A DYADIC APPROACH TO EXAMINE THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN
INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP
SATISFACTION

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A Dyadic Approach to Examine the Association between Intimate Partner Violence

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Beate and Werner Bussberg, who have supported me throughout my entire education and who have taught me that “Was du heute kannst besorgen, das verschiebe nicht auf morgen,” which have been incredibly helpful words of wisdom in order for this work to be completed.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

A Dyadic Approach to Examine the Association between Intimate Partner Violence and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

by

Julia Friederike Hammett
Master of Arts in Psychology
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This study examined the association between intimate partner violence (IPV) victimization and romantic relationship satisfaction in a sample of 100 heterosexual newlywed couples. IPV, defined as the physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse of an intimate partner, is a prevalent concern for couples in the United States. The negative association between IPV and relationship satisfaction has been widely examined in the academic literature. However, the inter-relatedness of the effects that individuals’ behaviors may have on themselves (actor effects) as well as on their partners (partner effects) remains unclear. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to identify individual and relationship-level associations between IPV victimization and relationship satisfaction among newlyweds from their first to their third year of marriage. It was hypothesized that for both husbands and wives, higher levels of IPV victimization during the first year of marriage would be associated with a reduction in their own levels of relationship satisfaction (actor effects) and their partner’s levels of relationship satisfaction (partner effects) during the third year of marriage. In addition, it was hypothesized that the association between IPV and relationship satisfaction would be stronger for female victimization due to the fact that the consequences that follow from male perpetration are more severe than those that follow from female perpetration. To examine these hypotheses, archival data from a two-wave marital satisfaction study was used. Partners’ IPV victimization was assessed using the Aggression (AGG) subscale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (MSI-R) and relationship (dis)satisfaction was assessed using the Global Distress (GDS) subscale of the MSI-R. In order to statistically account for the effects that a partner has on an individual’s outcome, the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) was used. The APIM estimates both actor and partner effects, allowing for the investigation of issues of mutual influence on an outcome variable through dyadic analysis. Overall, it was found that wives’ levels of satisfaction were impacted by their own as well as by their partners’ levels of IPV victimization. Interestingly, while wives’ own levels of IPV victimization were associated with wives’ decreased satisfaction, their husbands’ levels of IPV victimization were associated with wives’ increased satisfaction. When splitting the sample by ethnicity, compelling patterns emerged, showing that while among Mexican Americans, wives’ IPV victimization was related to husbands’ decreased satisfaction, among Caucasian Americans, wives’ IPV victimization was related to husbands’ increased satisfaction. These results elucidate the role that gender and ethnicity may play in romantic relationships marked by aggression. More importantly, knowing about the mutual influence that violent partners have on one another and taking into account these effects when developing treatment plans might help researchers and...
practitioners to come up with the most effective interventions possible. Thus, the findings of the present study might be useful for the development of individual as well as couple-based interventions for IPV and for the development of differing treatment plans for male versus female victims of IPV as well as for Caucasian versus Mexican Americans.
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INTRODUCTION

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), often defined as the physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse of an intimate partner (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2012), is a prevalent concern for couples in the United States (O’Leary et al., 1989). Even newlywed spouses experience IPV. Studies indicate that 16% to 36% of newlywed husbands and 24% to 44% of wives have perpetrated physical aggression against their partners; over 90% of newlywed couples report that psychological aggression has occurred in the past year; and the prevalence of sexually aggressive behaviors among married couples is estimated to be as high as 50% (Panuzio & DiLillo, 2010). The negative consequences associated with IPV perpetration and victimization are numerous, ranging from increased levels of stress (e.g., Testa & Leonard, 2001) to severe depression (e.g., Peltzer, Pengpid, McFarlane, & Banyini, 2013).

Relationship satisfaction has been found to be one of the strongest correlates of spousal aggression (O’Leary et al., 1989). Previous research shows that higher levels of all types of IPV (physical, psychological, and sexual aggression) are associated with lower victim marital satisfaction (Panuzio & DiLillo, 2010) and that aggression may help discriminate between separated or divorced couples and those who remain married (Rogge & Bradbury, 1999). In addition, previous studies (e.g., Lawrence & Bradbury, 2007) highlight the need to understand the relationship between IPV and satisfaction in a context that does not only take into account within-person but also within-couple effects and that examines this relationship over time.

The purpose of the present study was to identify individual and relationship-level associations between IPV victimization and relationship satisfaction among newlywed couples from their first to their third year of marriage by using a dyadic data analysis approach. The fact that being a victim of partner violence might be associated with decreased relationship satisfaction does not appear surprising. In fact, this association has been widely examined in the literature and different risk factors and mechanisms underlying this association have been proposed. Panuzio and DiLillo (2010) examined the impact of three different types of IPV – physical, psychological, and sexual aggression – on relationship
satisfaction in a sample of newlyweds in their first, second, and third year of marriage.

Although it was found that, controlling for initial levels of satisfaction, all three types of IPV were connected to a decrease in satisfaction, psychological IPV was identified as the most consistent correlate of victim marital satisfaction. Similarly, in a longitudinal study of community couples in early marriage by O’Leary et al. (1989), 25% to 30% of victims of physical aggression became maritally dissatisfied over time. As these and other studies using different samples and methodological approaches (e.g., Marcus, 2012; Tang & Lai, 2008; Testa & Leonard, 2001) underscore, spousal aggression is quite common and its relation to decreased marital satisfaction is well documented.

Researchers have identified different risk factors of IPV perpetration and victimization. In a meta-analytic review of 85 studies, Stith, Smith, Penn, Ward, and Tritt (2004) identified emotional abuse, forced sex, illicit drug use, attitudes condoning physical violence, and marital satisfaction as the strongest risk factors of physical IPV perpetration. Using violence towards one’s partner (i.e., IPV perpetration) was identified as the strongest risk factor of one’s own physical violence victimization. As this review suggests, the association between satisfaction and IPV may be bidirectional. Relationship dissatisfaction may not only occur as a consequence of the experience of IPV but may also increase the likelihood that physical aggression might occur in a romantic relationship.

