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Relational Dynamics Associated with Adolescent Dating Violence: The Roles of Rejection Sensitivity and Relational Insecurity

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The significant rates of dating violence among adolescents have prompted investigations into underlying relational processes that might increase the risk for perpetration and victimization. Two relational constructs that have potential significance for predicting adolescent dating violence are rejection sensitivity and relational insecurity. This study investigated the relationships among relational insecurity, rejection sensitivity, and dating violence perpetration and victimization in a sample of 176 adolescents. Results indicated that relational insecurity fully mediated the relationship between rejection sensitivity and dating violence perpetration, and that relational insecurity was directly related to dating violence victimization. Results suggest that adolescent dating violence prevention programs might need to address victimization and perpetration in different ways.

KEYWORDS adolescence, dating violence, rejection sensitivity, relational insecurity

Dating violence, defined as "any attempt to control or dominate another person physically, sexually, or psychologically, resulting in harm" (Wolfe

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& Feiring, 2000, p. 360), is a pervasive and significant problem in adolescence. Results of a national, longitudinal study suggest that as many as 32% of youth in the United States are victimized by dating violence at some point during their teenage years (Halpern, Oslak, Young, Martin, & Kupper, 2001). Furthermore, rates of psychological and physical victimization appear to be virtually identical for girls and boys in Grades 7 through 12 (Halpern et al., 2001; O'Keefe, 1997), although adolescent females are significantly more likely to be sexually victimized by dating partners than are adolescent males (Howard & Wang, 2005; O'Keefe, 1997; Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). Given the relatively high rates of dating violence among adolescents, it is important to examine the risk factors, underlying relational processes, and gender dynamics associated with this behavior.

One particularly pernicious risk factor for involvement in violent relationships is exposure to violence in the family of origin (Feiring, Rosenthal, & Taska, 2000; Grych & Kinsfogel, this issue; Wolfe et al., 2001; Wolfe & Wekerle, 1997; Wolfe, Wekerle, Reitzel-Jaffe, & Lefebvre, 1998). It is in the context of their relationships with caregivers that children develop internal working models of self and other (Bowlby, 1969/1982). When these relationships have been characterized by inconsistency and violence, youths might replicate in friendships and romantic partnerships the maladaptive patterns of relating they experienced in their families (Bartholomew, Henderson, & Dutton, 2001; Cicchetti & Toth, 1995). In particular, youth growing up in abusive homes learn from their families that violence and intimidation are tools for maintaining relationships and solving conflict (Cicchetti & Howes, 1991), increasing the likelihood that they will become involved in violent romantic relationships (Wolfe et al., 1998). In addition, Cicchetti and Howes (1991) proposed that children who witness interparental violence internalize both sides of their caregivers' relationship, such that they identify with both the victim and the perpetrator roles. Thus, there is a continuity of relationship patterns in which "adolescents who were abused as children appear to choose partners who continue to act abusively toward them (and to whom they act abusively as well)" (Wolfe et al., 1998, p. 80).

In an attempt to account for the connection between growing up in an abusive home and being involved in violent dating relationships, Downey, Khouri, and Feldman (1997) proposed the concept of rejection sensitivity (RS), or "the disposition to anxiously or angrily expect, readily perceive, and overreact to rejection" (p. 85). The RS model, which draws from attachment, social-cognitive, and interpersonal theories, hypothesizes that RS develops when children's emotional needs are repeatedly met with rejection by caregivers or other important people in their lives (Downey, Bonica, & Rincon, 1999; Levy, Ayduk, & Downey, 2001). As a result, youth come to expect that they will be rejected when seeking support or acceptance from others, and become hypervigilant and overly reactive to rejection in ambiguous

situations (Downey et al., 1997; Levy et al., 2001). In the face of perceived rejection, youths high in RS respond with defensive emotions of hurt, anger, or anxiety, which then lead to maladaptive interpersonal strategies such as hostility, aggression, or withdrawal (Downey et al., 1997; Downey, Lebolt, Rincon, & Freitas, 1998; Galliher & Bentley, this issue; Levy et al., 2001).

