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**GENDER, RELATIONSHIP CONCERNS, AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE
IN YOUNG ADULTHOOD**

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ABSTRACT

Feminist theorists have emphasized that men's use of violence against women stems from and reproduces broad-based gender inequalities, while 'gender-neutral' approaches typically emphasize background experiences such as earlier violence exposure. Drawing on symbolic interaction and feminist post-structural theories as background, we examine more localized gendered relationship concerns that we argue are common yet little explored in prior treatments of intimate partner violence (IPV). This focus also provides additional context for interpreting women's relatively high rates of 'perpetration' as revealed in community surveys. While much prior theorizing has emphasized men's concerns related to women's actions (e.g., men's feelings of jealousy as a risk factor), the current study examines the role of disagreements centered on men's actions as well as those related to women's behaviors. Using data from a large, diverse sample of young adult women and men (Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study, n=904), results indicate that disagreements about male partners' actions during this period were actually more common, and relative to concerns about women's actions, more strongly associated with IPV. Findings highlight the need to attend to both types of concerns, suggesting considerable variability in relationship dynamics associated with IPV during young adulthood. However, foregrounding to a greater extent women's perspectives, including areas of disappointment with male partners' actions, fits well within a feminist framework. Thus, conflicts may escalate as a reaction to perceived 'negative attributions' that women's expressions of concerns represent, and to the prospect of curtailing the freedom of behavior and movement men may have previously enjoyed (i.e. connecting back to the notion of male privilege). Programs focused on IPV should continue to emphasize distinctions between men's and women's actions in terms of meaning,

seriousness, and consequences, while including attention to dyadic processes that may figure into commonly occurring forms of IPV.

Gender, Relationship Concerns, and Intimate Partner Violence in Young Adulthood

Numerous studies have identified risk factors for intimate partner violence (IPV), but much of this research focuses on what individuals bring with them into the relationship, rather than on dynamics that unfold within the relationship itself. Feminist theorizing has focused attention on power and control dynamics, and emphasized ways in which broader bases of gender inequality tend to be reproduced at the couple level (Komter, 1989; Sweet, 2019). Other research traditions have focused on early family socialization, conceptualizing IPV in more gender-neutral terms as an outgrowth of learned patterns of behavior. Yet several specific research findings highlight the need for further research on dyadic processes.

First, given the presence of a known predictor such as early exposure to violence within the family, a significant percentage of individuals do not go on to exhibit violence within their own relationships (Johnson et al., 2015). Second, research on patterns of IPV across the life course reveals discontinuities across time and different partners (e.g., Shortt et al., 2012; Whitaker et al., 2010). Third, research has shown that high levels of verbal conflict within a focal relationship are significant precursors of IPV (Capaldi et al., 2012; Felson, 2002). These findings point to the general importance of dyadic processes, but do not reveal much about specific sources of disagreement that develop as particular flashpoints. However, several recent studies focused on the adolescent and young adult periods have shown that infidelity concerns are a common ‘domain of contestation’ associated with increased odds of reporting IPV within a relationship (Giordano et al., 2015; Miller, 2008; Nemeth et al., 2012).

In this article, we contribute beyond prior work by considering gendered aspects of these common sources of disagreement, and their association with IPV during the young adult period. Young adulthood is an important phase of the life course, as self-report data and official statistics

indicate that levels of IPV typically peak during this period (Johnson et al., 2015; Rennison, 2001). Further, regardless of theoretical perspective, there is widespread agreement that women, relative to their similarly situated male counterparts, experience significantly greater fear, injury, and other detriments to emotional and physical health in connection with this form of violence (Ansara & Hindin, 2011). Given these realities, it is intuitive to expect that violence often follows from some form of male partner dissatisfaction with a female partner's actions. Feminist theorizing has appropriately focused on such dynamics and placed them within the broader context of power and control. Yet here we argue that focusing exclusively on dissatisfaction with women's actions does not provide a comprehensive portrait of the variation in these dynamic processes as they often unfold within the contemporary context.

The current analyses consider the degree to which conflicts revolve around female or male partner actions (especially but not limited to the experience of infidelity), and the association between these concerns and IPV. This is an important issue, as the dominant narrative within the field and associated examples widely shared in prevention and intervention materials often center on men's goals (cementing or reestablishing power within the relationship), as well as their concerns about or dissatisfaction with women's actions. A frequently used example is the young man who hits a partner because of the real or imagined attention she has paid to another man (Pence & Paymar, 1993; Sweet, 2019). What follows may include violent acts and other forms of coercive control that serve to isolate partners from friends and family as well as other men.