In addition, previous studies point to a variety of mechanisms to explain the association between IPV and satisfaction. For example, Shortt, Capaldi, Kim, and Laurent (2010) found that higher levels of IPV predicted lower levels of satisfaction only in couples who displayed low levels of externalizing negative affect. However, there was no evidence that couples’ positive affect moderated the effects of IPV on satisfaction. Additionally, in a critical review by Cano and Vivian (2001), marital satisfaction was identified as a moderator of the relationship between life stressors and husband-to-wife violence.

Finally, the literature suggests that gender may be an especially important moderator variable in understanding the relationship between marital satisfaction and IPV. A meta-analysis of 32 articles by Stith, Green, Smith, and Ward (2008) highlights the differential impact of perpetration and victimization on men’s and women’s levels of marital satisfaction. While the effect size for the relationship between satisfaction and IPV perpetration was found to be larger for men than for women, the effect size for the relationship between
satisfaction and IPV victimization was found to be smaller for men than for women. The authors propose that violent men might feel more shame than violent women and, as a result, might be less satisfied with their relationships. In addition, male victims might not be as fearful of their perpetrators as female victims and might thus experience a smaller decrease in satisfaction (Stith et al., 2008). A literature review by Caldwell, Swan, and Woodbrown (2012) resulted in similar findings, indicating that women experience greater decreases in relationship satisfaction as a result of IPV victimization than do men. The authors propose that gender’s instrumental role in the context of abusive relationships might be due to its strong relation to power. Due to cultural factors that typically ascribe a higher status to men than to women and due to men’s overall greater size and strength, women might be more likely to encounter severe outcomes when victimized (Caldwell et al., 2012). As a result, women might become more dissatisfied with their relationships than men. On the other hand, Ackerman and Field (2011) state that aggression may be more harmful to the quality of women’s romantic relationships than to the quality of men’s relationships regardless of whether the male or the female partner is the perpetrator of this aggression. The authors claim that women, both as victims and as perpetrators, are more dissatisfied with their relationships as a result of IPV, possibly due to differences in the ways men and women are socialized. Since women are commonly socialized to value social relationships more than men and men are commonly socialized to be more physical and aggressive in play than women, women may suffer more when their relationships are not going well while men may not perceive hitting or slapping as large a social norms violation as women (Ackerman & Field, 2011). Finally, Amanor-Boadu et al. (2011), in a study with 668 college students, found that physical violence victimization did not impact relationship satisfaction for either men or for women. Thus, the results of this study do not support previous findings, which suggest that female victims suffer a greater impact than do male victims.

Although the aforementioned studies describe gender differences in the association between IPV and relationship satisfaction, findings about the direction of these effects remain inconclusive. The reason behind this inconclusiveness might lie in the fact that several previous studies do not take into account the influence of partners’ behaviors on one another. By looking at gender as a moderator of the aggression-satisfaction association, researchers are unable to tease apart the effects that husbands’ and wives’ behaviors might
have on themselves from the effects that their behaviors might have on their partners. Thus, it remains unclear whether the strength and direction of this association will be the same or will be different when looking at the effects of husbands’ and wives’ IPV victimization on their own levels of relationship satisfaction and when looking at the effects of husbands’ and wives’ IPV victimization on their partners’ levels of relationship satisfaction.

To overcome the limitations of previous research it is important to examine the association between IPV and relationship satisfaction in a context that takes into account individual as well as relationship effects. In order to statistically account for the effects that a partner has on an individual’s outcome, Kenny, Kashy, and Cook (2006) have proposed dyadic approaches using the couple as the unit of analysis, rather than the individual. The Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006) estimates both, actor and partner effects, which allows the investigation of issues of mutual influence on an outcome variable through dyadic analysis (Martinez-Arango, 2013). Using the APIM, it is possible to assess the effect of an individual’s IPV victimization on their own relationship satisfaction (actor effect), as well as the effect of the individual’s IPV victimization on their partner’s relationship satisfaction (partner effect). This dyadic approach to the examination of gender effects in the aggression-satisfaction association tells us more than past research that simply examined gender as a moderator in the aggression-satisfaction association, in that it allows us to tease apart the inter-relatedness of partners’ behaviors. Therefore, a dyadic approach provides statistical advantages over previous research, in that it allows for examination of cross-level effects by treating partners’ data interdependently instead of treating data independently (as was done in most previous studies using individual-level data). In this way, interdependence of data can explicitly be controlled for.

In addition, in order to clarify the temporal nature of physical aggression and its effects on relationship satisfaction, collecting data at different time points is advantageous. A longitudinal design allows examination of whether a decline in satisfaction follows from the experience of IPV or whether IPV follows from a decline in relationship satisfaction. Based on previous research, it was expected that a decline in relationship satisfaction would follow from the experience of IPV victimization, because individuals who are victimized as well as individuals who have a partner who has been victimized (i.e., individuals who have perpetrated IPV) were expected to suffer in terms of their relationship satisfaction, either as a
result of the injury and loss of power that may go along with IPV victimization (e.g., Caldwell et al., 2012) or as a result of feelings of shame and guilt that may go along with IPV perpetration (e.g., Stith et al., 2008).