Sensitivity to rejection can increase the risk of adolescents' involvement in violent romantic relationships in a number of ways (Downey Feldman, & Ayduk, 2000). First, theorists studying the sequelae of child maltreatment propose that youth from abusive homes might become involved precociously in dating relationships in an effort to gain the acceptance and security missing from their relationships with caregivers (Mueller & Silverman, 1989). Thus, child abuse might increase the likelihood that youths will become involved in romantic and sexual intimacies before they are developmentally and emotionally prepared for them (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). Second, RS could lead to youths' overvaluing of "partners who are attentive, who need them, and who seek a rapid intensification of commitment early in the relationship" (Downey et al., 1999, p. 163). Third, the rapid commitment and intensification of their romantic relationships places individuals high in RS at greater risk to become involved with partners who participate in dating violence (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1998; Wolfe et al., 1998). For example, youth high in RS might be more willing than those low in RS to remain in a relationship with an abusive partner because of their intense need for acceptance and connection (Downey et al., 1997; Levy et al., 2001). By the same token, the strong emotions triggered by perceptions of rejection in individuals high in RS might act as catalysts to the perpetration of dating violence (Downey et al., 2000).

Although RS might account for the connection between child maltreatment and later victimization and perpetration of dating violence, additional research is needed to clarify the underlying mechanisms that could account for this relationship. One concept that might offer a potential link is relational insecurity (RI), which refers to the desperation to maintain an intimate relationship at all costs (Purdie & Downey, 2000). In contrast to RS, which refers to an overall fear of not being accepted by important others, RI is specific to the fear of losing a romantic relationship. Purdie and Downey introduced this concept in a study of economically disadvantaged, middle school females' romantic relationships, and found that girls high in RS were more likely to have concerns and insecurities about their romantic relationships, and were more likely to engage in harmful behaviors to maintain their relationships.

The results of Purdie and Downey's (2000) study support the hypothesis that anxiety about the loss of an intimate relationship that is characteristic of youth high in RI might contribute to both victimization and perpetration of violence in dating relationships. Youth high in RI might succumb to victimization in their romantic partnerships because they have learned from their

abusive families that violent relationships are normative (Cicchetti & Howes, 1991). On the other hand, RI might contribute to perpetration by increasing sensitivity to perceived threats of rejection, separation, or abandonment by their partners, which in turn might prompt youths high in RI to engage in violent behavior to keep their partners in the relationship. For example, Purdie and Downey (2000) found that adolescent females high in RI reported that they would do *"anything"* to preserve their romantic relationships, even things they believed were wrong.

Although the concept was only recently introduced by Purdie and Downey (2000), other researchers have alluded to the concept of RI in their work. Wolfe and Wekerle (1997) described the desperation some adolescents feel to form a secure, loving relationship after experiencing troubled relationships with their caregivers: "the inconsistent and haphazard expressions of approval or affection can readily be construed by the child as 'love,' and a sense of desperateness may pervade this and other intimate relationships based on the hope that love and attention could be forthcoming" (p. 327). In another study, Wolfe and colleagues (1998) asserted that "attachment intensity/insecurity in adolescent partner relationships may promote a controlling and even violent interaction dynamic to ensure that partner stays in the relationship" (p. 64). Bartholomew and colleagues (2001) reached a similar conclusion in their research on abused youths: "Torn between a pathological need for approval from their partner and the terror of never feeling satiated in this regard, the . . . individual may become increasingly more demanding and potentially aggressive when attachment needs are not fulfilled" (p. 50).

Although research has demonstrated preliminary associations among conflictual dating relationships, RS, and RI, there are a number of significant limitations of the literature to date. First, despite recent studies suggesting associations among fears of rejection, insecurity in relationships, and dating violence, research has not directly investigated the hypothesis that RI is a construct that could explain how RS and dating violence are related. A second limitation is that research on RI so far has focused exclusively on adolescent females. Given the gender parity in adolescent dating violence (e.g., Sears & Byers, 2010), it is important for research to investigate whether models of the underlying mechanisms are appropriate for both males and females. An additional limitation is that RS has only been studied in samples of early adolescents (Grades 5–8) or college-aged students (Purdie & Downey, 2000; Wekerle & Wolfe, 1998; Wolfe et al., 1998; Wolfe & Wekerle, 1997); therefore, it is important to extend this research to the high school years, a time when dating violence is highly prevalent. Thus, the purposes of this study were twofold: (a) to investigate the interrelationship among RI, RS, and dating violence perpetration and dating violence victimization; and (b) to determine whether these relationships were differentiated by gender. Specifically, it was hypothesized that RI would mediate the relationship

between RS and adolescent dating violence perpetration and victimization, and that this mediational model would hold for the prediction of dating violence for both males and females.

