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PROTECTIVE FACTORS AGAINST DATING VIOLENCE PERPETRATION AND
VICTIMIZATION

by

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PROTECTIVE FACTORS AGAINST DATING VIOLENCE PERPETRATION AND
VICTIMIZATION

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University of Nebraska, 2021

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Dating violence is a prominent problem among college students that can result in harmful physical and mental health outcomes. To date, much research has focused on risk factors, but less is known about protective factors that may decrease the likelihood of dating violence. As such, the current paper examines protective factors (e.g. religion, positive parental relationships) against perpetrating and/or experiencing dating violence and whether these protective factors operate similarly for both perpetration and victimization. Data were gathered in 2013-2014 at two large public universities using pencil and paper surveys (N = 1482). Bivariate results revealed that women have more protective factors than men. Multivariate results showed that religious attendance, lower entitlement, more positive maternal relationship quality, and having more close friends with lower rates of drinking were all protective against dating violence perpetration and victimization. Additionally, lower respondent drinking was also protective against both dating violence perpetration and victimization. These findings highlight the importance of positive friendships as protective factors against dating violence victimization and perpetration. Finally, current study findings also emphasize that abstaining from alcohol is protective against dating violence victimization and perpetration.

Introduction

Dating violence, which can include physical, sexual, and psychological violence (CDC, 2020), is widespread among many college students (Barnett, Miller-Perrien, & Perrin, 2005). For example, dating violence is estimated to affect between 10 – 50% of dating relationships (Wincentak, Connelly, & Card, 2017). Dating violence has been linked to many negative physical and mental health outcomes such as increased depression and physical injury (Park & Kim, 2018) and has the potential to negatively impact future relationships via the continuation of dating violence perpetration and victimization (Berkel, Vandiver, & Bahner, 2004). Because of the negative health outcomes associated with dating violence and its potential to negatively affect future relationships, prevention is key to stopping dating violence before it starts. To date, much research has been conducted on factors that increase the *risk* of perpetration and victimization of dating violence (Duval, Lanning, & Patterson, 2020, Hébert, et al., 2019; Eriksson & Mazzerolle, 2015; Cucci, O’Leary, Olivari, Bonanomi, & Confalonieri, 2018), but less is known about *protective factors* that may decrease the likelihood of an individual perpetrating or experiencing dating violence (Vagi, et al., 2013; Thursten & Howell, 2018). As such, the current paper fills this literature gap by examining protective factors (e.g. religious influence, positive parental relationships) against perpetrating and/or experiencing dating violence and whether these protective factors operate similarly for both perpetration and victimization in reducing the risk of dating violence in dating relationships.

Literature Review

Two important early or distal risk factors that have consistently been shown to increase the risk for dating violence include witnessing parental violence and experiencing child abuse (Duval et al., 2018; Kaukinen, 2014; Thursten & Howell, 2018; Tussey & Tyler, 2019; Tyler, Schmitz, Ray, Adams, & Simmons, 2018). Though the literature generally has focused on risk factors such as child abuse and family violence, little research has examined protective factors that potentially may reduce the likelihood of perpetrating or being a victim of dating violence (Thursten & Howell, 2018; Hebert et al., 2017; Vagi et al., 2013). Specifically, religion and strong maternal relationship quality have been found to indirectly lower the risk for dating violence as these two factors are protective against risky drinking behavior among college students (Baltazar, McBride, Ames, & Griffore, 2020). However, very few studies have examined protective factors as they relate to dating violence perpetration and victimization. Given that prior research has found that religion and maternal relationship quality lower the risk for participation in drinking behaviors, it is plausible that these two factors are also protective against dating violence as heavy drinking has been found to be directly associated with dating violence (Tussey & Tyler, 2019). In sum, more research is needed to understand whether certain factors are protective against dating violence perpetration and victimization.

Dating Violence Perpetration

Dating violence perpetration is common among college students (Barnett et al., 2005) but the research is inconsistent regarding whether males and females are equally violent (Elmquist et al., 2016; Wincentak et al., 2017). For example, Elmquist and

colleagues (2016) found that in their sample of southeastern college students, 29.4% reported perpetrating physical dating violence. Moreover, most of these perpetrators were approximately 18 years of age, female, freshman, white, and heterosexual. Similarly, Paat and Markham (2019) found the perpetration of physical aggression ranged from 10% to 21% among a national sample of students who were on average 21 years old and heterosexual. In comparison, Elmquist et al. (2016) found no differences in rates of perpetration between male and female college students. In contrast, Wincentak et al. (2017) found high rates of perpetrating among females compared to males such that 13% of males but 25% of females reported perpetrating physical dating violence. Regardless of gender, prior research finds high levels of physical dating violence perpetration among college students.

Dating Violence Victimization

According to the CDC, approximately 25% of women and 10% of men will experience some form of intimate partner violence (e.g. sexual, physical, or stalking) in their lifetime making dating violence victimization a common problem, particularly among college students. Rubio-Garay, López-González, Carrasco, and Amor (2017) found that existing literature on dating violence victimization find prevalence rates that range from 0.4% to 57% for physical violence and 8.5% to 95.5% for psychological dating violence. At least one study, however, found no significant differences in the victimization of dating violence by gender as both males and females equally reported being a victim of physical dating violence (Wincentak et al., 2017). Physically aggressive victimization in their study ranged from 6.2% to 18% among college students who were on average 21 years old and heterosexual (Wincentak et al., 2017).

Not only are dating violence victimization prevalence rates high but dating violence victimization in general is also associated with negative mental health outcomes (Kaura & Lohman, 2007; Pengpid & Peltzer, 2020; Sargent, Kruass, Jouriles & McDonald, 2016). For example, Pengrid and Peltzer (2020) found that physical and sexual victimization were associated with numerous negative mental outcomes including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sleeping problems, loneliness, and depression for women, and PTSD and sleeping problems for men. In a Midwestern sample of college students, Kaura and Lohman (2007) found that 84% of respondents had levels of depression and anxiety that were higher than the general population. In addition to physical dating violence victimization, Sargent et al. (2016) found that psychological victimization also increased both depressive symptoms and anti-social behaviors among Southwestern college students.