Newlyweds are an appropriate sample for examining issues of relationship change as they are in a particularly formative period of their partnership. In the first years of their marriage, couples are more likely to experience dramatic changes in relationship quality (e.g., Neff & Karney, 2005). In addition, according to Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, and George (2001), newlyweds’ behaviors and changes in their union at the onset of marriage foreshadow long-term marital fate. In a study of 168 couples, the authors examined connections between the first two years of marriage and marital satisfaction and stability more than 13 years later. Results indicate that initial feelings of love, perceptions of one’s partner’s qualities, and behaviors towards one’s partner may predict whether couples stay together or divorce. Furthermore, in Huston et al.’s (2001) study, most of the differences between couples that stayed married but differed in marital happiness existed at the outset of marriage. Studying newlyweds might be particularly informative when examining changes in intimate partner aggression. Previous research indicates that IPV tends to begin early in a relationship and tends to persist over time (e.g., Lawrence & Bradbury, 2001). In a study by Schumacher and Leonard (2005), partners’ marital adjustment, verbal aggression, and physical aggression were examined as risk factors for physical aggression during the first two years of marriage. Verbal as well as physical aggression by both husbands and wives were identified as longitudinal predictors of subsequent IPV by both husbands and wives. However, marital adjustment did not appear to be independently predictive of physical aggression. Thus, it is important to examine the temporal nature of physical aggression and its effects on partners’ satisfaction during an early stage of marriage. Studying aggression in newlyweds might not only have implications for understanding the directionality of the IPV-marital satisfaction association, but might also shed light on the temporal nature of aggression in intimate relationships and might have implications for predicting changes in aggression over time.

The present study aimed to assess actor and partner effects of IPV victimization and romantic relationship satisfaction using archival data from a two-wave marital satisfaction study. This archival data set contained data from 100 heterosexual newlywed couples. The
hypotheses proposed for the current study were based on the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model and the results from previous studies examining gender as a moderator in the aggression-satisfaction association. It was hypothesized that for both men and women, higher levels of IPV victimization at the first year of marriage would predict a reduction in their own levels of relationship satisfaction (actor effects) and their partner’s levels of relationship satisfaction (partner effects) at the third year of marriage. It was also predicted that the association between IPV and relationship satisfaction would be stronger for female victimization due to the fact that the consequences that follow from male perpetration are more severe than those that follow from female perpetration (see Figure 1 in the Appendix for a graphical representation of the proposed model). In addition to controlling for relationship satisfaction at Year 1, possible confounding variables, including age, education, income, cohabitation status before marriage, and presence of children, were controlled for in the present design. In addition, due to the preponderance of individuals who identified as Mexican-American in the current sample, this group was taken out and examined separately. Because acculturation, defined as the extent to which individuals identify with their traditional values, norms, and behavioral patterns versus the values, norms, and behavioral patterns of the mainstream culture, and acculturative stress, which is defined as the amount of stress and tension that may arise as a result of individuals’ acculturation or lack of acculturation, have been found to impact immigrant couples’ intimate relationships (e.g., Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler, Caetano Vaeth, & Harris, 2007; Flores, Tschann, Vanoss Marin, & Pantoja, 2004), these two variables were included as covariates in some of the analyses examining Mexican American couples.
METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Archival data from a two-wave marital satisfaction study among Mexican-American and Caucasian American newlyweds was used for the present study. To be eligible for the original study, participants had to be 18 years of age or older, within the first 12 months of their first marriage, and both partners were required to identify themselves as of the same ethnicity, either both Caucasian American or both Mexican American. During the first year of marriage, data from 139 heterosexual couples were collected and during third year of marriage, data from 101 heterosexual couples (plus three individuals whose partners did not participate in the study) were collected. While some couples provided information on the reasons for their separation, others simply could not be found. Analyses were conducted using data from those couples who participated in both rounds of data collection. Data from individuals whose partner did not participate in the study at Year 3 were excluded from the analyses. The final sample for analysis included 100 heterosexual couples (N = 200; one additional couple was found to never have been married and was thus deleted from the final sample for analysis.) At Year 1, husbands ranged in age from 19 to 58 years (M = 28.92, SD = 7.97) and wives ranged in age from 19 to 57 years (M = 27.56, SD = 8.08). Sixty-five percent of participants identified as Mexican American and 35% of participants identified as White.

PROCEDURE

In the original study, couples were recruited from the community through media advertisements, flyers, and in-person solicitation in Southern California. Upon completion of an initial screening questionnaire, each partner was interviewed separately during the first year and during the third year of marriage, either in face-to-face, telephone, or self-administered interviews. Each interview took approximately 60 to 90 minutes. At both time points, participants completed measures assessing a variety of dimensions related to marital satisfaction as well as mental health. Mexican American participants completed measures of acculturation and acculturative stress. In addition, a brief demographic questionnaire was
administered. As incentives, participants received $25 for the first interview and $45 for the second interview (for a total of $140/couple).

**MATERIALS**

In the original study, the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (MSI-R; Snyder, 1997) was used to assess participants’ marital quality and the anxiety and depression content scales of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2) were used to assess participants’ mental health. The MSI-R consists of 150 True-False items that cover 13 domains of marital interaction. For the purpose of the present study, only the Aggression (AGG) subscale of the MSI-R (to assess IPV victimization) and the Global Distress (GDS) subscale of the MSI-R (to assess partners’ relationship (dis)satisfaction) were used. The Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (ARMSA-II; Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995) and the Multidimensional Acculturative Stress Inventory (MASI; Rodriguez, Myers, Mira, Flores, & Garcia-Hernandez, 2002) were used to assess acculturation and acculturative stress among participants who identified as Mexican American. In addition, several demographic variables were assessed using individual items.

**Intimate Partner Violence Victimization (IPVV)**

Intimate Partner Violence Victimization (IPVV) at the first year of marriage was assessed using the AGG subscale of the MSI-R, which measures level of intimidation and physical aggression experienced by respondents from their current marital partners. It contains ten items, covering two aspects of related content, namely, physical aggression and non-physical aggression or intimidation. Examples include, “My partner has left bruises or welts on my body” and, “My partner has slammed things around or thrown things in anger.” For each item, participants indicated whether this statement was true (1) or false (0) of their current relationship. After reverse-scoring half of the items on the AGG scale, raw scores were summed, so that higher summed raw scores indicated higher levels of victimization. Afterwards, raw scores were converted to normalized T-scores. In the present sample, normalized T-scores ranged from 40 to 73 ($M = 49.51$, $SD = 8.37$) for husbands and from 40 to 66 ($M = 46.29$, $SD = 6.98$) for wives (For Caucasian American husbands, normalized T-scores ranged from 40 to 67 [$M = 48.80$, $SD = 8.09$]; for Caucasian American wives,
normalized T-scores ranged from 40 to 56 \( [M = 42.74, SD = 5.11] \); for Mexican American husbands, normalized T-scores ranged from 40 to 73 \( [M = 49.89, SD = 8.56] \); for Mexican American wives, normalized T-scores ranged from 40 to 66 \( [M = 48.20, SD = 7.14] \). Husbands’ and wives’ IPVV normalized T-scores at the first year of marriage were used as the antecedents in the present study.