Although these concerns and this type of coercive control have been shown to be key relationship dynamics associated with IPV, we argue that issues related to men's actions coexist with these concerns, are more common as sources of disagreement, and within the context of a community sample, may be even more strongly related to IPV. A finding that many intimate

partner conflicts revolve around issues relating to men's actions would also support the need to consider women's concerns and behaviors, including the use of aggressive "conflict tactics" against their partners. These dynamics have been documented in numerous studies, but have generally been bracketed off when considering relationship-based sources of contention and sequences linked to IPV.

Our dyadic approach accords with the symbolic interactionist view of meanings as necessarily 'situated,' and feminist post-structural scholars' recognition that power is socially reproduced, but also multilayered, and subject to transformation within the framework of particular contexts (Cannon et al., 2015). Below we briefly review family violence and feminist approaches, and subsequently the utility of SI and feminist post-structural theorizing as a general backdrop for considering specific sources of contention associated with IPV. We draw on additional research findings, including a recent qualitative analysis, that provide a preliminary basis for expecting that: a) disagreements related to both women's and men's actions will increase the odds of experiencing IPV net of traditional predictors such as family history, but that b) conflict revolving around men's actions is likely more strongly related to the odds of IPV.

Background

The family violence perspective. Scholars whose work is linked to the family conflict or family violence tradition view IPV as an outgrowth of exposure to various forms of violence within the family (Sellers et al., 2005; Straus et al., 1996). Numerous studies have shown that the experience of parental IPV and/or child abuse victimization are associated with increased risk of experiencing IPV in one's own intimate relationships (e.g., Fritz et al., 2012). The perspective is closely aligned with survey methods and use of the "conflict tactics scale" (CTS) that measures whether respondents have perpetrated a variety of aggressive actions or been the victim of

perpetration of the same behaviors by a partner (Straus et al., 1996). This line of research is compatible with the broader tradition of social learning theories, and does not center heavily on the role of gender or unique aspects of the intimate relationship context. A controversial set of findings that emerged from studies relying on the CTS, however, is that rates of female perpetration are generally similar to or exceed the levels reported by men (Hardesty & Ogolsky, 2020; Nowinski & Bowen, 2012). Johnson (1995) attempted to address this issue by describing two types of IPV--‘situational couple’ violence, a less serious form that includes mutual violence and is most often documented in community surveys, and one-sided violence--‘intimate terrorism’-- that is highly gendered, includes elements of coercive control, and is most often found in samples of women located through victim-serving agencies or criminal justice settings.

Feminist perspectives. Feminist activists and researchers have focused most attention on this more serious end of the spectrum, and have worked to affect change in criminal justice responses, increase services for women victims, and heighten public awareness of the problem of men’s violence against women. The theoretical framework has guided research and programmatic efforts that have focused centrally on the gendered aspects of this form of violence (Dixon & Graham-Kevan, 2011; Pence & Paymar, 1993). Feminist perspectives emphasize how inequalities at the societal level connect to power and control dynamics, and ultimately women’s subordinate positions within the intimate dyadic context (Komter 1989). A key example is that the more favorable economic position men often enjoy may limit women partners’ freedom to leave problematic and/or violent situations (Brush, 2011). Owing in large part to feminists’ work in this area, public opinion about IPV has changed significantly in recent decades. For example, scales measuring the acceptability of men hitting partners typically receive relatively low levels of endorsement (Copp et al., 2019; McCarthy et al., 2018). Yet other broad-based changes such

as women's increased labor force participation have not eliminated the problem of IPV. Further, levels of prevalence reported among adolescent daters (who often are not economically dependent on partners) underscore the need to consider multiple ways in which relationship dynamics and issues of gender remain linked to conflict and conflict escalation. Another complication is that while patriarchal attitudes provide an important general basis for understanding IPV, research has shown that individual level variations in traditional masculine or patriarchal attitudes are not a consistent predictor of IPV perpetration (Sugarman & Frankel, 1996).

Finally, as noted above, the levels of self-reported use of various 'conflict tactics' by women, as reported in community samples, remain undertheorized from a feminist vantage point. Initially, scholars argued that when women hit partners, this is most often in self-defense (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). More recently, recognizing that this is not uniformly the case, researchers have emphasized that scales such as the CTS do not capture differences in the meaning and seriousness of male and female acts of perpetration (Hamby, 2016). These basic distinctions have been critical to highlight. Nevertheless, recognizing that women's and men's acts of perpetration are experienced differently, and that consequences are, on average, significantly greater for women victims, does not render women's own concerns and actions as lacking in meaning within the context of their intimate relationships.

