay together in the future), and the remaining 5.5% are engaged to be married. Only 16.2% of the sample has cohabited with a partner or is currently cohabiting with a partner. The sample is diverse with respect to relationship length: over 30% of the respondents' most recent relationship has lasted five months or less, almost 22% has lasted between six months and one year, 19.9% has lasted between one and two years, 19.1% has lasted between two and four years, and the remaining 7% has lasted four years or more. See Table 2 for more detailed information on the relationship characteristics of the sample.

Measures

Problematic Alcohol Use

The Rutgers Alcohol Problem Index (RAPI; White & Labouvie, 1989) was used to assess for problematic consequences due to alcohol consumption. This 24-item measure poses a series of statements related to alcohol consumption during the previous 6 months. Example items include, "Went to work or school drunk," and "Kept drinking when you promised yourself not to." Responses ranged from this has "Never" happened during the past 6 months (1) to this has happened "More than 10 times" (5). Reliability for the RAPI in the current study is $\alpha=.94$.

Witnessing Parental Violence

Two items were used to determine whether the participant witnessed parental violence as a child. One item referred to physical assault and the other to psychological (verbal) aggression.

The items read, “While you were growing up, was there ever any physical violence/verbal abuse between your parents or whoever raised you?” Response options identified if the violence was initiated by the father, mother, was mutual, or if there was no violence present. However, for the purposes of this study, responses were recoded into a dichotomized format indicating whether the participant did not witness parental violence (0) or witnessed parental violence (1).

Relationship Length

Respondents were asked, “How long have you been in this relationship (or how long did the most recent relationship last)?” Responses ranged from “Less than one month” (1) to “Four years or more” (7).

Relationship Satisfaction

The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMSS; Schumm, 1985) was used to measure relationship satisfaction. The KMSS is a 3-item scale that assesses one’s perceived level of relationship satisfaction. Items such as, “How satisfied are (or were) you with your relationship,” are rated on a scale of “Extremely Dissatisfied” (1) to “Extremely Satisfied” (7). The scale has a reliability coefficient of $\alpha=.95$ in the current study. The score for the KMSS was reverse-coded in order to go in a consistent direction with the other predictors of dating violence.

Dating Violence Victimization and Perpetration

The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale-CTS2 (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) was used in this study to measure partner violence victimization and perpetration. The CTS2 assesses the frequency with which an individual perpetrates and is a victim of physical assault and psychological aggression against and from their partner. Each subscale is broken down into minor and severe forms of violence. Respondents are asked to identify the frequency that they committed each item in the past and were a victim of each item. Response choices

range in frequency from “No, this has never happened” (0) to “More than 20 times in the past year” (6). The reliability scores for perpetration of physical assault are $\alpha=.89$ and $\alpha=.79$ for perpetration of psychological aggression. The reliability for victimization is $\alpha=.76$ for psychological aggression and $\alpha=.91$ for physical assault.

Marital Horizon

Two items were used to assess for marital horizon. The first item states, “Being married is a very important goal for me,” and respondents select their level of agreement with the statement from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (4). The second item asks, “What is the ideal age for an individual to get married?” Response choices range from “21 or younger” (1) to “32 or older” (7). This score was then reverse-coded in order to fit theoretically with level of marital importance. More specifically, the marital horizon theory contends that the closer one perceives him or herself to be to marriage, the more important marriage would be to him or her.

CHAPTER 4 - Results

I first explored the data by examining gender differences in the predictor variables using independent t-tests. There were significant differences between men and women on several of the predictors. Therefore, men and women were examined separately in the analysis. Then, I created correlations matrices for men and women regarding the predictors and outcome variables used in the study to gain an understanding of the univariate relationships between all the variables (see Tables 3 and 4).