Protective Dating Violence Factors

Religion

Though very little research has examined protective factors for dating violence among college students, some studies have examined religion and its effects on various forms of intimate partner violence (used interchangeably with domestic violence) among community samples. These findings attest to the positive influence of religion as a protective factor against partner violence. For example, a consistent finding in this literature is that as religious attendance increases, intimate partner violence decreases (Ellison & Anderson, 2001; Ellison, Bartowski, & Anderson., 1999; Ellison Trinitapoli, Anderson, & Johnson, 2007; Jung & Olson, 2017). In a U.S. probability sample of cohabitating and recently married couples, Ellison et al. (1999) found that when religious

attendance increased, perpetration of domestic violence decreased among weekly attendees for men and monthly attendees for women. Using this same sample, Ellison, and Anderson (2001) compared both partners' self-reports of partner violence and found that religion played more of a protective role in self-reports of partner violence than in partner reports of violence. Though social desirability was explored as a possible explanation for the discrepancy between individual and partner self-reports of violence, further analyses did not support social desirability as the explanation (Ellison & Anderson, 2001). In additional work, Ellison and colleagues (2007) used the same U.S. probability sample to examine race and found that African American men were two times more likely to have committed intimate partner violence than non-Hispanic white men. However, when religion was considered, the frequency at which men attended religious services had more of a protective effect for African American men and Hispanic men compared to non-Hispanic white men (Ellison et al., 2007). Finally, in a probability sample of the World Values Survey, researchers found that individuals who exhibited higher levels of religiosity also demonstrated lower levels of acceptance of wife beating (Jung & Olson, 2017). Though past research (Ellison & Anderson, 2001; Ellison et al., 1999; Ellison et al., 2007; Jung & Olson, 2017) has overwhelmingly found that religious attendance is associated with lower intimate partner violence, a more recent study by Renzetti, DeWall, Messer, and Pond (2017) found that men who were more religious perpetrated physical and psychological aggression more frequently than individuals who were less religious. Given the lack of research on college students and some of the inconsistencies between older and newer literature using community samples, this is an area in need of further research.

Mother-Child Relationship Quality

In addition to religion, some studies have examined the quality of the relationship between mother and child in relation to dating violence among teens and young adults (Cucci et al., 2018; Davis, Ports, Basile, Espelage, & David-Ferdon, 2019; Espelage et al., 2019; Hèbert et al., 2019; Kamody, Howell, Schwartz, Schaefer, & Thurston, 2020; Park & Kim, 2018; Testa, Hoffman, Livingston, & Turrisi, 2010; Vagi et al., 2013). Specifically, studies have consistently found that individuals with a higher quality or more positive relationship with their mother tend to perpetrate violence less frequently and are also less likely to become a victim of dating violence compared to individuals who have lower quality or less positive relationships with their mother (Davis et al., 2019; Espelage et al., 2019; Hèbert et al., 2019; Park & Kim, 2018; Testa et al., 2010; Vagi et al., 2013). For example, a study by Davis et al. (2019) found that a one-unit increase in parental monitoring decreased the likelihood of teens perpetrating physical and verbal dating violence by 15%. Similarly, Hèbert et al. (2019) found a small but significant effect size for parental monitoring on both psychological and physical dating violence ($r = -.211$ and $r = -.135$, respectively). In sum, parental monitoring may contribute to the quality of relationship one has with their mother contributing to a decreased risk of dating violence.

Generally, reviews of the literature indicate that positive parental relationships are important in contributing to the quality of relationship a child has with their mother (Hèbert et al., 2019; Park & Kim 2018; Vagi et al., 2013). For instance, in their review of the literature, Hèbert et al. (2019) found established family ties to be a protective factor in reducing and preventing dating violence, suggesting families as a social institution

provide insight that positive parent relationships provide young adults with the support they need, protecting them from forming relationships with abusive partners. In a meta-analysis, Park and Kim (2018) found positive parenting to have the largest effect in protecting against dating violence. In another literature review examining the risk and protective factors associated with dating violence, Vagi et al. (2013) concluded that a positive relationship with one's mother is an important protective dating violence factor. Indeed, positive parental relationships prevent and/or reduce dating violence.

Another aspect contributing to the quality of the relationship one has with their mother is parental monitoring. In a longitudinal study examining the effects of adverse childhood experiences, Davis et al. (2019) found that parental monitoring protects against dating violence among adolescents but is limited to physical and verbal dating violence in a sample of teens. In a different study using the same data, Espelage et al. (2019) examined several protective factors and found only female non-perpetrators of verbal teen dating violence differed from female perpetrators based solely on parental monitoring. Overall, parental monitoring contributes to the quality of the relationship one has with their mother which further contributes to the prevention and/or reduction of dating violence.

In addition to parental monitoring certain parenting styles have been found to be associated with dating violence perpetration. For example, Cucci et al. (2018) found that authoritarian parenting leads to emotional dysregulation which increases the risk of adolescents perpetrating dating violence, suggesting non-authoritarian parenting to be more protective in reducing the risk of perpetrating dating violence. Authoritarian parenting is commonly characterized by severe discipline and physical punishment

(Baumrind 1971). Considering the characterization of this parenting style, it is possible the quality of relationship one has with their mother is lessened compared to individuals with non-authoritarian parents, the latter of which may be akin to stronger relationship quality. Overall, the effect of parenting style influences the relationship one has with one's mother which potentially may be associated with dating violence perpetration and victimization.

Parental communication with children also may contribute to the quality of relationship one has with their mother. Specifically, Komody et al. (2020) found that mothers who themselves were victims and perpetrators of intimate partner violence were least comfortable talking with their older children about substance abuse, violence, and AIDSs. Highlighting the importance of communication in a parent-child relationship, Testa et al. (2010) found increased communication about alcohol, heavy episodic drinking, and sexual assertiveness between mothers and daughters reduced heavy episodic drinking. These findings suggest that having open communication and being able to talk with one's mother about difficult topics may make it easier for daughters to confide in their mothers about other topics such as dating violence, validating the important role positive relationships with parents play in reducing dating violence perpetration and victimization. In sum, having a higher quality relationship with one's mother is a contributing protective factor against dating violence. While the focus of this paper is protective factors of dating violence, much of the dating violence literature draws on factors that increase the risk of experiencing or perpetrating dating violence.

Alcohol Use

Several studies have identified alcohol use as an important risk factor in predicting dating violence (Collibee & Furman 2018; Foran & O’Leary 2008; Haynes, Strauss, Stuart, & Shorey, 2017; Hill & Fischer 2020; Ritter, Lookatch, Schmidt, & Moore, 2019; Roudsari, Leahy, & Walters, 2008; Shorey, Stuart, & Cornelius, 2011; Shorey, Stuart, McNulty, & Moore, 2014a; Shorey et al., 2014b; Stappenbeck & Fromme, 2010; Tyler, Schmitz, Ray, & Simons, 2017). For example, Hill et al. (2020) found college students binge drinking habits to be associated with physical, sexual, and psychological dating violence, as well as with stalking and cyber dating abuse. Specifically, as the number of instances of binge drinking incidents increases, so too does physical intimate partner violence stalking, and cyber dating abuse (Hill et al., 2020). Furthermore, in a community sample of 120 individuals, Collibee and Furman (2018) found alcohol use among individuals with average and high relationship risks (e.g. jealousy, negative interaction, and relationship dissatisfaction) were at an increased risk of perpetrating physical violence and sexual violence in their relationship.