Symbolic interaction and poststructural feminist perspectives. Symbolic interaction (SI) theories emphasize that individuals act on the basis of meanings, and focus on the ways in which these meanings are necessarily constructed from and responsive to the unique contingencies of particular situations (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Our use of this framework differs somewhat from prior IPV studies that have drawn on this tradition, as many such studies have

conceptualized ‘the situation’ in terms of the immediate precipitants of violent acts (e.g., whether alcohol was involved, or bystanders were present) (see Wilkinson & Hamerschlag, 2005). In contrast, our use of the concept encompasses the full range of experiences associated with involvement in a given relationship (Mullins & Miller, 2008). For example, an event that occurred early on in a relationship (e.g., infidelity) may nevertheless affect an individual’s current perspective and response to unfolding relationship concerns.

Contemporary feminist scholars have worked to avoid essentialism and binary conceptualizations in analyses of gender dynamics, and one outcome is an increased emphasis on the ways in which other positions (e.g., based on race/ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation and their unique intersections) complicate women’s challenges and adaptations (Ferraro, 2006; Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006). Also moving in the direction of greater complexity, post-structural feminist perspectives, like SI theories, focus centrally on the role of language and communication in the social reproduction process. Thus, gendered understandings and actions are affected by broader structural influences, but these are necessarily constituted at the local level (St. Pierre, 2000). These insights suggest the need to focus on women’s own histories and motivations, and how these affect communication processes and other developments within the romantic realm. For example, such communications may foster a more equitable power balance, and precede positive changes within a relationship. In such instances, partner communication is part of a sequence in which men begin to modify behaviors deemed harmful to the relationship. Alternatively, some men may develop resentments about any attempt to discuss shortcomings or alter their behavior; women may lash out verbally or physically due to frustrations with this state of affairs. In turn, men may draw on aggressive tactics as a way to negate women’s expressions of their concerns and/or acts of aggression against their partner. Thus, traditionally gendered

hierarchies and coercive processes may be introduced or reintroduced at any time, interrupting the shared features and apparent reciprocity that characterized these intimate interactions.

Gendered sources of conflict within young adult relationships

Symbolic interaction theories and feminist post-structural approaches draw attention to dyadic processes and their influential role in shaping perceptions and ultimately behavioral choices.

Previous empirical findings from the IPV literature (levels of verbal conflict as a reliable risk factor, women's relatively high rates of reported perpetration) provide additional evidence of the potential value of a dyadic lens. However, the traditional focus on men's use of violence as a way to hold onto or retake power within the relationship does not fully capture all of the more localized concerns that may be associated with IPV. Further, this perspective as initially theorized does not reveal much about women's perspectives on these unfolding events, or how feelings of disappointment and/or anger may figure into sequences of action and reaction associated with conflict escalation.

Yet if we consider other research outside the IPV literature, findings routinely point to gender differences in rates of involvement in actions likely to be viewed as 'problematic' during this phase of the life course. Studies across multiple substantive areas ranging from delinquency to substance use and in particular to infidelity have shown that young adult men (like their adolescent counterparts), when compared to similarly situated young women, on average report higher levels of involvement in these behaviors (Arantes, et al., 2020; Ford et al., 2002; Moffitt et al., 2001). Thus, as relationships grow in meaning and significance during young adulthood, women may react negatively to and express dissatisfaction with issues related to male partner involvement in these problem areas. The area of infidelity is likely to be a particularly critical arena, as this is a type of concern that goes to the heart of romantic involvement. This specific

concern thus has special meaning with its potential to reframe the past, engender negative emotions in the present, and render uncertain the future of the relationship.

A recent qualitative study provided suggestive evidence that although disagreements related to both partners' actions were common among IPV-experienced couples, conflicts related to men's actions appeared more prominent and associated with more heated conflicts (authors). This suggests the need to attend to women's reactions and behaviors (whether verbal expressions or hitting their partners) that gain meaning in context, not as evidence of 'gender symmetry' but as they may be part of consequential interactive sequences. Such communications may be interpreted as negative 'reflected appraisals' that potentially challenge men's positive self-views, and more broadly views about male privilege, freedom of movement, and for some, the viability of using sexual conquests as a measure of masculinity (Anderson, 2000; Kreager & Staff, 2009).

Thus, such heated interactions may trace a circuitous path back to men's coercive acts and the mismatched violence long emphasized in feminist treatments. Nevertheless, this represents a different--and we argue common--set of dynamics relative to traditional discussions, which more often revolve exclusively around men's goals (e.g., desire to consolidate power, make all the decisions, isolate their partners—see e.g., Pence and Paymar's (1993) power and control wheel). Largely bracketed off, then, have been discussions of women's perspectives and feelings of disappointment, especially those that revolve around men's actions. Our focus thus accords well with the basic objectives of the feminist perspective, and the goal of developing more well-rounded portraits of women's complex lives (Ferraro, 2006). The initial focus on men's motivations and aggressive acts has been critical to the process of ensuring that men begin to take responsibility for their own behavior. In addition, the attention to other forms of coercion and control have pointed to a wider constellation of behaviors that may accompany the use of

violence. Yet our view is that the resulting depictions do not provide a comprehensive portrait, as they fail to capture the processual and interactive aspects of IPV, and foster a binary, somewhat static presentation of gender dynamics associated with escalating conflicts. Conversely, gender-neutral theories and associated programs downplay the continuing impact of gender on the character of actions and reactions as they unfold at the dyadic level.