A series of hierarchical linear regressions were then computed in order to measure how much ideal age of marriage and marital importance would enhance the prediction of both psychological aggression and physical assault, above and beyond the other known predictors of dating violence. Relationship length, witnessing parental violence, relationship satisfaction, alcohol use, and victimization of physical assault and psychological aggression were entered into step 1 of the regression model. Ideal age of marriage and marital importance were then entered into step 2 of the model.

Table 5 contains the results of the regression models for men's perpetration of physical assault and psychological aggression. In regard to perpetration of physical assault, the only significant predictor in both step 1 and step 2 was victimization of physical assault ($\beta = 0.92, p < .001$), with the final model accounting for 91% of the variance in perpetration of physical assault ($r^2 = 0.91, F = 223.35, p < .001$). In predicting men's perpetration of psychological aggression, alcohol use ($\beta = 0.06, p < .05$), victimization of physical assault ($\beta = 0.12, p < .01$), and victimization of psychological aggression ($\beta = 0.82, p < .001$) were all significant predictors in both steps of the regression model. The final regression model was able to explain 88% of men's perpetration of psychological aggression ($r^2 = 0.88, F = 157.51, p < .001$). Neither ideal age of

marriage nor marital importance provided any additional explanatory power for men's perpetration of either psychological aggression or physical assault.

The regression models for women's perpetration of physical assault and psychological aggression told a very similar story as the men's models (see Table 6). Once again, victimization of physical assault ($\beta = 0.79, p < .001$) was the only significant predictor in both steps of the regression model for perpetration of physical assault, accounting for over 60% of the variance ($r^2 = 0.65, F = 46.86, p < .001$). Women differed from men in the prediction of psychological aggression, with alcohol use not showing up as a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.02, p < n.s.$). Victimization of physical assault ($\beta = -0.10, p < .05$) and victimization of psychological aggression ($\beta = 0.95, p < .001$) were significant predictors in both steps of the regression model. This model was able to explain 80% of women's perpetration of psychological aggression ($r^2 = 0.80, F = 99.98, p < .001$). Ideal age of marriage and marital importance did not emerge as significant predictors of dating violence in women either.

The victimization variables were the strongest predictors of perpetration of dating violence for both men and women, which is in line with the current understanding in the literature (Baker & Stith, 2008). However, these predictors were so strong in the models that none of the other known predictors of dating violence, not to mention the marital horizon variables, emerged as significant. It was hypothesized that the overwhelming strength of these predictors could possibly be masking contributions from the other variables in the model. Therefore, the victimization variables were removed from the models and the regression was re-analyzed to see if any of the other predictors might emerge as significant.

The results of the regression models, minus the victimization variables, for men's perpetration of physical assault and psychological aggression are presented in Table 7.

Relationship length ($\beta = -0.16, p < .05$) and alcohol use ($\beta = 0.16, p < .05$) were the only significant predictors in both steps of the model for men's perpetration of physical assault. The final model was able to explain 9% of men's perpetration of physical assault ($r^2 = 0.09, F = 4.03, p < .001$). In predicting psychological aggression in men, relationship satisfaction ($\beta = 0.20, p < .05$) and alcohol use ($\beta = 0.21, p < .01$) were significant predictors in both steps of the model, accounting for 9% of the variance in men's perpetration of psychological aggression ($r^2 = 0.09, F = 3.70, p < .001$). Ideal age of marriage and marital importance, once again, were not significant in the explanation of men's perpetration of dating violence. In fact, with the perpetration of physical assault, the marital horizon variables caused the final model to have less predictive power than step 1, when they were not included.