In other studies which have used lab settings and focused on blood alcohol content (BAC), Ritter et al. (2019) found that among 160 college males, alcohol on its own did not cause aggression, but the combined effect of alcohol use and high tendencies of past aggression caused reactive aggression in a lab setting. In terms of BAC, Roudsari et al. (2008) found higher BAC as well as increased instances of binge drinking per week were associated with more victimization and perpetration of dating violence, specifically verbal abuse, and overall instances of abuse among college students. In terms of frequency of use of substances, Shorey et al. (2014b) controlled for marijuana use in their study of 67 college males, and found that any alcohol use and more drinks consumed

were both significantly associated with increased odds of physical and sexual violence perpetration while heavy alcohol use was associated with an increased odds of physical, psychological, and sexual intimate partner violence. In a separate study of male college students, Shorey et al. (2014a) found hazardous drinking participants (defined as drinking in excess to the point of negative impact such as injury and difficulty with schoolwork) were more likely to perpetrate physical, psychological, and sexual dating violence than non-hazardous drinking participants. Moreover, Stappenbeck and Fromme (2010) found in a sample of 2,247 college students that heavy drinking for women in their sophomore year of college predicted dating violence in their junior year of college. Among college men in their freshman year of college, heavy drinking and dating violence were found to be significantly associated. In a study of almost 1,500 college students, Tyler et al. (2017) found that dating violence perpetrators were more likely to engage in heavy episodic drinking compared to those who did not perpetrate dating violence. In contrast to the abundant literature in support of the association between alcohol use and dating violence perpetration, Sabina, Schally, and Marciniec (2017) did not find evidence to support the relationship between alcohol usage and dating violence victimization in their national sample of college students who were on average 21 years old. Overall, most literature however does suggest there is an association between alcohol use and dating violence perpetration and victimization.

In addition to the studies finding a positive association between alcohol use and dating violence, a meta-analysis and a literature review support this association as well. That is, in a meta-analysis of clinical, community and non-clinical samples, Foran and O'Leary (2008) found studies with measures of consequence such as alcohol abuse and

alcohol dependence were more closely linked to aggression perpetration than measures of consumption such as frequency, quantity, and binge/heavy drinking. Alternatively, in a review of the literature, Shorey et al. (2011) found that college males and females were more likely to perpetrate dating violence as the frequency of drinking increased. Overwhelmingly, evidence suggests that alcohol and dating violence are closely related whereby those who drink more frequently and/or binge drink are more likely to be involved in instances of perpetration and victimization of dating violence.

While this current paper focuses on protective factors of dating violence, in the preceding and following sections, the literature provided demonstrates the association between alcohol use and dating because little research has focused on *alcohol abstinence* as a protective factor against dating violence. As demonstrated above, research finds that alcohol consumption is a risk factor of dating violence. As such, one could infer that not drinking alcohol may be a protective factor in and of itself against dating violence, which will be examined in the current study.

Protective Behavioral Strategies

Previous literature demonstrates the positive association between alcohol and dating violence suggesting protective behavioral strategies (PBS) may reduce the amount of alcohol consumed by individuals and thus decrease the likelihood of perpetrating dating violence, making PBS a potential protective factor. PBS promote responsible drinking habits by creating a plan of action before an individual starts drinking to curb excessive alcohol consumption such as binge drinking that can result in negative outcomes like missing class or drinking and driving (Martens et al., 2007). Specific PBS include strategies such as refraining from drinking games, alternating alcoholic beverages

with non-alcoholic beverages, setting a specific time to quit drinking, and eating before drinking (Martens et al., 2005). In a review of literature, Pearson (2013) overwhelmingly found PBS to be negatively associated with negative outcomes related to the use of alcohol. Consistent with previous literature, Tyler et al. (2018) found that college students who engaged in more PBS had lower rates of heavy drinking. Additionally, the authors found that fraternity and sorority members engaged in more PBS than students living on campus, in dorms, or off-campus with a roommate (Tyler et al., 2018). Overall, PBS may indirectly lower the risk of perpetration and victimization of dating violence by giving students the tools they need to promote responsible drinking.

Peer Drinking Behavior

Peer drinking behaviors also have been found to have a profound influence on individual's own drinking behaviors (Beard & Wolff, 2020; Byrd, 2016; Cox et al., 2019; DiGuseppi et al., 2020; Kenny, DiGuseppi, Meisel, Balestrieri, & Barnett, 2018; Smith et al., 2019). For example, in a national, longitudinal study of almost 5,000 participants that were followed from adolescence into early adulthood, Byrd (2016) found that individuals' three closest friends' binge drinking habits predicted participants drinking habits for both college and non-college students. In addition, Cox et al. (2019) asked college students to estimate their close friends and general friends' drinking habits and found that participants who overestimated how much both their close friends and general friends drank, reported consuming more alcohol themselves. Similarly, among a sample of 1,254 first year college students living on campus, Kenney et al. (2018) found that individuals with anxiety and/or depression who believed their peers to drink heavily reported drinking heavily themselves. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2019) in a sample of 755

college students at an urban university found comparable results such that college students who perceived their peers to drink heavily consumed more alcohol than those who did not perceive their peers to drink heavily. Indeed, research suggests that the perception of peers heavily drinking influences individual college students to drink more alcohol which may suggest that having friends who abstain from alcohol or drink minimally may be protective against dating violence.

Despite the potential negative influence of peer drinking on individual drinking behavior, peers also can have a positive influence (Beard & Wolff, 2020; Cox et al., 2019). Beard and Wolff (2020) surveyed 382 college students at a Midwestern university and found that participants who had more positive peers (e.g. volunteer, involvement in student organizations, and/or abstaining from alcohol and substance use) were less likely to smoke cigarettes and marijuana, less likely to use alcohol, and less likely to drink and drive. Moreover, Cox et al. (2019) found that among a sample of 1331 college students, participants who underestimated peer drinking were less likely to drink heavily and had fewer instances in which they drank. In sum, underestimating peer drinking is associated with lower drinking among participants. Though not widely examined to date, it is possible that having friends who abstain from drinking alcohol may be associated with individuals themselves abstaining from alcohol; thus, having peers who refrain from any kind of substance use may serve as a protective factor against dating violence perpetration and victimization.

Entitlement

Some studies have identified entitlement as a risk factor for perpetrating dating violence (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farruggia, 2008; Hill & Fischer, 2001; Pornari,

Dixon, & Humphreys, 2013; Santana, Raj, Decker, La March, & Silverman, 2006; Tyler et al., 2017). Individuals considered entitled think of themselves as above the rules and believe themselves to be more worthy of certain advantages than others which suggests entitled individuals are better than others (Greenberger et al., 2008). For example, one study found that college males in the Midwest and Southwest who had higher entitlement scores engaged in more risky behaviors related to alcohol, drugs, and/or sex and that these risk-taking behaviors were associated with more instances of dating violence perpetration compared with college males who scored lower on entitlement (Tyler et al., 2017). Furthermore, entitled college males who held greater traditional masculine gender roles also approved of rape-related views such as rape myth acceptance and victim blaming and/or intimate partner violence (Hill & Fischer, 2001) and risky sexual behaviors such as unprotected sex (Santana et al., 2006). Acceptance of such rape beliefs makes it conceivable then for some males to perpetrate sexual, physical, and psychological dating violence. Moreover, Pornari and colleagues (2013) found that individuals with relationship entitlement believed themselves to be superior to their partner and thus believed it was their right to discipline their partners when they saw fit which may result in dating violence. Because research has demonstrated that having a sense of entitlement increases the risk of perpetrating dating violence (Tyler et al., 2017), it is plausible that those who score lower on entitlement may be less likely to perpetrate dating violence; thus, lower entitlement may serve as a protective factor.