**Relationship Satisfaction**

Relationship satisfaction at the third year of marriage was assessed using the GDS subscale of the MSI-R, which measures individuals’ overall dissatisfaction or unhappiness in the relationship. It contains 22 items, covering three aspects of related content, namely, pessimism regarding future of the relationship, general relationship dissatisfaction, and unfavorable comparison to other relationships. Examples include, “I get pretty discouraged about our relationship sometimes,” “There are many things in our relationship that please me,” and, “Our relationship is as successful as any that I know of.” For each item, participants indicated whether this statement was true (1) or false (0) of their current relationship. After reverse-scoring half of the items on the GDS scale, raw scores were summed, so that higher summed raw scores indicated higher relationship dissatisfaction. Afterwards, raw scores were converted to normalized T-scores. In the present sample, normalized T-scores ranged from 39 to 78 \( (M = 49.72, SD = 8.28) \) for husbands and from 39 to 79 \( (M = 48.51, SD = 8.30) \) for wives. (For Caucasian American husbands, normalized T-scores ranged from 39 to 62 \( (M = 48.09, SD = 8.04) \); for Caucasian American wives, normalized T-scores ranged from 39 to 60 \( (M = 44.80, SD = 6.39) \); for Mexican American husbands, normalized T-scores ranged from 39 to 78 \( (M = 50.66, SD = 8.33) \); for Mexican American wives, normalized T-scores ranged from 39 to 79 \( (M = 50.57, SD = 8.57) \)). Husbands’ and wives’ relationship satisfaction normalized T-scores at the third year of marriage were used as the outcomes in the present study.

**Covariates**

Husbands’ and wives’ relationship satisfaction normalized T-scores at the first year of marriage were included as covariates in all analyses. Relationship satisfaction normalized T-scores at the first year of marriage were calculated in the same way as relationship
satisfaction normalized T-scores at the third year of marriage (as described above). In the present sample, relationship satisfaction normalized T-scores at the first year of marriage ranged from 39 to 63 ($M = 48.82, SD = 6.09$) for husbands and from 39 to 70 ($M = 48.84, SD = 6.72$) for wives.

In addition, husbands’ and wives’ age and cohabitation status before marriage at Year 1 and education, income, and presence of children at Year 3 were included as covariates. In the present sample, husbands ranged in age from 19 to 58 years ($M = 28.92, SD = 7.97$) and wives ranged in age from 19 to 57 years ($M = 27.56, SD = 8.08$). Cohabitation before marriage was assessed with the item, “Did you and your spouse live together before you were married?” In the present sample, 43.0% of husbands and wives indicated they had cohabitated before marriage. Education was assessed with the item, “How many years of schooling have you completed?” In the present sample, most husbands either had some university completed (50.0%) or were university graduates (24.0%) and most wives either were university graduates (43.0%) or had completed some university (38.0%). Income was assessed with the item, “Which of the following best indicates your yearly income for last year?” In the present sample, the most husbands made between $10,001 and $25,000 (23.0%) or between $25,001 and $35,000 (19.0%) and the most wives made between $10,001 and $25,000 (29.0%) or less than $10,000 (24.0%) in the past year. Finally, presence of children was assessed with the question, “Do you have children?” In the present sample, 48.0% of husbands and 50.0% of wives indicated that they had children.

In some of the analyses examining the Mexican American sample only, acculturation and acculturative stress at Year 3 were included as covariates. Acculturation was assessed with the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (ARMSA-II; Cuellar et al., 1995). Examples include, “I speak Spanish,” “I speak English,” and, “I enjoy speaking Spanish.” Participants indicated the degree to which 48 statements applied to them on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely often or almost always). In the present sample, acculturation scores at the third year of marriage ranged from -3.19 to 2.05 ($M = -0.36, SD = 1.33$) for men and from -2.71 to 1.86 ($M = -0.36, SD = 1.15$) for women, with positive scores indicating higher orientation to the Anglo culture and negative scores indicating higher orientation to the Mexican culture (see Cuellar et al., 1995 for a more detailed description of the ARMSA-II). Acculturative stress was assessed with the Multidimensional Acculturative
Stress Inventory (MASI; Rodriguez et al., 2002). Examples include, “I don’t speak Spanish or don’t speak it well,” “I feel uncomfortable being around people who only speak Spanish,” and, “I feel pressure to learn Spanish.” Participants indicated the degree to which 25 statements were stressful for them on a scale from 1 (not at all stressful) to 5 (extremely stressful). In the present sample, MASI scores ranged from 1.00 to 2.25 (M = 1.38, SD 0.34) for men and from 1.00 to 2.49 (M = 1.35, SD = 0.35) for women, with higher scores indicating higher levels of stress.