Current study

Building on a previous qualitative study that focused on a small number of violent couples, we rely on the full TARS sample that necessarily includes young men and women who have not experienced IPV, as well as those who report such experiences within their current/most recent relationship. We developed scales that tap the degree to which disagreements revolve around concerns related to male partner actions and concerns focused on female partner actions. The content areas of the items were drawn largely from the in-depth qualitative interviews we had conducted (areas include issues of infidelity/lack of commitment, privileging time spent with friends, and avoiding taking on adult roles, particularly economically). We hypothesize that: a) disagreements will be more likely to revolve around men's relative to women's actions, and that b) high levels of concerns related to men's actions will be more strongly related to IPV. The current study contributes beyond prior work, as the gendered aspects of the dynamics we focus on here have not been systematically investigated relying on a large sample, structured scales, and adequate controls. After documenting the prevalence of male and female concerns as sources of disagreement, we assess associations between these gender specific concerns and IPV, net of early family history (parents' IPV) and other relevant controls. Supplemental analyses examine moderation effects, including whether prior exposure via witnessing parents' IPV increases the impact of these male and female-centered disagreements.

Methods

Data and Sample

Analyses presented rely on data from the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS). The TARS, a longitudinal study that began in 2001, is based on a stratified random sample of 7th, 9th, and 11th graders. The sampling frame relied on school registration data from 62 schools across seven school districts in Lucas County, Ohio, but school attendance was not required to be included in the sampling frame. Most interviews took place within respondents' homes with preloaded questionnaires on laptop computers to ensure privacy. The TARS oversampled Black and Hispanic students. Data were collected in five waves in the following years: 2001, 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2011. The initial sample size at the first interview was 1,321, with the fifth interview retaining 77% of those respondents with a sample size of 1,021. Analyses of U.S. Census data have shown that characteristics of the Toledo area such as race, education level, and median family income closely parallel national figures (authors). The analytic sample consists of all respondents who participated in the wave 5 interview. We excluded respondents who did not report a current or most recent romantic partner from analysis ($n = 71$). Additionally, we omitted respondents who did not identify as Black, White, or Hispanic from the analyses due to the small sample size ($n = 22$). Further, also due to small sample size, we excluded respondents who reported on same-gender relationships ($n = 24$). The final analytic sample includes 904 respondents, including 493 women and 411 men between the ages of 22 and 29 years old.

Measures

Intimate Partner Violence. The dependent variable for the current study is a general measure designed to capture any IPV (either perpetration or victimization) that occurred in the respondent's current or most recent relationship at the fifth interview. This is measured using

eight questions based on the revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2) (Straus et al., 1996) ($\alpha = .91$). Items were similarly worded to measure victimization (e.g., during this relationship, how often has (partner) hit you?) (see online supplement for a list of all items included). We created a dichotomous variable to indicate whether the respondent reported any violence in the relationship (0 = no IPV, 1 = any IPV). In supplemental analyses, we separate outcomes by perpetration and victimization, and results do not differ substantively.

Sources of conflict. Our key focal variables assess the gendered nature of disagreements that occur within romantic relationships. Respondents were asked how often they fought about a variety of issues during their relationships. We use 5 items capturing issues related to commitment and infidelity, disapproval of friends, and lack of direction in life. The questions include comparable items that asked about disagreements related to the actions of the respondent and their partner. Specific items include “I wanted more commitment from him/her,” “He/She cheated on me,” “I thought he/she might cheat on me,” “He/She’s not doing anything with her life,” and “I don’t like some of his/her friends.” Corresponding items reference disagreements relating to the respondent (e.g., “I cheated on him.”). Responses ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). The index of *concerns about men’s actions* is coded using a mean score of the five items for male respondents reporting conflict about their own actions and female respondents reporting conflict about their male partners’ actions ($\alpha = .81$). The index of *concerns about women’s actions* was constructed and coded similarly ($\alpha = .74$).