METHOD

Participants

The sample for this study included 176 youth (59% female) in Grades 6 through 12 who had been recruited to participate in a dating violence prevention program at their schools. Participants were self-referred in response to fliers posted at their schools, or were identified as being at high risk for dating violence by school staff due to exposure to family violence, child maltreatment, or involvement in problematic dating or peer relationships. Participants were drawn from two geographical locations, one near a large Midwestern city and one in an urban area of a large Southwestern state. Of the sample, 46% identified themselves as Hispanic, 25% as European American, 16% as African American, 11% as multiracial, and the remaining 2% as American Indian, Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, or other. Participants included in this study were only those who reported involvement in a current or previous dating relationship. These participants comprised 58% of the full sample and did not differ from youth who reported no dating relationship in regard to gender or ethnicity, but were more likely to be advanced in grade level than their peers who reported no dating relationships, $F(3, 300) = 8.35$, $p < .001$.

Procedure

Informed assent was obtained from each participant, in addition to active informed parent or guardian consent. Paper-and-pencil self-report questionnaires were completed by each youth in an individual session prior to the first session of the dating violence prevention program. Completed questionnaires were placed in an envelope that was sealed and submitted to the investigators. Youth were informed that their responses were confidential and private (i.e., identified with a subject number only).

Measures

Adolescent dating violence

Participants completed the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI; Wolfe et al., 2001), a self-report questionnaire measuring victimization and perpetration violence in romantic relationships. Although

the CADRI asks respondents to think about a conflict or an argument that they have had with a current partner or an ex-partner in the past year, in this study the time frame was limited to the past three months. This ensured that an appropriate length of time elapsed from the pretest to the posttest for the larger program evaluation from which these data were drawn. The youth responded to each question twice, once in relation to their own behavior toward a partner (i.e., perpetration), then again in relation to a partner's behavior toward them (i.e., victimization). Due to time constraints, for this study the CADRI was reduced to 16 items, each measured once for perpetration and once for victimization. The items that were eliminated were discarded on the basis of low factor loadings. Eight items assessed emotional and verbal abuse, four items assessed physical abuse, two items assessed sexual abuse, and two items assessed threatening behavior. The response choices include 0 (*never*); 1 (*seldom—this has happened only 1 to 2 times*); 2 (*sometimes—this has happened about 3–5 times*); and 3 (*often—this has happened 6 times or more*). Wolfe and colleagues (2001) assessed the internal reliability of the CADRI, and results indicated that, across grade and gender, reliability was good when the subscales were combined to form a total abuse score. Thus, total scores for perpetration and victimization were used in this study. In this sample, internal consistencies were high for scales of perpetration (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$) and victimization (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$).

Rejection sensitivity

Participants completed the Children's Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (CRSQ; Downey, Lebolt, et al., 1998), a self-report questionnaire assessing youths' expectations of rejection and their confidence in whether they will be accepted by others. Although an alternative version is available for college students, the CRSQ was chosen as the more age-appropriate measure, as it presents scenarios that youth typically encounter with other peers or with teachers. The CRSQ asks participants to imagine that they are part of a scenario in which they might experience interpersonal rejection, and then indicate: (a) their degree of anxiety about whether they will be rejected on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*not nervous*) to 6 (*very, very nervous*); (b) their degree of anger about potentially being rejected on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*not angry*) to 6 (*very, very angry*); and (c) whether the person or people in the scenario would respond with acceptance on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*YES!!*) to 6 (*NO!!*). Higher scores indicate expectations of rejection, whereas lower scores indicate expectations of acceptance. The RS score is generated for each scenario by multiplying the expectation of rejection by the degree of anxiety or anger over this possibility. In this study, an abbreviated version of the CRSQ was administered that

included only scenarios involving peer rejection. Anxious and angry expectations of rejection were combined to form a single scale of RS (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$).