**ANALYTICAL APPROACH**

A path-analytic approach was used to assess the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006). In Model 1, husbands’ IPVV at the first year of marriage and wives’ IPVV at the first year of marriage were added as antecedents and husbands’ relationship satisfaction at the third year of marriage and wives’ relationship satisfaction at the third year of marriage were added as outcome variables (see Figure 1 in the Appendix). In addition, all control variables (see above) were entered into the models. In order to examine differences by ethnicity, two additional models were analyzed, examining Caucasian American and Mexican American couples separately. Model 2 (see Figure 2 in the Appendix) was coherent with Model 1 except for the inclusion of only Caucasian American participants and Model 3 (see Figure 3 in the Appendix) was coherent with Model 1 except for the inclusion of only Mexican American participants. All analyses involving the Mexican American sample were first conducted without including acculturation or acculturative stress as covariates and were then first repeated with the inclusion of acculturation as a covariate and then repeated with the inclusion of acculturative stress as a covariate to examine the potential impact of these two variables on the association between communication and IPV victimization. Fit measures were not assessed. According to Kenny (2014), fit indices for SEM-APIM analyses may be misleading and thus, do not need to be reported.
RESULTS

MODEL 1: IPVV AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION IN THE OVERALL SAMPLE

Results of Model 1 partially support the hypothesis that higher levels of IPV victimization at the first year of marriage would predict increased levels of relationship dissatisfaction at the third year of marriage. As can be seen in Figure 1 in the Appendix, the greater wives’ IPV victimization at the first year of marriage, the greater wives’ dissatisfaction at the third year of marriage ($\beta = .190, p = .050$) and the greater husbands’ IPV victimization at the first year of marriage, the lower wives’ dissatisfaction at the third year of marriage ($\beta = -.224, p = .021$) All other actor and partner effects were found to be non-significant. For a full listing of all standardized regression coefficients with corresponding standard errors and levels of significance see Table 1 in the Appendix.

MODEL 2: IPVV AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION IN THE CAUCASIAN AMERICAN SAMPLE

Results of Model 2 are not coherent with the results of Model 1, indicating that the associations between husbands’ and wives’ IPV victimization at the first year of marriage and husbands’ and wives relationship dissatisfaction at the third year of marriage do not generalize across a solely Caucasian American sample (see Figure 2 in the Appendix). More specifically, the greater wives’ IPV victimization at the first year of marriage, the lower husbands’ relationship dissatisfaction at the third year of marriage ($\beta = -.486, p = .008$). All other actor and partner effects were found to be non-significant. For a full listing of all standardized regression coefficients with corresponding standard errors and levels of significance see Table 1 in the Appendix.

MODEL 3: IPVV AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION IN THE MEXICAN AMERICAN SAMPLE

Results of Model 3 are not coherent with the results of Model 1, indicating that the associations between husbands’ and wives’ IPV victimization at the first year of marriage
and husbands’ and wives relationship dissatisfaction at the third year of marriage do not generalize across a solely Mexican American sample (see Figure 3 in the Appendix). When not including acculturation or acculturative stress as covariates, all actor and partner effects were found to be non-significant. However, a marginally significant\(^1\) actor effect was found for wives, indication that the greater wives’ IPV victimization at the first year of marriage, the greater wives’ relationship dissatisfaction at the third year of marriage (\(\beta = .227, p = .059\)). In addition, a marginally significant partner effect was found for wives to husbands, indicating that the greater wives’ IPV victimization at the first year of marriage, the greater husbands’ relationship dissatisfaction at the third year of marriage (\(\beta = .200, p = .066\)).

When including husbands’ and wives acculturation as an additional covariate in the model, we found a significant partner effect for wives to husbands, indicating that the greater wives’ IPV victimization at the first year of marriage, the greater husbands’ relationship dissatisfaction at the third year of marriage (\(\beta = .219, p = .041\)).

When including husbands’ and wives acculturative stress as an additional covariate in the model, all actor and partner effects were found to be non-significant. However, a marginally significant actor effect was found for wives, indicating that the greater wives’ IPV victimization at the first year of marriage, the greater wives’ relationship dissatisfaction at the third year of marriage (\(\beta = .207, p = .087\)). In addition, a marginally significant partner effect was found for wives to husbands, indicating that the greater wives’ IPV victimization at the first year of marriage, the greater husbands’ relationship dissatisfaction at the third year of marriage (\(\beta = .203, p = .068\)). For a full listing of all standardized regression coefficients with corresponding standard errors and levels of significance see Table 1 in the Appendix.

\(^1\)In the present study, we defined a marginally significant effect as \(p < .100\)
DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to examine the association between partners’ IPV victimization and their romantic relationship satisfaction. Findings of the current analyses partially support the hypotheses that increased levels of IPV victimization would be associated with increased levels of dissatisfaction and that the association between IPV and relationship satisfaction would be stronger for female victimization.

In the overall sample, a significant actor effect in the expected direction emerged for wives, indicating that wives’ higher levels of victimization were associated with higher dissatisfaction among wives. In addition, a significant partner effect in the opposite direction of what was expected emerged for husbands to wives, indicating that husbands’ higher levels of IPV victimization were associated with lower dissatisfaction among wives. Thus, according to the current analyses, women become less satisfied with their relationships as a result of their own IPV victimization and become more satisfied with their relationships as a result of their husbands’ victimization. It is reasonable (and consistent with previous research; e.g., Caldwell et al., 2012) to assume that wives who are physically or emotionally abused by their partners will see their partners in a less positive light and will, as a result, be less happy with their overall relationship. The fact that husbands’ levels of IPV victimization are likely to go hand in hand with wives’ levels of IPV perpetration may explain the second part of the current results. It is possible that an increase in women’s perpetration leads them to perceive themselves as more powerful in the relationship. Previous studies have found that partners’ higher perceptions of interpersonal power were associated with higher relationship satisfaction (Bentley, Galliher, & Ferguson, 2007). In addition, a positive association between women’s levels of IPV perpetration and their satisfaction with their relationships has been detected in at least one previous study (Ulloa & Hammett, 2014).