Past experiences. Models also incorporate indices tapping past experiences. We measure *family history of IPV* retrospectively at the fifth interview using a mean score of four items indicating how often respondent’s parents engaged in physical partner violence ($\alpha = .95$). We measure *respondent prior IPV* using respondent’s reports of perpetration and victimization at the

first and second interview. These questions are also derived from the revised CTS2 (Straus et al., 1996) and coded dichotomously to indicate whether the respondent reported prior IPV (0 = no IPV, 1 = any IPV). We measure *partner's prior IPV* by asking respondents to report whether their partner has ever experienced a violent incident in a previous relationship (0=no, 1=yes). We measure *traditional gender role attitudes* with the item, "In most relationships the guy should be in charge." Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Control variables. We control for a number of sociodemographic variables including respondent's *gender, age, race/ethnicity* (White (reference), Black, or Hispanic), and *mother's education*, a proxy for social class background (less than high school, high school (reference), some college, and college or more). Further, models control for several adult status characteristics including *full-time work, parenthood status, and union type*. We use binary measures to indicate whether the respondent is employed full time and whether the respondent is a parent. We measure *union type* using three variables indicating whether the union was dating (reference), cohabiting, or married.

Analytic Strategy

We first present descriptive statistics in Table 1 and Figure 1. Due to the nature of our dependent variable we rely on logistic regression to estimate the odds of experiencing any IPV in a current or most recent relationship. For ease of interpretation we present the coefficients and odds ratios in Table 2. We present an initial zero-order model focusing on the bivariate results. Two additional models are presented that separately include concerns about women's actions (Model 1) and concerns about men's actions (Model 2). The final model (Model 3) includes both concerns about women's actions and men's actions along with the full roster of covariates.

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive results for the sample as a whole and bivariate analyses by gender of the respondent. As shown in the table, about 22% of the sample reports any IPV in their current or most recent relationship. Reports about the presence of any IPV are about equal for male and female respondents. Analysis of the separate perpetration and victimization scales that comprise the “any IPV” index indicate no gender differences in victimization, but higher self-reports of perpetration by women (Johnson et al. 2015). With respect to sources of conflict within their relationships, an important basic finding is that both men and women report higher levels of conflict due to concerns about male actions. We use a paired *t*-test to examine the differences in means for concerns about men’s actions ($M=1.70$, $SD=.78$) and concerns about women’s actions ($M=1.54$, $SD=.62$). Results reveal that respondents report significantly more concerns about men’s actions than women’s actions ($t=8.28$, $p<.001$). Additionally, these results remain robust when separated by gender, indicating that both men and women in the sample are more likely to report conflict in the relationship due to concerns about men’s actions (not shown).

(Insert Table 1 here)

Recognizing that responses may reflect disagreements centering on both male and female issues, we examined the distribution of these gendered relationship concerns. We calculated whether respondents indicated higher scores for concerns related to men’s actions or women’s actions, and grouped respondents into three categories: equal concerns related to men’s and women’s actions, more concerns related to men’s actions, and more concerns related to women’s actions. As shown in Figure 1a, among respondents reporting any relationship concerns, the most common pattern is to indicate greater concerns about men’s actions (52%), followed by equal levels of concerns (27%). As illustrated, reporting more disagreements related to women’s actions is the least common response (22%). Figure 1b shows a similar pattern among IPV

experienced respondents, with 80% reporting greater or equal concerns related to men's actions.

(Insert Figure 1 here)

Table 2 presents the coefficients and odds ratios based on logistic regression models predicting any IPV in the current/most recent relationship. We include the focal 'sources of conflict' variables indexing relationship concerns, measures of past experiences, and respondents' background characteristics. At the zero-order, both the scale indexing concerns about male partner actions and the measure of concerns revolving around female partner actions are associated with self-reports of IPV within the relationship. In a two-variable model without additional controls (results shown in online supplement), both concerns related to men's and women's actions significantly increase odds of IPV. Using a postestimation test for equality of coefficients we find that concerns related to men's actions are more strongly associated with IPV in this basic model ($\chi^2 = 6.13, p < .05$). Other zero-order results show that the indices reflecting past experiences and traditional gender role attitudes are all significant. That is, family history (parents' IPV), the respondent's own prior IPV, partner's prior IPV, and having attitudes favoring traditional gender roles, are all significantly related to increased odds of reporting IPV. Of the demographic characteristics, race/ethnicity (Black, Hispanic), cohabiting relationships, unemployed respondents, and individuals whose backgrounds include mothers with low education levels (less than high school) have higher odds of IPV.

The first multivariate model in Table 2 introduces the measure of disagreements about women's actions and the remaining covariates. This index is significantly associated with IPV, net of the controls. Parent history of IPV and respondent prior IPV continue to be significant in this model. Model 2 includes the index of disagreements about male partner actions, and other covariates, and the pattern is generally similar. However, in this model, respondent's prior IPV is

not significant. The complete model (Model 3) includes the indices of both types of concerns, and, consistent with expectations, both sources of conflict are significantly related to odds of reporting IPV. Yet disagreements related to men's actions are associated with 220% greater odds of IPV, whereas higher levels of disagreement about female partner actions are associated with a 76% increase in odds. We again used a postestimation test to determine whether the effect of these coefficients are equal.