Relational insecurity

Participants completed the Relational Insecurity Questionnaire (Purdie & Downey, 2000), a self-report questionnaire assessing youths' relationship concerns. This measure asks the youth to answer how true a series of six statements are for him or her on a scale from 1 (*not true at all*) to 5 (*very true*). The items involve concerns about partner fidelity, discomfort allowing the partner to have close relationships with others, and willingness to use extreme tactics to prevent partner rejection. Internal consistency of the total score was good in the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$).

RESULTS

Main Effects for Gender, Ethnicity, and Grade

Gender

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) indicated that there was a pattern of gender differences across the study variables, Wilks's $\lambda = .87$, $F(4, 171) = 6.57$, $p < .001$. Follow-up one-way between-subjects analyses of variance (ANOVAs) indicated that females ($M = 1.58$, $SD = .46$) scored significantly higher than males ($M = 1.33$, $SD = .33$) on dating violence perpetration, $F(4, 171) = 15.64$, $p < .001$, and females ($M = 1.56$, $SD = .62$) scored higher than males ($M = 1.26$, $SD = .37$) on dating violence victimization, $F(4, 171) = 13.18$, $p < .001$. Additionally, females ($M = 8.37$, $SD = 4.55$) scored significantly higher than males ($M = 6.47$, $SD = 3.67$) on RS, $F(4, 171) = 8.74$, $p < .01$, and females ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.02$) obtained significantly higher scores than males ($M = 2.06$, $SD = .81$) on RI, $F(4, 171) = 11.34$, $p < .01$. Means for these results are reported in Table 1.

Ethnicity

MANOVA results indicated a pattern of ethnic differences across the study variables, Wilks's $\Lambda = .775$, $F(24, 580) = 1.83$, $p < .05$. Follow-up one-way between-subjects ANOVAs indicated that there were significant differences by ethnicity for dating violence perpetration, $F(24, 580) = 2.48$, $p < .05$; RS, $F(24, 580) = 3.84$, $p < .01$; and RI, $F(24, 580) = 2.52$, $p < .05$. Post-hoc analyses utilizing the Tukey honestly significant difference (HSD) procedure revealed that European American participants reported significantly higher

TABLE 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Range for All Variables Separated by Gender

	Males				Females			
Variable	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum	*M*	*SD*	Minimum	Maximum
Dating violence perpetration	1.33	0.33	1.00	2.94	1.58	0.46	1.00	3.25
Dating violence victimization	1.26	0.37	1.00	3.06	1.56	0.62	1.00	3.63
Rejection sensitivity	6.47	3.67	1.00	15.50	8.37	4.55	1.17	26.50
Relational insecurity	2.06	0.81	1.00	4.33	2.55	1.02	1.00	5.00

rates of RS ($M = 9.63$, $SD = 5.17$) as compared to African American participants ($M = 5.55$, $SD = 2.93$) and to Hispanic or Latino participants ($M = 7.08$, $SD = 3.67$), all ps $< .05$. Results also showed that European American participants reported significantly higher rates of RI ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.13$) than African American participants ($M = 2.00$, $SD = .80$), ps $< .05$.

Grade

To determine whether there was an effect of grade on the study variables, a MANOVA was performed. Results indicated a pattern of grade differences across the study variables, Wilks's $\Lambda = .79$, $F(24, 580) = 1.65$, $p < .05$. Follow-up one-way between-subjects ANOVAs indicated that there were significant differences by grade level for dating violence perpetration, $F(24, 580) = 2.33$, $p < .05$, and for dating violence victimization, $F(24, 580) = 3.98$, $p < .01$. Post-hoc analyses utilizing the Tukey's HSD procedure revealed that participants in the 12th grade reported higher rates of dating violence victimization ($M = 1.79$, $SD = .72$) compared to those in 6th ($M = 1.07$, $SD = .07$), 8th ($M = 1.23$, $SD = .20$), and 10th ($M = 1.32$, $SD = .34$) grades, all ps $< .05$.