Greek Letter Affiliation

In addition to entitlement, research finds Greek letter affiliation is an important factor in the perpetration and victimization of dating violence (Hummer, LaBrie, Lac,

Sessoms, & Cail, 2012; Humphrey & Kahn, 2000; Ragsdale et al., 2012; Tyler et al., 2017). Hummer et al. (2005) found that Greek members drank alcohol at increased rates compared to non-Greek members. Likewise, Tyler et al. (2017) found Greek letter affiliation to be associated with binge drinking. In addition to drinking more, Humphrey and Kahn (2000) discovered fraternity members demonstrated more sexual aggression, hostility toward women, and encouraged sexual peer aggression, making it plausible for fraternity members to perpetrate dating violence at a higher rate than non-Greek members. Moreover, Ragsdale et al. (2012) found fraternity members who binge drank also were involved in more physical altercations than non-Greek members. Additionally, Ragsdale et al. (2012) found sorority members who binge drank also suffered more negative outcomes such as injury and sexual victimization. In sum, non-Greek affiliates may be at a decreased risk of perpetration and victimization of dating violence due to their lower rates of alcohol consumption and aggressive behaviors.

Gender

Gender also adds to the complexity in understanding dating violence. It should be reiterated that there are many inconsistencies in the literature regarding whether men or women perpetrate more dating violence (Archer, 2000; Bates, 2016; Cuenca, Graña, & Redondo, 2020; Kimmel, 2002; Kamody et al., 2020; Tontodonato & Crew, 1992). Some research suggests that women are more likely to be perpetrators than men (Archer, 2000; Manchikanti Gómez, 2011). Specifically, Archer (2000) found women were more likely to perpetrate physical violence than men; however, men are more likely to cause injury when they do perpetrate violence. In contrast, other research suggests that men are more likely to perpetrate dating violence than women (Tontodonato & Crew, 1992). Still, other

research suggests women are just as likely to perpetrate dating violence as men (Cueña et al., 2020; Kimmel, 2002). Additionally, recent research suggests that dating violence is bidirectional, that is, both partners perpetrate dating violence and experience dating violence (Bates, 2016; Kamody et al., 2020). Taken together, gendered differences in the perpetration and victimization of dating violence suggest more research is needed to better understand the relationship between gender and perpetration and victimization of dating violence.

Theoretical Framework - Social Ecological Perspective

This study uses Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological framework to understand the link between protective factors and dating violence perpetration and victimization. Social ecological perspective is comprised of five systems (microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, exosystem, and chronosystem) with varying levels of interaction between the different levels. This perspective has been used to study social phenomenon in various settings such as community, school, interpersonal, and individual levels (Foshee, Linder, MacDougall, & Bangdiwala, 2001; Foshee, 2004; Tussey 2018, Ballard, & Skeer, 2015). The *microsystem* consists of primary influences of socialization like family, peers, school, and church. These influences are said to directly affect the individual. In their longitudinal study of adolescents, Foshee and colleagues (2001) examined individual (microsystem) level influences including peers and family and their relationship with dating violence perpetration and found support for the social ecological model. The second level, *mesosystem*, refers to the interactions between microsystems and their influence on the individual which may have direct and indirect effects. For instance, the interconnection between family and peers, each on their own are

microsystems but when brought together make a mesosystem such as when a peer comes over for dinner, they interact with family members. The third type, *macrosystem* can be defined as the dominant attitudes and ideologies of a particular culture. For instance, to be successful in the U.S., it is believed that one must have a college education. The fourth type, *exosystem* are the links between social settings that may not involve the individual directly but ultimately influence the individual and includes things like their parent's job, mass media, politics, and neighbors. Specifically, a stay-at-home parent reentering the job force is an example of an exosystem. A stay-at-home parent has significantly more time to dedicate to an infant than parents who choose to work or financially must work outside the home in addition to their family responsibilities. Finally, the *chronosystem* refers to the influences over your life course that affect your view of the world and how you navigate and make sense of the world around you (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Microsystem and Mesosystem

Theory Application to Present Study

The social ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is useful for studying dating violence because this perspective takes multiple levels of influence into consideration rather than focusing exclusively on one level of influence such as family or peer relationships (Salzinger, Feldman, Stockhammer, & Hood, 2002). Specifically, this paper applies both microsystems and mesosystems to understand protective factors and their influence on dating violence perpetration and victimization within the context of a college setting. Microsystems tend to be *primary* factors such as parental relationship quality, parents being married, religion, and sense of entitlement one grew up with. Mesosystems or *secondary* factors look at how primary factors interact with these

secondary factors and include alcohol use and alcohol expectancy, protective behavioral strategies (PBS), peer drinking behavior, and Greek-letter affiliation.

Primary Factors (microsystem)

As primary agents of socialization, strong influence of religion, positive father- and mother-child relationship quality, and lower entitlement are expected to protect against dating violence. From the microsystem level, one's relationship with one's parents contributes to the likelihood that their child (i.e. the college student) will be involved (or not) in perpetrating and being a victim of dating violence. That is, having a higher quality relationship with one's mother has been shown to be protective against dating violence (Davis et al. 2019). Religion is another microsystem influence that has been found to play a protective role against dating violence perpetration and victimization (Ellison et al. 2007). Entitlement, which is tied to parental socialization (Lareau, 2003), may be protective insofar as those who are less entitled commit less dating violence. Specifically, research has shown that greater entitled college students are more likely to participate in sexually risky behaviors which is associated with dating violence perpetration (Tyler et al. 2017). Concerning all three factors, parents play a pivotal role in their own relationship with their child, religious influence, and entitlement and these in turn impact dating violence perpetration and victimization.

Secondary Factors (mesosystem)

Alcohol use and alcohol expectancy, PBS for drinking alcohol, peer drinking behaviors, and Greek letter affiliation are all secondary factors that may influence dating violence victimization and perpetration at the mesosystem level. Alcohol on its own does not lead to dating violence; however, research demonstrates there is a link between dating

violence and alcohol use (Hill et al., 2020). Therefore, those who abstain from drinking alcohol are less likely to perpetrate dating violence or become a victim of dating violence. Similarly, when one uses PBS (e.g. counting the number of drinks one consumes), they moderate how much they drink which prevents them from binge drinking and thus decreases the risk of negative outcomes such as dating violence (Pearson, 2013; Tyler et al., 2018). Depending on the perception one has of their peers drinking behaviors, the perception influences how much the individual drinks (Cox et al., 2019). Those who believe their friends consume less quantities of alcohol are less likely to drink alcohol themselves. Finally, those in Greek-letter affiliated organizations tend to engage in more risky drinking behaviors, but they also tend to engage in more PBS and have more available social support (Tyler et al., 2018). However, because there is a lack of research on Greek-letter affiliated organizations and dating violence, the inclusion of this variable is considered exploratory in the current study.