In the full model (Model 3) with past experiences and other controls, we continue to find that concerns about men's actions has a significantly stronger association with IPV relative to concerns related to women's actions ($\chi^2 = 4.01, p < .05$). This result highlights that variability in reports about these specific concerns, particularly but not limited to those that revolve around the male partner's actions, are strongly linked to the odds of experiencing IPV within a particular relationship, even after traditional predictors of IPV have been taken into account. In the full model, family history continues to be significant, while respondent's own prior history and partner's prior history are no longer significant. However, working full time as well as cohabitation and marriage are still significant. We note also that upon introduction of these relationship-specific indices, the associations of demographic characteristics are no longer significant.

(Insert Table 2 here)

We conduct a series of additional sensitivity tests. Interaction terms of gender of respondent and the two sources of conflict were included and not statistically significant, indicating a similar effect of the male and female concerns on the odds of experiencing IPV, regardless of gender of the respondent reporting about these issues (results not shown). Additional models examined the potential interaction of the various past indices and the presence of the two types of concerns on

the odds of reporting IPV (results not shown). The majority of these interactions were not significant. However, there is a significant interaction between family history of violence and disagreements about men's actions on the odds of reporting any violence (see online supplement). This finding reveals that disagreements about men's actions are associated with IPV regardless of parental history of IPV, but the association is amplified when respondents' backgrounds included parental IPV. This finding thus forges a connection between dynamics emphasized by social learning theorists and our focus here on relationship-specific factors. We also estimated additional models focused on the separate scales tapping perpetration and victimization, and the pattern of results is substantively similar to the results using any violence (results not shown).

Discussion and Conclusion

Research on IPV has most often focused on imported elements—factors such as family history or peer normative climates that precede conduct within intimate relationships but often influence behavior within them. Researchers have also pointed to individual-level factors such as personality traits or attachment styles associated with IPV that similarly retain the emphasis on what individuals bring with them as they navigate their romantic relationships (Ulloa et al., 2016). Feminist scholars moved the lens closer to dyadic processes in outlining specific relationship dynamics (e.g., desire for control, tendency to isolate the partner, jealousy) that are often associated with men's use of violence. Yet the theoretical emphasis remains on the degree to which broader structural bases of gender inequality tend to be replayed at the couple level. In this sense, traditional feminist treatments can in some ways be classified as theories of importation.

Descriptions of relationship dynamics incorporated into many programmatic efforts have

focused on issues of power and control, and highlighted that injurious actions are not limited to the acts of violence themselves (e.g., intrusive control as a warning sign of abuse). While this perspective has provided the impetus for positive social changes, in this article we argued that depictions of these dynamics are not comprehensive as they: a) do not tap the full complement of relationship processes associated with IPV, and b) in emphasizing men's objectives and strategies (e.g., desire for control and power), have not fully elucidated women's responses, including feelings of dissatisfaction with what are viewed as the male partner's troubling actions. Further, recognizing the pressing nature of harms posed by relationships that fit the label 'intimate terrorism,' the associated depictions nevertheless do not fit seamlessly with the experiences of many couples who reported experiencing significant levels of IPV.

Symbolic interaction theorists recognize the ongoing influence of external factors, but view social interaction and communication as nevertheless central to an understanding of human behavior. Feminist post-structural theorists similarly focus on the importance of language and communication in the reproduction of gender inequalities, yet underscore that one's positions are multilayered and fluid; power thus may be contested in specific situations rather than being fixed at the outset. These insights provide a general basis for examining dyadic processes, including specific sources of contention that are significantly related to IPV within the context of young adult relationships. We drew on more general research on men's behavior patterns during young adulthood and recent qualitative analyses to develop the hypothesis that disagreements related to men's actions require additional research scrutiny.

To examine relationship dynamics associated with IPV in greater detail, we used data from a longitudinal study that has focused on the intimate relationship experiences of a large, diverse sample of young adults originally interviewed as adolescents. The current study relied on

questions in the most recent structured survey that asked specifically about the presence of conflicts revolving around male and/or female partner actions. These data provide a different perspective on gender and IPV, as we documented sources of disagreement that appear to occur frequently, but that have not been explored in-depth relative to those associated with one-sided acts of male perpetration. The findings thus offer additional context for interpreting results of prior research (e.g., women's relatively high levels of self-reported IPV; men's reports about partner control attempts; observed discontinuities across time and different partners) that have remained undertheorized in existing treatments. Analyses revealed that both men and women in the sample reported higher levels of conflict due to concerns related to men's actions. In turn, while conflicts related to female partner actions were significantly related to IPV, conflict related to male partner actions was more strongly linked to the odds of reporting IPV in a current or most recent relationship. These relationship-specific factors mattered net of traditional precursors such as exposure to IPV in the family of origin, and highlight the utility of considering the 'content' of disagreements as a way of further illuminating the play of gender in relationship dynamics associated with violence.