Intercorrelations

Intercorrelations among the variables are reported in Table 2, separately by gender. Consistent with previous research on adolescent populations, dating violence victimization and perpetration were significantly correlated with one another for both boys and girls. Also consistent with hypotheses, RS and RI were correlated. However, for girls, RI and RS were associated with perpetration only, whereas for boys RI was associated with both dating violence perpetration and victimization.

TABLE 2 Intercorrelations

Variable	Dating violence perpetration	Dating violence victimization	Rejection sensitivity	Relationalin security
Dating violence perpetration	—	.50*	.21*	.30*
Dating violence victimization	*.61**	—	.06	.12
Rejection sensitivity	*.21*	*.09*	—	.30*
Relational insecurity	*.43**	*.38**	*.38**	—

Note. Correlations for females are above the diagonal; correlations for males are in italics below the diagonal.
*$p < .05$.

Tests for Mediation

Analyses of skewness and kurtosis indicated that transformations were necessary for both dependent variables; therefore, prior to the regression analyses dating violence perpetration and dating violence victimization were centered. In addition, because RS and RI were moderately intercorrelated, these variables were also centered to remove any inessential multicollinearity.

To test the hypothesis that RI mediates the relationship between RS and dating perpetration and victimization, a series of multiple regression analyses were performed following the recommendations of Baron and Kenny (1986). Gender, ethnicity, and grade were entered as covariates on the first step of each regression equation. To investigate whether RS predicted dating violence, two separate simple linear regressions were performed, with RS entered as the independent variable (IV) in both analyses, dating violence perpetration entered as the dependent variable (DV) in the first analysis, and dating violence victimization entered as the DV in the second analysis. RS significantly predicted dating violence perpetration, $F(4, 171) = 8.68$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .23$, $p < .01$. However, RS did not predict dating violence victimization, $F(4, 171) = 6.57$, $p < .001$; $\beta = 1.14$, $p > .05$. A simple linear regression indicated that RS significantly predicted RI, $F(4, 171) = 8.34$, $p < .001$; $\beta = 4.53$, $p < .001$. To test whether RI predicted dating violence, two separate simple linear regressions were performed. In the first analysis, RI was entered as the IV and dating violence perpetration was entered as the DV. RI significantly predicted dating violence perpetration, $F(4, 171) = 12.01$, $p < .001$; $\beta = 4.68$, $p < .001$. In the second analysis, RI was entered as the IV and dating violence victimization was entered as the DV. RI significantly predicted dating violence victimization, $F(4, 171) = 7.83$, $p < .001$; $\beta = 2.38$, $p < .05$. To determine whether RI predicted dating violence perpetration over and above RS, a multiple linear regression was

TABLE 3 Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses Testing Relational Insecurity as a Mediator of the Relationship between Rejection Sensitivity and Dating Violence Perpetration

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*β*	R^2	ΔR^2
				.24	.07***
Grade	.05	.02	.20**		
Gender	−.13	.06	−.15*		
Ethnicity	−.02	.02	−.09		
Rejection sensitivity	.01	.01	.14		
Relational insecurity	.13	.03	.28***		

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

TABLE 4 Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses Testing Relational Insecurity as a Mediator of the Relationship between Rejection Sensitivity and Dating Violence Perpetration

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*β*	R^2	ΔR^2
				.24	.02
Grade	.05	.02	.20**		
Gender	−.13	.06	−.15*		
Ethnicity	−.02	.02	−.09		
Relational insecurity	.13	.03	.28***		
Rejection sensitivity	.01	.01	.14		

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

performed with dating violence perpetration as the DV, RS as the IV, and RI as the mediator. As depicted in Table 3, RI significantly predicted dating violence perpetration over and above RS. Despite RS not being a significant predictor of dating violence victimization, a multiple linear regression was performed to test whether RI mediated this relationship. Results indicated that RI was not a mediator of this relationship. Finally, a linear regression was performed to determine whether RI fully mediated the relationship between RS and dating violence perpetration. As Table 4 illustrates, RI fully mediated the relationship between RS and dating violence perpetration, demonstrating that RS no longer predicted dating violence perpetration when RI was in the model.