The final regression models, minus the victimization variables, examined women's perpetration of physical assault and psychological aggression (see Table 8). Women's perpetration of physical assault had relationship satisfaction ($\beta = 0.15, p < .05$) and alcohol use ($\beta = 0.21, p < .01$) emerge as significant predictors in both steps of the model. This regression model, after excluding the victimization predictors, was able to explain 8% of women's perpetration of physical assault ($r^2 = 0.08, F = 4.14, p < .001$). The final model analyzed women's perpetration of psychological aggression. The significant predictors in this model were relationship length ($\beta = 0.34, p < .001$), alcohol use ($\beta = 0.26, p < .001$), and marital importance ($\beta = -0.19, p < .01$). The final model accounted for 18% of the variance in women's perpetration of psychological aggression ($r^2 = 0.18, F = 8.45, p < .001$). Marital importance was a significant variable in explaining women's perpetration of psychological aggression, adding an additional 2% of variance explained.

CHAPTER 5 - Discussion

The current study sought to examine the potential link between an individual's marital horizon, including marital importance and ideal age of marriage, and his or her perpetration of physical assault and psychological aggression. The most dramatic finding from the study is the overwhelming strength that the victimization variables possess to predict perpetration of both psychological aggression and physical assault for both men and women. With the exception of alcohol use predicting men's perpetration of psychological aggression, when the victimization variables are included in the regression models, no other variables emerge as significant. Even so, the models are still able to predict the vast majority of perpetration, ranging from 65% to 91% of variance explained. The strength of victimization variables in the prediction of dating violence perpetration has also been found in one previous study using hierarchical linear regression to examine dating violence predictors (Baker & Stith, 2008), where, consistent with the current findings, most of the variance was accounted for by victimization and the other predictors enhanced the regression model's explanatory power by a very small amount (2% to 4% additional variance accounted for). Other studies looking at dating violence among college students have found victimization to be a significant factor in relation to perpetration as well (Luthra & Gidycz, 2006; Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991).

The fact that so much of the perpetration can be explained by victimization leads to the conclusion that the dating violence in this study can be described as situational couple violence, as it has been coined in the literature (Johnson & Leone, 2005). This type of violence is described as one in which "conflict occasionally gets 'out of hand,' leading usually to 'minor' forms of violence" (Johnson, 1995, p. 285). Viewing frequency tables of the items in the conflict tactics scale for the current study lends further credence to this conclusion because the vast

majority of the physical assault occurred infrequently, only a couple of times. Interestingly, psychological aggression did occur more frequently than physical assault, in general, and possibly becomes an enduring pattern in dating relationships. However, it is still mutual, likely falling under the umbrella of situational couple violence.

Once the victimization variables were excluded from the regression models, alcohol use became a significant predictor of dating violence for both men and women, with higher levels of problematic usage contributing to greater occurrences of dating violence. In addition to alcohol usage, the other predictors became significant for different types of perpetration. Quite interestingly, men's perpetration of physical assault was significantly predicted by relationship length, but in the opposite direction described in the literature. While it was proposed that physical assault is more likely to occur with longer relationship length (Luthra & Gidycz, 2006), these results suggest that men perpetrate more often in newer relationships. This area has not been widely explored in the dating violence literature and the current findings suggest that more investigation is needed. Relationship satisfaction also became a significant predictor in every type of violence except men's perpetration of physical assault and women's perpetration of psychological aggression when the marital horizon variables were included in the model.

The only marital horizon variable to emerge as a significant predictor of dating violence was marital importance in the model of women's perpetration of psychological aggression. In particular, the less important marriage is to a woman, the more likely she is to perpetrate psychological aggression. This indicates that, perhaps, a woman would be more willing to call her partner derogatory names or use profanity toward him if she did not intend to marry or have a long-term committed relationship with him. It is unclear why this pattern would not also hold true for men. Previous research looking at the marital horizon theory has found it to be a salient

factor for both men and women in relation to risk-taking behaviors and family formation values (Willoughby & Dworkin, 2008; Carroll et al., 2007).

In reality, the marital horizon theory does not directly contribute much to understanding the perpetration of dating violence. Rather, it seems that one's marital horizon might mediate that individual's engagement in various risky behaviors (including problematic alcohol consumption), which play a more direct role in the perpetration of physical assault and psychological aggression. In addition, most of the predictors of dating violence deal with family of origin and relationship factors, including reciprocal escalation, with less focus on risk behaviors outside of alcohol consumption. Therefore, marital importance and the desired timing of marriage may influence factors that only contribute minimally to understanding one's perpetration of physical assault and psychological aggression.