In sum, Bronfenbrenner's social ecological perspective can be used to explain why some individuals do not commit dating violence, particularly when examining factors that protect against dating violence. It is important to study individuals in multiple environments because people do not exist in a vacuum. A single factor of influence (e.g. religion) may be important in understanding dating violence but understanding dating violence in a holistic sense (e.g. religion and influence of peers) offers more nuance and depth about why some individuals do not perpetrate or become a victim of dating violence. The application of the social ecological perspective is a way of studying the big picture, rather than individual pieces.

Hypotheses

Based on the above literature review and theoretical perspective, the following were hypothesized. *Hypothesis #1*: Males were expected to have lower odds of experiencing both victimization and perpetration compared to females. *Hypothesis #2*: Individuals whose parents are married were expected to have lower odds of experiencing and perpetrating dating violence compared to those with parents who are not married. *Hypothesis #3*: Individuals who have higher quality relationship with their mother and father (higher quality indicates more positive) were expected to have lower odds of experiencing victimization and perpetration compared to individuals with lower quality relationships with their mother and father. *Hypothesis #4*: Individuals with lower entitlement were expected to have lower odds of perpetrating and being a victim of dating violence compared to individuals with higher entitlement. *Hypothesis #5*: Individuals who frequently attend religious services were expected to have lower odds of experiencing victimization and perpetration compared with individuals who attend religious services less frequently. *Hypothesis #6*: Individuals who indicated religion is of high importance in their daily life were expected to have lower odds of experiencing and perpetrating dating violence compared to those who indicated religion was not important. *Hypothesis #7*: Individuals who engage in more PBS are expected to have lower odds of experiencing and perpetrating dating violence compared to those who engage in less PBS. *Hypothesis #8*: Individuals who have close friends who have lower levels of alcohol use are expected to have lower odds of experiencing and perpetrating dating violence compared to those who have friends with higher levels of alcohol use. *Hypothesis #9*: Individuals with lower levels of alcohol expectancy are expected to have lower odds of

experiencing and perpetrating dating violence compared to those with higher alcohol expectancy. *Hypothesis #10*: Individuals who have lower levels of heavy drinking are expected to have lower odds of experiencing and perpetrating dating violence than individuals who have higher levels of heavy drinking. Because there is very limited literature on Greek-affiliated organizations and dating violence, there is no hypothesis regarding this relationship as it is considered exploratory.

Methods

Study Sites

Data were gathered in the 2013-2014 academic year at two large public universities in the U.S., one in the Midwest and one in the Southeast. Both universities are public land-grant institutions with undergraduate enrollment ranging from 20,000 to 25,000 students. Racial composition at both locations during data collection was approximately 80% White.

Procedure

Undergraduate students enrolled in social science courses completed a paper and pencil survey of attitudes and experiences about family, dating, peers, and substance use. Every student was eligible to participate. Students were informed that their participation was voluntary, and their responses were anonymous. They had the option of filling out the survey for course credit. If they did not wish to complete the survey, they were given another option. Students were told that if they chose not to fill out the survey or do the alternative extra credit assignment, it would not affect their course grade. Approximately 98% of all students across both institutions completed the survey, while the remaining

students opted for the alternative assignment. The Institutional Review Board at both institutions approved this study for their respective location.

Measures

Dependent Variables

Dating violence perpetration and victimization (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996) were from the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale, which asked, “During the past 12 months, how many times have you done each of the following to a current or former partner (five items) and how often have they done each of the following to you” (five items): (1) threw something, (2) kicked, (3) punched or hit, (4) choked, and (5) insulted or swore (0 = never to 4 = more than 10 times). Due to skewness, both dependent variables, perpetration, and victimization, were dichotomized (0 = never; 1 = at least once).

Independent Variables

Gender was self-reported and coded 0 = male; 1 = female.

Greek affiliation was coded 0 = not a member or 1 = is a member of a Greek fraternity or sorority.

Parents married asked respondents which of the following best describes your parents’ marital status (1 = never married but lived-in same household while I was growing up, 2 = married, 3 = divorced or separated, 4 = one or both parents is deceased, 5 = always lived in a single parent household). Due to skewness, this variable was dichotomized into 1 = married, 0 = not married.

Maternal and parental relationship quality was from the warmth subscale of the instruments used in the Iowa Youth and Families Project (Conger et al., 1992) and

included six items that asked what their relationship with their mother/father was like when they were growing up such as how often your mother/father “criticized you or your ideas,” “listened carefully to your point of view,” and “shouted or yelled at you because she/he was mad at you” (1 = always to 5 = never). Certain items were reverse coded and then a mean scale was created; higher scores indicated more positive relationships (maternal relationship quality $\alpha = .80$; paternal relationship quality $\alpha = .76$).

Entitlement included six items from the Psychological Entitlement Scale (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004), which measures beliefs such as “I honestly feel I’m just more deserving than others” and “People like me deserve an extra break now and then” (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Items were reverse coded, and a mean scale was created where a higher score indicated lower entitlement ($\alpha = .73$).

Religious attendance was a single item indicator, which asked respondents about the frequency with which they attend religious services (0 = never to 4 = more than once per week).

Religious influence was a single item indicator, which asked respondents about the influence of religion on their daily life (0 = none, 1 = something I sometimes consider when making decisions, and 2 = my religious beliefs guide nearly every decision I make).

Protective behavioral strategies (PBS survey; Martens, Ferrier, & Cinimi, 2005), included 10 items, which asked respondents how often in the past 12 months they engaged in the following activities when they “partied/socialized” (1 = never to 5 = almost always or always). For example, “Use a designated driver,” “Determine not to

exceed a set amount of drinks,” and “Avoid drinking games.” A mean scale was created such that a higher score indicated more frequent use of PBS ($\alpha = .85$).

Amount close friends drink was a single item which asked respondents to indicate how much their close friends typically consume when drinking alcohol (1 = they do not drink to 4 = more than six drinks). The item was reverse coded such that a higher score indicated friends do not drink.

Alcohol expectancy included six items from the Social/Physical Pleasure scale of the Alcohol Expectancy Questionnaire (Brown, Goldman, Inn, & Anderson, 1980). For example, “Alcohol makes me feel happy” and “Drinking adds a certain warmth to social occasions.” Items were reverse coded and then an index was created such that higher scores indicated lower alcohol expectancy ($\alpha = .72$).