Consistent with prior research on adolescent dating violence (Bartholomew et al., 2001; Cicchetti & Howes, 1991; Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999; Wolfe et al., 1998), it was hypothesized that the mediational model would hold across gender and would fit the data for both females and males. Following Baron and Kenny's (1986) recommendations, the regression analyses were conducted with females and males separately to determine whether the mediational model described in Hypothesis 1 was supported for each gender. To control for ethnic and grade-level differences, ethnicity and grade were entered as covariates on the first step of each regression equation. As hypothesized, the same pattern of findings emerged for both males and females, with RI fully mediating the relationship between RS and

dating violence perpetration for both males and females. As with the full sample, results indicated that RS did not predict dating violence victimization for either females or males.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate relational processes associated with adolescent dating violence, and, in particular, to examine the roles of RS and RI in predicting dating violence. Partial support was found for the hypothesis that RI mediates the relationship between RS and dating violence perpetration and between RS and dating violence victimization. Results indicated that RI fully mediated the relationship between RS and dating violence perpetration. That is, the predictive relationship between sensitivity to rejection and perpetration of dating violence was driven by the desperation to maintain intimate relationships at all costs. Contrary to the hypothesis, however, evidence was not found to support the idea that RI acts as a mediator of the relationship between RS and dating violence victimization. In this sample, RS was not related to dating violence victimization. Instead, there was a direct effect of RI on dating violence victimization.

The body of research produced by Downey and colleagues might provide some clues for explaining why RS plays a role in predicting dating violence perpetration, but not victimization. An important aspect of the RS model is that individuals respond to real or imagined threats of rejection with cognitive-affective and behavioral overreactions, such as anger, hostility, and controlling behavior (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Downey et al., 1997; Galliher & Bentley, this issue). An angry, hostile, and controlling reaction to perceived rejection might lead to active ways of coping, such as perpetrating violence in the relationship, rather than passive ways of dealing with the rejection, such as tolerating being victimized by violence. Another potential explanation for why RS did not predict victimization in the present comes from Downey et al.'s (2000) research on RS in male adults. The investigators found that those men high in RS who were invested in romantic relationships were likely to respond to perceptions of rejection by becoming violent, whereas those who endorsed low levels of investment in romantic relationships tended to avoid romantic relationships altogether. Thus, those who are high in RS can take one of two pathways in romantic relationships: They overinvest in relationships in the desperate hope that they will be accepted, or they avoid relationships for fear of being rejected. For those who invest highly in romantic relationships, any signs of rejection might be readily perceived as threatening and might prompt violent behavior toward a partner. Alternatively, those high in RS with low investment in romantic relationships might avoid entering into relationships in the first place.

Although RI fully mediated the relationship between RS and dating violence perpetration for both female and male adolescents, the model predicting dating violence perpetration for males accounted for more than twice as much variance (27%) as the model predicting dating violence perpetration for females (13%). This finding suggests that there are other variables affecting dating violence perpetration for females that are not accounted for in the model. O'Keefe's (1997) research focusing on gender differences in motives for perpetrating dating violence might provide some insight. O'Keefe found that both males and females perpetrated dating violence to express anger, but females also reported perpetrating dating violence in self-defense. The measure of dating violence used in this study did not take into account factors such as the context in which the violence occurs, the function of the violence, and the motivations for perpetrating violence, all of which could be important in predicting dating violence perpetration by female adolescents.

This study has several limitations that warrant consideration and might provide insight into why the hypotheses were only partially supported. Several limitations relate to the measures used in the study. First, this study used only self-report measures, which could prompt participants to give socially desirable responses, especially when reporting engagement in socially proscribed behaviors such as dating violence. Second, although the CADRI was the only available measure that was specifically designed for assessing multiple types of dating violence perpetration and victimization in adolescents, it was developed and validated using an ethnically and racially homogenous sample composed of primarily White Canadian adolescents (Wolfe et al., 2001). In contrast, this study included an ethnically and racially diverse sample. Thus, the items that are relevant to assessing dating violence in White individuals might not be relevant to assessing dating violence in racial minority groups. For example, in Latino culture the values of *machismo* and passion might be construed as driving an adolescent male's violent behavior toward his dating partner, and thus might not be construed by either partner as "dating violence" (Dietrich, 1998; Levy, 1999).