Finally, the present findings of the overall sample showing that husbands’ relationship satisfaction was not affected by either their own or their partner’s IPV victimization are consistent with some of the extant literature showing that the experience of IPV has a stronger effect on women’s levels of satisfaction than on men’s levels of
satisfaction (e.g., Ackerman & Field, 2011). It may be that overall, for men, the experience of IPV is not as tightly connected to the way they perceive their partner and to the way they perceive their overall relationship. It is possible that men do not perceive IPV as severely and detrimentally, because they tend to experience less severe outcomes (e.g., injuries) than do women (Caldwell et al., 2012). Moreover, it may be that men do not become as fearful after experiencing IPV and, thus, their personal perceptions of power and control are not as strongly impacted as are women’s perceptions of power and control (Caldwell et al., 2012).

Previous research has found that men’s higher perceptions of power were associated with lower chances of break-up (Felmlee, 1994). Lower chances of break-up are likely connected to lower levels of dissatisfaction. Thus, it is possible that men, who do not experience as much fear and loss of power in the aftermath of IPV as do women, are not as negatively impacted in terms of their levels of satisfaction when involved in violent relationships.

Interestingly, when the current sample was split based on ethnicity (Caucasian Americans versus Mexican Americans), the same actor and partner effects detected in the overall sample did not emerge. In the solely Caucasian American sample, only one significant partner effect emerged for wives to husbands, indicating that wives’ greater IPV victimization was associated with lower relationship dissatisfaction among husbands. In addition to being counterintuitive, this finding was also contradicted by the positive association between wives’ victimization and husbands’ dissatisfaction in the solely Mexican American sample.

The opposition in the direction of effects and the larger sample size of the Mexican American sample (in which the predicted positive association emerged) may account for the positive association between IPV victimization and dissatisfaction observed in the overall sample. It is surprising that Caucasian men who perpetrate IPV (which is a behavior that is likely to go along with their wives’ levels of IPV victimization) were found to be more satisfied with their relationships. However, it could be that the same mechanism that may account for the negative partner effect for husbands’ IPV victimization to wives’ satisfaction as detected in the overall sample may be at play: Husbands who physically or emotionally abuse their partners may feel that they possess more power and control in the relationship. These feelings may validate society’s view that men are the “stronger” gender in a
relationship (Caldwell et al., 2012) and may thus enhance husbands’ satisfaction with not only themselves but also with their overall relationship.

However, the same mechanism may not be at play among Mexican American couples. In fact, Mexican American men who perpetrate IPV (which is likely to go along with their wives’ levels of IPV victimization) were found to be less satisfied with their relationships. Previous cross-cultural research has found that individuals from collectivist cultures generally tend to be conflict-avoidant (e.g., Bermudez & Stinson, 2012). In addition, traditional Mexican American couples are likely to identify with a familistic orientation and adhere to the cultural values personalismo (a warm and personal way of relating to others), simpatico (emphasis on harmonious social relationships), and respeto (dignity and respect towards others; Flores et al., 2004). The perpetration of IPV does not adhere to this orientation and to these values and thus, Mexican American husbands who perpetrate IPV may feel especially uncomfortable and may become less satisfied with their relationships as a result of IPV. Also, while the concept of machismo is usually thought of as indicating male dominance and control, as a cultural ideal of manliness, it also encompasses the notion that men should be caretakers and providers of the family and generally do good for the family (e.g., Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008; Pardo, Weisfeld, Hill, & Slatcher, 2013; Torres, Solberg, & Carlstrom, 2002). IPV victimization of wives may be an indicator that, in their relationships, husbands are not living up to this ideal of manhood that is quite important in the Mexican-American culture, thus, contributing to their unhappiness.

Finally, a marginally significant actor effect for Mexican American wives was detected, indicating that wives’ higher levels of victimization were associated with higher dissatisfaction among wives. This finding supports our predictions as well as previous research and also mirrors the effect detected in the overall sample. Thus, it is likely that general findings indicating that women’s IPV victimization strongly impacts their levels of relationship satisfaction (e.g., Caldwell et al., 2012) generalized across Mexican Americans.

**STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS**

Several factors of the methodological design of the current study enhance confidence in the present findings. A great advantage of this study over some previous work is the use of a dyadic design. Collecting data from both husbands and wives allowed for assessment of the
effects that individuals’ behaviors had on themselves as well as on their partners, while statistically accounting for the interdependence of partners’ behaviors (Kenny et al., 2006). Additionally, the data used for the present research were assessed at two different time points, during the first and during the third year of marriage. This allowed accounting for husbands’ and wives’ initial levels of IPV victimization in the analyses and helped clarify the temporal nature of the IPV-satisfaction association. Moreover, several covariates that have been found to be associated with relationship satisfaction in previous research were included in the analyses to account for variance associated with these variables. Furthermore, even though not diverse in terms of ethnicity, the present sample was not only composed of White, ethnic-majority couples, who tend to predominantly make up the samples of research on relationship satisfaction. The high preponderance of Mexican American couples in the current sample thus provided an advantage over previous research in that it allowed examination of differences in the IPV-satisfaction association between these two sub-groups. Finally, when examining the solely Mexican American sample, we re-ran all analyses accounting for acculturation and acculturative stress, two variables that have been found to play a role in influencing immigrant couples’ levels of satisfaction with their relationships (e.g., Caetano et al., 2007; Flores et al., 2004).

However, there are also some factors that may limit interpretation of the current findings. First, the overall sample of the current study was rather small, and when split by ethnicity, the sizes of the Caucasian and Mexican American sub-samples were even smaller. As a result of the small sample size, power of the current analyses might have been limited and additional true actor or partner effects may have been missed. Nevertheless, some significant effects were found, which enhances faith in these findings.

Second, the homogeneity of the current sample might limit generalization of the effects detected to populations that are more diverse in terms of age, length of marriage, relationship status, as well as prevalence and severity of IPV. It may be that actor and partner effects between IPV and satisfaction will look different among couples in more established marriages or dating relationships as well as among couples from clinical samples recruited from violence shelters or batterers’ treatment programs.