Within the contemporary context, public opinion has slowly shifted regarding the acceptability of men hitting their partners, but women's use of "aggressive conflict tactics" is not as well understood or as heavily proscribed. Prior research and descriptions in fact sheets about IPV emphasize that while men's violence is injurious in many ways, women's acts may be dismissed by men or seen as 'laughable' (Molidor & Tolman, 1998). Based on these results and findings from a recent qualitative study (authors), we would argue that in context, women's actions have meaning as they telegraph the perceived seriousness of their concerns, and the feelings of anger and disappointment they may be experiencing. In turn, men's own feelings of

anger may stem not just from the perceived shortcomings of a female partner, but from the negative attributions and potential to curtail previous freedoms that their partner's expressions of concern represent. Researchers have tended to bracket off women's attempts to contest the current state of affairs or their expressions of anger, recognizing the pressing need for men to take full responsibility for their own aggressive actions (i.e., to avoid any sense of blaming the victim). Yet a perspective that includes attention to women's perspectives and behaviors and such couple-level dynamics is likely to provide the most comprehensive framework for understanding the genesis and potentially the cessation of these forms of conflict.

While we focused on heterosexual couples, research on the relationship experiences of young adults who identify with the more complete range of gender identities will be required for a comprehensive assessment. Similarly, more systematic research is needed on the ways in which these and other gendered relationship issues connect to socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity. Additional research is also needed on the sequencing of these concerns and dynamics, including potential linkages between the relationship processes emphasized here and the intimate terrorism dynamic described in prior work. A complete assessment of relationship processes associated with IPV will also include more attention to the reciprocally related nature of many of these relationship experiences, as illustrated by the prevalence of those respondents reporting both types of concerns. Such findings fit with prior work indicating that male and female levels of partner control, jealousy induction, and use of violence are significantly correlated (Giordano et al., 2016). Yet the presence of these complex interrelationships itself fits well with the SI perspective, feminist post-structural theorizing, and the general notion that intimate relationships are lifelong sites of continuous learning and adjustment.

The analyses presented here did not focus heavily on the factors we labeled 'imported,' as

these have been addressed extensively in prior work. Yet factors such as family history were significant predictors, and thus future research should include more detailed assessments of the complex interplay of these background and relationship-based factors. For example, results of supplemental interaction models indicated that concerns related to male partners had a stronger impact on IPV when respondents reported a history of exposure to parental violence.

Taking into account these and other study limitations (e.g., the sample is regional), the analyses nevertheless contribute beyond prior work in shedding light on relationship processes and forms of violence that almost by definition occur more frequently relative to more extreme forms of abuse such as the intimate terrorism dynamic that has been stressed in many prior investigations of IPV. Thus, the conceptual terrain we identified has not been well-traveled either within the context of traditional feminist theorizing or gender neutral approaches. The gap is significant, as research, whether relying on TARS, other community based studies, or national samples, has demonstrated links between self-reports of partner violence and depression (Fletcher, 2010), relationship instability (Halpern-Meehin et al., 2013), and declines in the well-being of children exposed to these forms of parental conflict (Vu et al., 2016). And indeed, some research has shown that IPV that involves a ‘mutual’ element may be more likely than one-sided actions to result in injuries to women victims (Whitaker et al., 2007).

These findings about sources of disagreement have implications for prevention and intervention strategies. Some gender-neutral programs have centered more on the form than the content of interpersonal conflicts (e.g., anger management programs), but these are likely to offer only a partial solution if underlying bases of conflict and gendered aspects of these dynamics are not fully addressed. Other programs have included attention to common sources of disagreement (e.g., all teens may experience jealousy), but this gender-neutral approach does not reflect the

current results indicating that disagreements are more often based on concerns about male partner actions. Programs based on feminist perspectives have focused on gendered processes, but have primarily emphasized the male partner's attempt to control and dominate the partner, positioning this as a general objective of men's use of aggression and other intrusive actions. This picture describes well one set of highly injurious relationship processes, but does not take into account the apparent variability in these dynamics we documented in the current study. Thus, programs should also include attention to conflict involving: a) control dynamics related to specific contested domains such as men's infidelity, b) women's efforts to change (control) their relationship circumstances along with men's controlling actions, and c) negative emotions, communications, and actions that may arise based on such concerns. Reflecting on the interactive aspects of conflict may prove a recognizable starting point for developing programs that then go on to highlight the distinctively gendered features of these dynamics, including disproportionate harms related to men's use of violence against female partners.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Full Sample and by Gender (n=904)