Respondent drinking included two items (Testa, Livingston, & Leonard, 2003), which asked respondents, During the past 12 months, “how many times have you gotten drunk on alcohol” and “how many times have you consumed five or more (if you’re a man)/four or more (if you’re a woman) drinks in a single sitting” (0 = never to 5 = five or more days per week). The two items were reverse coded and then averaged such that higher scores indicated less frequent heavy drinking (Testa et al., 2003). The correlation between the two items was .87.

Data Analytic Procedure

Chi square tests assessed bivariate associations between gender and dichotomous variables whereas student’s *t*-tests assessed bivariate associations between gender and continuous variables. Logistic regression was used to assess the relationship between all study variables and the two dependent variables, dating violence perpetration and

victimization given the dichotomous nature of these two outcome variables. Odds ratios (OR) are presented. For the multivariate models, data were entered in two separate blocks: model 1 included micro-level variables, while model 2 included both micro- and meso- level variables for the perpetration models. Similarly, model 3 included micro-level variables, while model 4 included both micro- and meso-level variables for the victimization models. Interactions by gender were tested for all study variables to examine whether the pathways to perpetration and victimization differed for males and females. IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 was used for all analyses.

Results

Sample Characteristics

The total sample consisted of 1,482 cases. Of these, 755 respondents or 51%, were female. The majority of respondents were White (80%), followed by Black/African American (7.3%); Hispanic or Latino (3.6%); Asian (6.6%); and 2.4% identified their race as “other.” In terms of dating violence, 589 respondents (39.7%) reported that they have perpetrated one or more forms of dating violence while 554 students or 37.4% indicated that they have experienced one or more types of dating violence victimization from a current or former partner in the past 12 months.

Bivariate Results

Descriptive statistics for college women and men are presented in Table 1. Overall, 45% of women reported perpetrating dating violence compared to 34% of men and this difference was significant ($\chi^2=19.14$, $p<.01$). In terms of dating violence victimization, 39% of women reported this experience compared to 35% of men and this

difference was marginally significant ($\chi^2=2.97$, $p<.10$). None of the other dichotomous variables were significantly different between women and men.

For the continuous variables (bottom portion of Table 1) results show that apart from lower entitlement, which was marginally significant, all the remaining variables were significantly different for women and men. That is, women reported significantly higher levels of both maternal and paternal relationship quality ($M = 4.22$ and 4.07 , respectively) compared to men ($M = 4.15$ and 3.90 , respectively) as well as greater religious attendance and religious influence ($M = 2.65$ and 2.05 vs. $M = 2.48$, and 1.92 , respectively). Women also used more PBS compared to men when it comes to drinking ($M = 2.90$ vs. 2.53 , respectively). Finally, women reported that their close friends consume less alcohol compared to reports of men ($M = 1.96$ vs 1.60 , respectively), have lower alcohol expectancy than men ($M = 2.25$ vs 1.88 , respectively), and lower levels of heavy drinking than men ($M = 3.02$ vs 2.51 , respectively). In other words, women have more protective factors compared to men (see Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Women and Men

	Women		Men		χ^2
	N	%	N	%	
<i>Dichotomous Variables</i>					
Greek affiliation	274	36.5	275	38.5	0.58
Parents married	548	72.7	517	72.2	0.04
DV perpetration	340	45.0	244	33.9	19.14**
DV victimization	297	39.3	252	35.0	2.97+
<i>Continuous Variables</i>					
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	<i>t-test</i>
Maternal rel. quality	4.22	0.62	4.15	0.60	-1.98*
Paternal rel. quality	4.07	0.74	3.90	0.70	-4.44**
Lower entitlement	3.72	0.71	3.65	0.73	-1.82+
Religious attendance	2.65	1.15	2.48	1.13	-2.83**
Religious influence	2.05	0.66	1.92	0.65	-3.58**
Protective drinking strategies	2.90	0.87	2.53	0.75	-8.52**
Friends drink less	1.96	0.76	1.60	0.82	-8.64**
Lower alcohol expectancy	2.25	1.72	1.88	1.62	-4.26**
Lower respondent drinking	3.02	0.89	2.51	1.06	-9.92**

Note: ** $p \leq .01$, * $p \leq .05$, + $p < .10$. DV = dating violence, Rel. = relationship.

Multivariate Results

Perpetration

Logistic regression results for dating violence perpetration are presented in Model 1 and Model 2 in Table 2. Model 1 includes micro-level variables and Model 2 includes meso-level variables. In Model 1, results revealed that females were 1.86 times more likely to have reported having perpetrated dating violence compared to males (OR = 1.864; $p < .01$), which is consistent with hypothesis #1. Maternal relationship quality was

Table 2. Logistic Regression Models for Correlates of Dating Violence Perpetration (Models 1-2) and Dating Violence Victimization (Models 3-4)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	<i>DV Perpetration</i>		<i>DV Victimization</i>	
	OR	OR	OR	OR
Female	1.864**	2.479**	1.326*	1.722**
Greek affiliation	1.299*	1.005	1.326*	1.010
Parents married	1.028	0.996	1.011	0.984
Maternal rel. quality	0.702**	0.694**	0.801*	0.793*
Paternal rel. quality	1.022	0.990	0.931	0.897
Lower entitlement	0.736**	0.748**	0.826*	0.844*
Religious attendance	0.781**	0.832**	0.800**	0.856*
Religious influence	0.920	0.976	0.972	1.028
Prot. drinking strategies	--	0.946	--	0.977
Friends drink less	--	0.722**	--	0.771**
Lower alcohol expectancy	--	0.929+	--	0.962
Lower respondent drinking	--	0.824*	--	0.766**
Nagelkerke R ²	0.089	0.132	0.049	0.090

Note: **p ≤ .01, *p ≤ .05, +p < .10. OR = odds ratio, DV = dating violence, Rel. = relationship, Prot. = protective.

also associated with perpetration. That is, those who had higher levels of maternal relationship quality were 70% less likely to have perpetrated dating violence compared to those with lower levels of maternal relationship quality (OR = 0.702; p < .01), which is

partially consistent with hypothesis #3. Lower entitlement decreased the odds of having perpetrated dating violence by a factor of 0.74, (OR = 0.736; $p < .01$), which is consistent with hypothesis #4. Also consistent with hypothesis #5, religious attendance decreased the odds of having perpetrated dating violence by a factor of 0.78 (OR = 0.781; $p < .01$). Finally, Greek affiliation was associated with an increased odds of having perpetrated dating violence by a factor of 1.30 (OR = 1.299; $p < .05$). Overall, Model 1 explained almost 9% of the variation in dating violence perpetration with the micro-level variables (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.089$).