Third, data were collected at only two points in time, during the first and during the third year of marriage. It might be particularly useful to collect data at earlier time points,
such as during the engagement period or even before then, to be able to assess potential risk factors of IPV that may ultimately be helpful in the development of IPV prevention programs. Likewise, follow-ups throughout later time points in marriage might elucidate whether IPV persists over time and whether the effects of IPV on satisfaction remain stable or not. Furthermore, the two assessment points were separated by two years. Using smaller time increments, such as days or weeks (e.g., use of couples’ diary data) might allow to specifically address patterns of escalation and de-escalation of violence as well as the relation of these patterns to relationship satisfaction.

Finally, the measures of IPV and satisfaction used in the present study provide some limitations in regards to the validity of their assessment. The current study relied solely on self-report measures, which might bias the findings detected here. In addition, the IPV victimization measure lacked assessment of severity of violence. Also, the present study assessed IPV victimization but did not assess IPV perpetration. Although the measure clearly asked participants to report acts of violence received by their current marital partner (i.e., the partner who participated in the study with them), previous studies (e.g., Hamby, 2009) have found that one partner’s reports of IPV victimization do not always perfectly overlap with the other partner’s reports of IPV perpetrators. This measurement concern may be due to partners’ differential definition of violence experienced as well as issues of social desirability that may prevent perpetrators from honest reporting. Thus, although it is reasonable to assume that one partner’s IPV victimization may go along with the other partner’s IPV perpetration, this assumption is made without certainty. Furthermore, this lack of assessment of perpetration prevented evaluation of bidirectional violence. Since this form of violence is the most prevalent case of IPV (Anderson, 2002), assessment of bidirectional IPV and distinction between unidirectional IPV (perpetration-only versus victimization-only) and bidirectional IPV is important when examining the association between partners’ aggression and their relationship satisfaction.

**Future Research**

Future research may benefit from addressing the limitations addressed above. For example, researchers may consider replicating the present study using a larger and more diverse sample (different age groups, relationship status, clinical versus community,
additional ethnic groups) and collecting data at more than two points in time (either with smaller or larger time spans in between assessments). In addition, it might be advantageous to use measures other than self-report to assess the study variables. Observational measures could be used to assess partners’ affection towards one another, which may be indicative of their relationship satisfaction. Less direct attitude measures, such as a variant of the Semantic Differential (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957) may be useful in assessing partners’ satisfaction without explicitly asking them about their perceptions. Moreover, future research should consider assessing IPV perpetration in addition to assessing IPV victimization and should examine differences in the IPV-satisfaction association based on partners’ perpetrator-victim role (i.e., whether they are the perpetrator or victim of IPV or both). This would allow researchers to assess differences in the IPV-satisfaction association between unidirectionally and bidirectionally violent couples.

Finally, it is important to examine the mechanisms that may account for differences between husbands and wives and between couples from different cultures in the association between IPV victimization and relationship satisfaction. For example, power and control, which were speculated to play a role in explaining the current gender differences (e.g., Bentley et al., 2007), should be directly examined and possible moderation or mediation effects should be assessed. Similarly, Mexican Americans’ familialistic orientation and cultural values could be assessed as potential mechanisms. In addition, it might be interesting to examine more general motives for IPV, such as personality and attitudes (related to different types of intimate terrorists, such as “pit bulls” and “cobras,” as identified in previous research; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998), as well as situational factors, such as escalation/de-escalation of arguments and communication patterns. Statistical techniques such as lag sequential analyses and the use of daily diary data might be especially appropriate to address research questions pertaining to these latter factors.

**Practical Implications**

The present findings may be useful to those working with intimate partners. Knowing about the mutual influence that violent partners have on one another and taking into account these effects when developing treatment plans might help practitioners to come up with the most effective interventions possible. Lawrence, Eldridge, and Christensen (1998) have
delineated ways in which a perspective of intimate relationships including not only individual factors but also dyadic development might guide the enhancement of traditional behavioral couples therapy. The authors propose improved techniques that include the consideration of individual factors, such as attachment styles, as well as the consideration of the impact of dyadic development on relationship satisfaction. These techniques could be used in therapy for victims and perpetrators of IPV by considering partners’ communication patterns and escalation of violence due to anger and loss of control, factors that can only be understood when taking a dyadic therapy approach.

Since the present findings show that husbands’ and wives’ relationship satisfaction was impacted differently as a result of IPV, it is important to take gender into account when treating male and female victims and perpetrators of IPV. Generally, wives’ levels of satisfaction were more strongly affected by the experience of IPV victimization and thus should be a focus in marital therapy. These gender differences in the IPV-satisfaction association may be due to men’s and women’s differential perceptions and interpretations of IPV. When treating violent partners, clinicians should address mediating factors of the IPV-satisfaction association that may differ by gender, such as women’s fear resulting from the experience of IPV and men’s potential desire to exert control over their partner as well as their feelings of shame and guilt (Caldwell et al., 2012).

Furthermore, ethnic differences were detected in our findings, lending support for the conclusion that cultural origin needs to be taken into account when working with intimate partners who may have an immigration background. Practitioners should value Mexican Americans’ familialistic orientation and should keep in mind the additional burden that this orientation may bring about for couples affected by IPV when conducting marital therapy. Thus, the findings of the present study should motivate clinicians administering treatment programs for distressed Mexican American couples to assess their levels of IPV perpetration as well as victimization, because our results show that female victimization may increase the likelihood of distress among both husbands and wives in this ethnic group. Soto-Fulp and DelCampo (1994) suggest guidelines for working with families from Mexican-American family systems, in which they highlight the importance of taking cultural values, such as personalismo and machismo, into account during therapy. These guidelines could be applied
to therapy with Mexican-American husbands and wives who experience relationship violence in their marriages.