Given that up to this point in the research literature, the marital horizon variables have only proven to impact risk-taking behaviors and various family formation values, it is possible that this theory is actually a proxy for conventionality or religiosity. Willoughby and Dworkin (2008) did control for religiosity with two items assessing the perceived importance of the participant's religious faith and how much time the participant spends on religious activities each week. Marital importance still emerged as a significant predictor of risk-taking behaviors in that study, but religiosity is distinct from conventionality. It could be that people who want to get married younger and place more emphasis on marriage hold more conventional beliefs in a variety of areas and are, therefore, less likely to do drugs, be sexually permissive, and have problematic alcohol consumption. Distinguishing marital horizon from more conventional beliefs in general is a crucial next step if this theory is to gain more credibility.

While the marital horizon theory has proven to influence emerging adults' participation

in various risk-taking behaviors (Willoughby & Dworkin, 2008; Carroll et al., 2007) and some of those risk-taking behaviors are known predictors of dating violence (Murray & Kardatzke, 2007), there does not seem to be a direct link between one's marital horizon and his or her perpetration of psychological aggression or physical assault. This study does indicate, though, that situational couple violence may be the most prevalent type of dating violence among college students today.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study contains several limitations. The first limitation is that the sample is comprised entirely of college students. This greatly limits the generalizability of the findings to emerging adults who do not attend college. While the sample did have a sufficient number of participants from various age ranges within emerging adulthood, the geographic location and level of education contained little variation. In addition, one of the variables used in the analysis, ideal age for marriage, was categorical and it would have possessed more explanatory power if the data were continuous. Furthermore, items for one of the key components of marital horizon theory, criteria for marriage readiness, have not yet been developed. As a result, the theory could not be tested in its entirety.

Future research needs to focus on distinguishing the marital horizon theory from other conventional societal beliefs. If that distinction is established, an alternate explanation will be necessary as to why it is that one's marital horizon does not reduce dating violence behaviors. The theory should also be applied to other behaviors during emerging adulthood to determine how many behaviors really are shaped by emerging adults' perceived distance from marriage. In addition, future research should aim to unearth the role violence plays in relationships as a couple makes the transition from dating to cohabitation and, ultimately, to marriage. It seems

that the timing of marriage and the importance of marriage do not influence perpetration, for the most part, but would the entry into marriage itself influence one's perpetration?

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Table 1: Demographic Information for the Sample (n=611)

	<i>n</i>	%
Sex		
Male	272	44.5
Female	339	55.5
Age		
18-19	144	23.6
20-21	301	49.4
22-23	142	23.3
24-25	22	3.6
Year in School		
Freshman	71	11.6
Sophomore	165	27.0
Junior	201	32.9
Senior	172	28.2
Graduate	2	0.3
Race		
European American	539	88.4
African American	34	5.6
Latin American	15	2.5
Asian	10	1.6
Native American	3	0.5
Other	9	1.5

Table 2: Relationship Characteristics of the Sample (n=611)

	<i>n</i>	%
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Relationship Status		
Currently in a relationship	291	49.1
Has been in a relationship in the past	218	36.8
Has never been in a relationship	84	14.2
Current Level of Involvement		
Single	189	37.4
Casual dating	58	11.5
Serious dating	66	13.1
Committed relationship	164	32.5
Engaged to be married	28	5.5
Cohabitation		
No	423	83.8
Yes	82	16.2
Relationship Length		
Less than one month	29	5.8
About one month	36	7.2
Two to five months	99	19.7
Six to twelve months	109	21.7
More than a year	100	19.9
Between two and four years	96	19.1
Four years or more	34	6.8
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