Model 2 included the microsystem variables but also added mesosystem variables. Results from Model 2 indicated that being female increased the odds of perpetrating dating violence by a factor of 2.48 (OR = 2.479; $p < .01$), which is consistent with hypothesis #1. Maternal relationship quality was protective against the perpetration of dating violence. That is, those who had higher levels of maternal relationship quality decreased the odds of having perpetrated dating violence by a factor of 0.69 (OR = 0.694; $p < .01$). This is partially supportive of hypothesis #3, as maternal relationship quality was significant but paternal relationship quality was not. Similar to the Model 1, results indicated that lower entitlement decreased the odds of having perpetrated dating violence by a factor of 0.75 in Model 2 (OR = 0.748; $p < .01$), which is consistent with hypothesis #4. Results further revealed religious attendance decreased the odds of having perpetrated dating violence by a factor of 0.83 (OR = 0.832, $p < .01$), which is consistent with hypothesis #5.

In addition, Model 2 revealed the importance of mesosystem variables and their association with dating violence perpetration. Specifically, having fewer close friends

who drink alcohol decreased the odds of having perpetrated dating violence by a factor of 0.72 (OR = 0.722; $p < .01$) which is consistent with hypothesis #8. Next, lower alcohol expectancy was marginally associated with a decreased odds of perpetrating dating violence by a factor of 0.93 (OR = 0.929, $p < .10$), consistent with hypothesis #9. Finally, lower respondent drinking also decreased the odds of having perpetrated dating violence by a factor of 0.82 (OR = 0.824; $p < .05$), consistent with hypothesis #10. Overall, Model 2 explained 13% of the variation of dating violence perpetration (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.132$).

Victimization

Model 3 demonstrates key microsystem variables associated with dating violence victimization. Consistent with *hypothesis #1*, being female is associated with an increased odds of dating violence victimization by a factor of 1.33 (OR = 1.326; $p < .05$). That is, females are more likely to report having been a victim of dating violence than males. Maternal quality relationship decreased the odds of having experienced dating violence victimization by a factor of 0.80 (OR = 0.801; $p < .05$). Having a higher quality relationship protects against dating violence victimization which is partially consistent with hypothesis #3. Also consistent with previous models is lower entitlement, which decreased the odds of victimization of dating violence by a factor of 0.83 (OR = 0.826; $p < .05$), which is consistent with hypothesis #4. Religious attendance decreased the odds of being a victim dating violence by a factor of 0.80 (OR = 0.800; $p < .01$) which is consistent with hypothesis #5. This suggests the more one attends religious services the less likely they are to become a victim of dating violence. In addition, Greek affiliation was a significant variable that increased the odds of being a victim of dating violence by

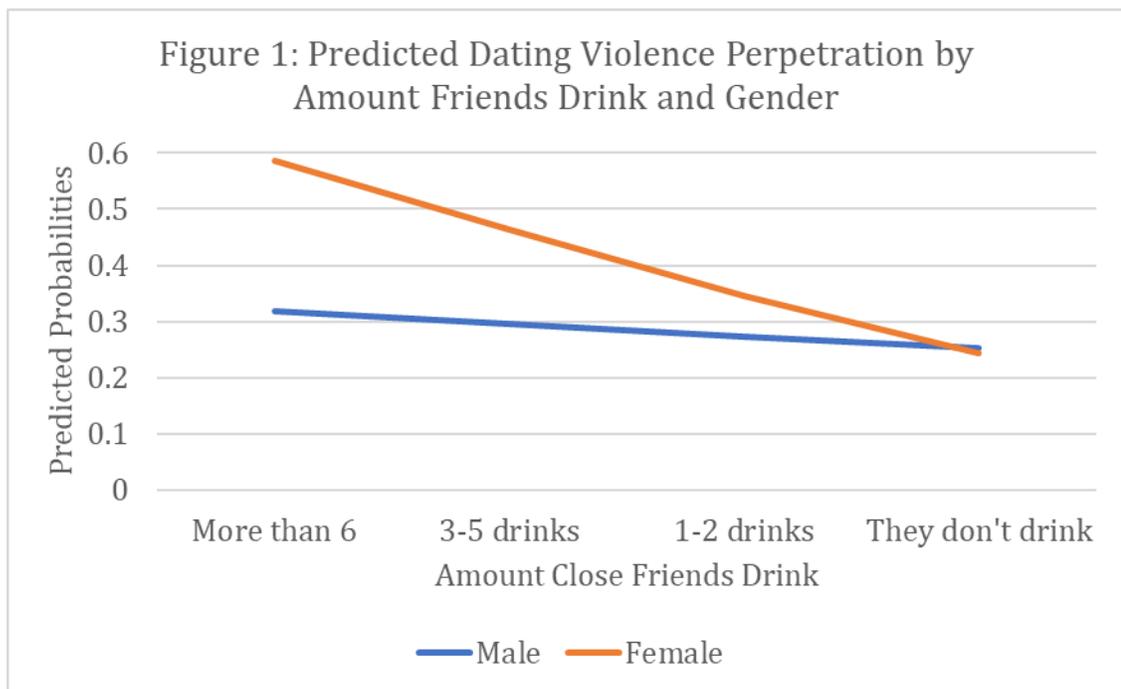
a factor of 1.33 (OR = 1.326; $p < .05$). Overall, Model 3 explained 5% of the variation in dating violence victimization (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .049$).

Model 4 included both micro- and meso-level variables. As hypothesized, females reported experiencing more dating violence victimization than males (OR = 1.722; $p < .01$). This finding is consistent with hypothesis #1. Maternal relationship quality decreased the odds of being victimized by a factor of 0.79 (OR = 0.793; $p < .05$), partially consistent with hypothesis #3. Consistent with previous models and hypothesis #4, lower entitlement was found to protect against dating violence victimization. Having lower entitlement decreased the odds of having experienced dating violence victimization by a factor of 0.84 (OR 0.844; $p < .05$). Also consistent with previous models, religious attendance decreased the odds of having experienced dating violence by a factor of 0.86 (OR = 0.865; $p < .05$), which is consistent with hypothesis #5. Thus, attending religious services was found to protect against having experienced dating violence. Having friends who drink less alcohol was also protective against dating violence victimization. Specifically, having close friends who drink less alcohol decreased the odds of having been a victim of dating violence by a factor of 0.77 (OR = 0.771; $p < .01$), which is consistent with hypothesis #8. Finally, consistent with hypothesis #10, lower respondent drinking decreased the odds of victimization by a factor of 0.77 (OR = 0.766; $p < .01$). Model 4 explained 9% of the variation in dating violence victimization (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .090$).