A third issue related to measurement that might have affected the results of this study is that the version of the CADRI used assessed the participants' experiences with dating violence during the previous three months, rather than their lifetime experiences with dating violence. Some youths might have had experiences with dating violence that were not captured in the three-month time frame, which might explain the low rates of dating violence perpetration and victimization reported in this study. An additional limitation of the CADRI is that the items making up the sexual violence subscale focus on forced rape only. However, results of a Canadian study examining sexual violence in an adolescent sample uncovered high rates of verbal coercion preceding sexual victimization (Poitras & Lavoie, 1995). This suggests that youths are being sexually victimized, but perhaps those who are

verbally coerced into engaging in unwanted sexual activities do not classify these coerced experiences as being "forced" rape. In addition, although previous research has used the shortened version of the CRSQ successfully, the reduced number of items on the shortened version might not have comprehensively assessed RS in this sample. Lastly, when the sample was divided by gender to assess the second hypothesis, the number of males in this study ($n = 72$) was slightly below what is suggested by Cohen (1992) to have a medium effect size at power = .80 ($n = 76$) to detect significant results.

Despite some limitations, this study has several strengths, particularly related to sample composition. The sample for this study was comprised of youths from a variety of different ethnic and racial backgrounds, which marks a change from the relatively homogenous samples utilized in the majority of the research on RS and RI (e.g., Downey et al., 1997; Downey, Lebolt, et al., 1998; Purdie & Downey, 2000). In addition, the sample for this study was made up of youths in Grades 6 through 12, in contrast to the relative absence of high school youths in the RS and RI literatures (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Downey et al., 1997; Downey, Lebolt, et al., 1998; Purdie & Downey, 2000). It is important to examine these constructs in middle school and high school youths because it is at this point in their lives that individuals begin to shift the focus of their attachment relationships from their parents to their peers (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1998). Finally, the sample for this study included both female and male adolescents, permitting assessment of gender differences on RS and RI, which has previously been neglected in the literature (Downey & Ayduk, 2002, as cited in Pietrzak, Downey, & Ayduk, 2005; Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998; Feldman & Downey, 1994; Purdie & Downey, 2000).

One implication the results of this study have for adolescent dating violence prevention concerns ways to intervene with adolescents to promote security in their romantic relationships. Perhaps dating violence prevention programs can focus on building youths' self-esteem so that they believe that they are worthwhile as individuals and deserve respect and proper treatment from dating partners. Another possibility is to form support groups for youths who have been involved in violent dating relationships for them to learn how to have healthy and respectful relationships. This is perceived to be the "key ingredient" in the Expect Respect adolescent dating violence prevention program (Rosenbluth, 1997/2004). The safe and secure friendships that youths form in these groups can serve as the counterexample to the insecure and fearful relationships they formed in their families. In other words, they learn that a different kind of relationship is possible—one that is safe and is based on mutuality and respect (Ball, Kerig, & Rosenbluth, 2009; Kerig, Volz, Arnzen Moeddel, & Cuellar, this issue). The support group component marks a distinction from many other dating violence prevention programs, which are designed to be delivered in a classroom setting over a short period of time (e.g., Avery-Leaf, Cascardi, O'Leary, & Cano, 1997;

Foshee et al., 1998; Macgowan, 1997), and thus might not provide the model of healthy relationships that a support group offers.

The findings revealed in this study point to several directions for future research. Future research can investigate whether the findings revealed in this study hold for predicting violence in other types of close relationships, such as friendships. In addition, future studies could examine other types of behaviors that adolescents are willing to engage in to maintain their romantic relationships, such as risky sexual behavior and unsafe eating behaviors or exercise habits. Finally, given the gender parity among some types of adolescent dating violence perpetration and victimization (Halpern et al., 2001; O'Keefe, 1997), future studies should investigate characteristics of mutually violent dating partners. The results of these studies will likely continue to inform prevention and intervention efforts with adolescents who are at risk for involvement in violent dating relationships.

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