Combining the different pieces of knowledge gained from the present study (importance of a dyadic approach and potential mechanisms underlying gender and ethnic differences in the IPV-satisfaction association) might allow researchers and practitioners to come up with the most effective IPV and relationship distress interventions possible. In line with the current findings, Epstein and Baucom (2002) have proposed a contextual approach to enhance traditional cognitive-behavioral therapy for couples. They point out that couples therapy needs to incorporate a framework that focuses on the behavior of individuals in relationships within the context of broader relationship patterns (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). This contextual approach might be appropriate when treating individuals or couples affected by IPV as the dynamic processes that may take place within the relationship as well as external processes that influence the couple’s relationship (e.g., larger family systems, job loss) may influence partners’ levels of aggression. Using this approach by Epstein and Baucom’s (2002) the present findings could be incorporated into therapy for maritally distressed victims and perpetrators of IPV. In order for IPV treatment programs to be the most effective, clinicians might want to take a dyadic approach, acknowledging the dynamic processes that might be involved in the escalation of violence among partner, while simultaneously considering differential motives and outcomes of IPV depending on gender and cultural origin. Being aware of a couple’s context and environment might thus be of utmost importance in order to alleviate the negative effects that the experience of IPV might have on partners’ relationships (such as decreased relationship satisfaction) and to avoid the re-occurrence of IPV in the long-run.

Finally, the current findings could be used by considering viable alternatives to the treatment of marital distress (which may lead to additional severe outcomes, such as poor mental health; e.g., Fincham, Beach, Harold, & Osborne, 1997), such as marital distress prevention programs. Assessing and working on avoiding intimate partner violence may decrease the chances of partners’ experience of marital distress and dissatisfaction. One such prevention program that, among other things, tackles partners’ IPV, already exists. The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993) is administered to couples while they are still happy or in the
early stages of distress. PREP takes a dyadic approach to therapy by teaching marital/premarital couples essential skills: how to communicate effectively, work as a team, solve problems, manage conflict, and preserve and enhance love, commitment, and friendship. According to previous research, PREP is effective in reducing partners’ risk of IPV, which, subsequently, may lead to a reduced likelihood of relationship distress (Markman et al., 1993).

**CONCLUSIONS**

The data from the present study highlight important considerations for understanding patterns of IPV and relationship satisfaction among Caucasian and Mexican American community couples. Overall, it was found that wives’ levels of satisfaction were impacted by their own as well as by their partners’ levels of IPV victimization. Interestingly, while wives’ own levels of IPV victimization were associated with wives’ decreased satisfaction, their husbands’ levels of IPV victimization were associated with wives’ increased satisfaction. When splitting the sample by ethnicity, compelling patterns emerged, showing that while among Mexican Americans, wives’ IPV victimization was related to husbands’ decreased satisfaction, among Caucasian Americans, wives’ IPV victimization was related to husbands’ increased satisfaction. Clearly, additional dyadic research examining ethnic differences as well as differences based on individuals’ perpetrator-victim role in the IPV-satisfaction association is needed. The present study may provide a useful basis for examining this association in a larger, more diverse sample. In addition to providing benefits to researchers in the areas of IPV and satisfaction, the present findings may aid practitioners and policy makers in developing prevention and interventions plans designed to alleviate marital distress. These treatment programs might acknowledge the dynamic processes involved in dyads’ violence and might differentially emphasize specific aspects of treatment (e.g., addressing men’s feelings of shame and guilt, women’s feeling of fear, and Mexican Americans’ familialistic orientation) depending on couples’ individual circumstances.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

FIGURES AND TABLES
Figure 1. APIM model for the association between intimate partner violence victimization during the first year of marriage and relationship dissatisfaction during the third year of marriage for the overall sample.

Note. * p =/< .10, **p =/< .05, *** p =/< .01. Standardized regression coefficients are shown. Covariates were included in all analyses. IPVV = Intimate Partner Violence Victimization, RDS = Relationship Dissatisfaction.

Figure 2. APIM model for the association between intimate partner violence victimization during the first year of marriage and relationship dissatisfaction during the third year of marriage for the Caucasian American sample.

Note. * p =/< .10, **p =/< .05, *** p =/< .01. Standardized regression coefficients are shown. Covariates were included in all analyses. IPVV = Intimate Partner Violence Victimization, RDS = Relationship Dissatisfaction.
Figure 3. APIM model for the association between intimate partner violence victimization during the first year of marriage and relationship dissatisfaction during the third year of marriage for the Mexican American sample (without the inclusion of acculturation or acculturative stress as additional covariates; with the inclusion of acculturation as an additional covariate; with the inclusion of acculturative stress as an additional covariate).

Note. * p =/ < .10, **p =/ < .05, ** p =/ < .01. Standardized regression coefficients are shown. Covariates were included in all analyses. IPVV = Intimate Partner Violence Victimization, RDS = Relationship Dissatisfaction.
### Table 1. Standardized Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors of Study Variables (Models 1 through 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome:</th>
<th>Model 1 (Overall Sample)</th>
<th>Model 2 (Caucasian Sample)</th>
<th>Model 3 (Mexican Sample)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDS W</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPVV W</td>
<td>.190</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.196&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.121&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.107&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPVV H</td>
<td>-.224</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.178&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.130&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.171&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
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Outcome: RDS H

| IPVV W                            | .106 | .105 | .311 | -.077 | .201 | .702 | .200 | .109 | .066 |
|                                  | .219<sup>a</sup> | .107<sup>a</sup> | .041<sup>a</sup> | .203<sup>b</sup> | .111<sup>b</sup> | .068<sup>b</sup> |
| IPVV H                            | .079 | .105 | .452 | .099 | .206 | .632 | .111 | .117 | .342 |
|                                  | .103<sup>a</sup> | .113<sup>a</sup> | .363<sup>a</sup> | .075<sup>b</sup> | .116<sup>b</sup> | .542<sup>b</sup> |

*Note.* RDS = Relationship Dissatisfaction at Year 3, IPVV = Intimate Partner Violence Victimization at Year 1, W = Wives, H = Husbands. Covariates were included in all analyses.

<sup>a</sup>Results of Models 3 when including acculturation as an additional covariate in the model.

<sup>b</sup>Results of Models 3 when including acculturative stress as an additional covariate in the model.