	Total			Women (n=493)	Men (n=411)
	Mean/%	SD	Range	Mean/%	Mean/%
Dependent variable					
Any IPV	0.22			0.22	0.23
Sources of conflict					
Concerns - men's actions	1.70	(0.78)	1-5	1.71	1.70
Concerns - women's actions	1.54	(0.62)	1-5	1.51	1.57
Past experiences					
Parent's IPV	1.38	(0.79)	1-5	1.40	1.36
Respondent prior IPV	0.29			0.26	*
Partner's prior IPV	0.26			0.21	***
Traditional gender role attitudes	2.53	(1.00)	1-5	2.23	***
Sociodemographic characteristics					
Female	0.55			-	-
Age	25.43	(1.83)	22-29	25.41	25.46
Race					
White	0.68			0.68	0.68
Black	0.21			0.21	0.21
Hispanic	0.11			0.11	0.11
Mother's education					
Less than high school	0.11			0.11	0.10
High school	0.33			0.33	0.33
Some college	0.33			0.33	0.33
College or more	0.23			0.23	0.24
Adult status characteristics					
Working full time	0.56			0.50	***
Parent	0.45			0.49	*
Relationship status					
Dating	0.44			0.42	0.47
Cohabiting	0.32			0.30	0.34
Married	0.24			0.28	**

Source: Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study

indicates significant difference between men and women * p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 2. Logistic regression for the association between sources of conflict and the experience of IPV (n=904)

	Zero Order		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	b (SE)	O.R.	b (SE)	O.R.	b (SE)	O.R.	b (SE)	O.R.
Sources of conflict								
Concerns - men's actions	1.43*** (0.13)	4.16			1.43*** (0.14)	4.17	1.16*** (0.16)	3.20
Concerns - women's actions	1.33*** (0.14)	3.80	1.30*** (0.15)	3.68			0.56** (0.19)	1.76
Past experiences								
Parent's IPV	0.74*** (0.10)	2.10	0.62*** (0.11)	1.86	0.66*** (0.11)	1.94	0.65*** (0.11)	1.92
Respondent prior IPV	0.58*** (0.17)	1.80	0.46* (0.20)	1.59	0.32 (0.21)	1.37	0.35 (0.21)	1.43
Partner's prior IPV	0.63*** (0.17)	1.89	0.13 (0.20)	1.14	0.03 (0.22)	1.03	-0.03 (0.22)	0.97
Traditional gender role attitudes	0.20* (0.08)	1.23	0.13 (0.10)	1.13	0.10 (0.10)	1.11	0.10 (0.10)	1.11
Sociodemographic characteristics								
Female	-0.06 (0.16)	0.95	0.02 (0.20)	1.02	-0.17 (0.21)	0.85	-0.11 (0.21)	0.90
Age	-0.03 (0.04)	0.97	-0.06 (0.05)	0.94	-0.02 (0.06)	0.98	-0.02 (0.06)	0.98
Race								
(White)								
Black	0.60** (0.18)	1.82	0.09 (0.24)	1.10	-0.22 (0.26)	0.81	-0.22 (0.26)	0.80
Hispanic	0.74*** (0.22)	2.09	0.54 (0.28)	1.71	0.59 (0.29)	1.80	0.56 (0.30)	1.75
Mother's education								
Less than high school	0.61**	1.85	-0.15	0.86	-0.25	0.78	-0.22	0.80

	(0.23)		(0.31)		(0.33)		(0.33)	
(High school)								
Some college	0.09 (0.17)	1.10	-0.06 (0.22)	0.94	-0.16 (0.23)	0.85	-0.12 (0.23)	0.89
College or more	-0.89*** (0.23)	0.41	-0.42 (0.28)	0.66	-0.36 (0.29)	0.70	-0.33 (0.29)	0.72
Adult status characteristics								
Working full time	-0.71*** (0.16)	0.49	-0.63*** (0.19)	0.53	-0.61** (0.20)	0.54	-0.61** (0.20)	0.54
Parent	0.61*** (0.16)	1.83	-0.15 (0.20)	0.86	-0.28 (0.21)	0.76	-0.31 (0.22)	0.73
Relationship status								
(Dating)								
Cohabiting	0.58*** (0.17)	1.79	0.93*** (0.22)	2.53	0.81** (0.23)	2.24	0.89*** (0.24)	2.45
Married	-0.04 (0.19)	0.96	0.84*** (0.27)	2.31	0.83** (0.28)	2.29	0.91** (0.28)	2.48
Intercept			-3.35* (1.38)		-4.58** (1.46)		-4.98** (1.48)	
Likelihood Ratio			207.49***		259.39***		268.50***	

Source: Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study

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

Note: O.R. = Odds Ratio

Figure 1. Patterns of conflict related to male and female partner actions