Interactions

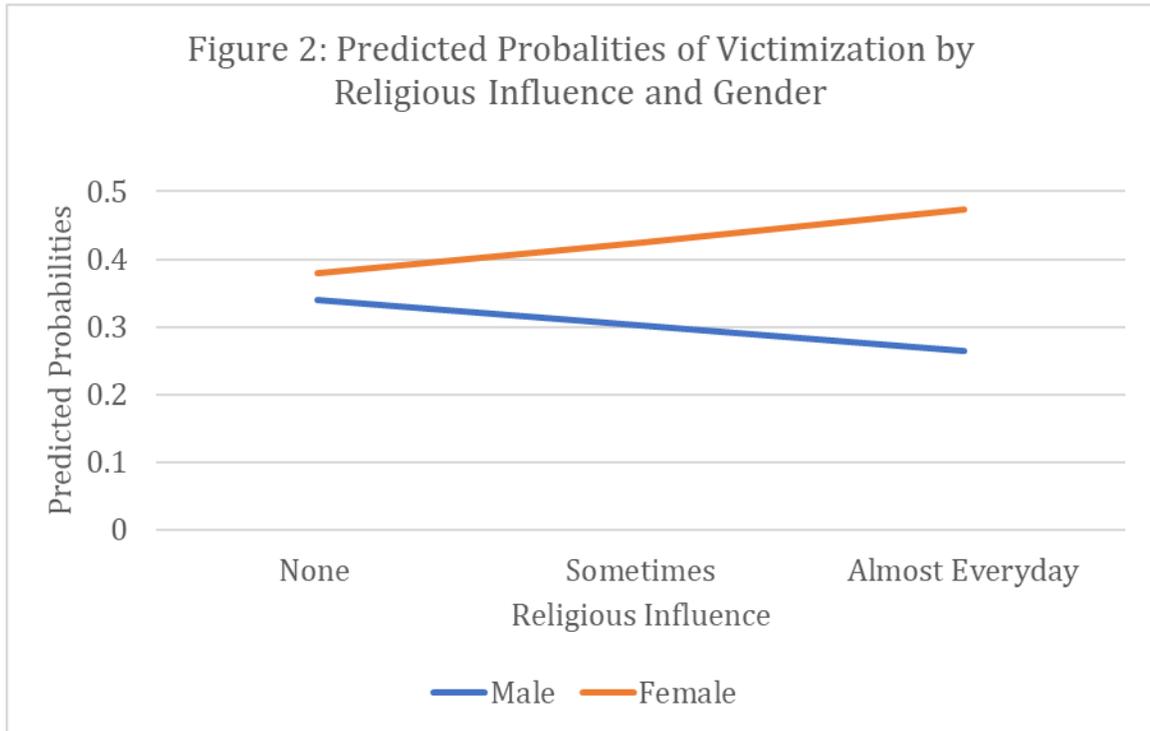
A total of 22 interactions were run for gender: 11 for the victimization models and 11 for the perpetration models. Of these 22 interactions, two of them were significant and

are reported below. The interaction for gender and the amount of alcohol friends drink on dating violence perpetration is presented in Figure 1. Results indicated that females have a higher probability of perpetrating dating violence when their close friends drank more than six drinks compared to having friends who do not drink alcohol. In contrast, the amount of alcohol close friends drink does not have as much of an influence on male's perpetration of dating violence. Additionally, when both males and females have close friends who do not drink alcohol, their probability of perpetrating dating violence is similar.



The second interaction that was significant was for gender and religious influence predicting the probability of experiencing dating violence victimization as displayed in Figure 2. Results indicated that religious influence was more protective for males and less protective for females. That is, females had a higher probability of being victimized as religious influence increased while males had a lower probability of being victimized as

reports of religious influence increased. Overall, these results highlight the important role that religious influence can have on protecting against dating violence victimization, particularly for men (see Figure 2).



Discussion

This paper examined protective factors against dating violence perpetration and victimization. Overall, results indicate the importance of positive relationships both with family, particularly mothers, and peers in preventing dating violence perpetration and victimization. These results highlight the importance of positive friends and their influence on dating violence. By the time, an individual reaches college their family influences are already fixed, whereas friendships can and often do change. In sum, the micro- and meso-levels of social ecological theory are important for explaining why some individuals do not experience victimization and/or perpetrate dating violence.

Gender

Results for gender show that women have greater odds of reporting both perpetrating and experiencing dating violence compared to men, which is consistent with *hypothesis #1*. This finding is consistent with prior research that finds that women report perpetrating dating violence more frequently than men (Archer, 2000; Manchikanti Gómez, 2011; Wincentak et al., 2017). Though women have been found to report perpetrating more dating violence compared to men, some research argues that women's perpetration of violence is akin to self-defense (Johnson, 2006). Moreover, this gender difference may also be explained by the fact that it is more socially acceptable for women to report perpetrating dating violence than it is for men. Another possible explanation for this gender difference may be that men in fact do perpetrate more violence but fail to report it due to this not being socially acceptable. In terms of explaining these gender differences for victimization, it is possible that men report experiencing less dating violence because they do not view female violence toward them as dating violence (e.g. a slap to the face), because it may not cause injury. Related, given the socially acceptable gender norms, men are expected to be strong; thus, they may be less likely to report being a victim of dating violence because they do not want to be viewed as weak. Finally, women may report being a victim of dating violence more often than men because they suffer from more serious injuries as a result and thus may be more willing to report the experience.

Greek Affiliation

Given the lack of prior research on Greek affiliation in relation to dating violence perpetration and victimization, the inclusion of the Greek affiliation variable was considered exploratory for this study. Current study results, however, show that Greek affiliation increases the odds of both perpetration and victimization of dating violence, with the inclusion of the micro-level variables, though this relationship was not significant with the addition of the meso-level variables. One possible reason why Greek members may be at increased risk of perpetrating and experiencing dating violence may be due to their high use of alcohol and their aggressive behaviors (Ragsdale et al. 2012; Tyler et al. 2017). As previously discussed, prior literature has consistently found that Greek members consume higher amounts of alcohol than non-Greek members (Hummer et al., 2005; Humphrey & Kahn 2000; Ragsdale et al., 2012; Tyler et al., 2017) and the consumption of alcohol increases the risk of victimization and perpetration of dating violence (Collibee & Furnam, 2018; Hill et al., 2020). When the meso-level variables were added, however, Greek affiliation was no longer significant in either the victimization or perpetration model. One possible explanation for this lack of a significant finding may be that PBS cancel out some of the negative effects of drinking.

Parents Married

Parental marital status results show no significant relationship with dating violence victimization and perpetration. This finding is inconsistent with *hypothesis #2*, which stated that individuals whose parents are married were expected to have lower odds of experiencing and perpetrating dating violence compared to those with parents who are not married. Additionally, this finding is inconsistent with the literature which finds that individuals whose parents are married is thought to protect against dating

violence victimization and perpetration (Paat & Markham, 2019). One possible explanation as to why parental marital status may not be important in protecting against dating violence in the current study is because friends may play a larger influential role in one's life during college. Current results highlight the importance that friendships play in the protection against dating violence perpetration and victimization. College is a time when many students are on their own for the first time without parental supervision, leaving students to make their own decisions. This newfound freedom combined with the influence of new friends and experimental nature of finding one's self in college may contribute to the decisions one makes which can increase or decrease the likelihood of perpetrating and/or experiencing dating violence.

Parental Relationship Quality

Results indicate that maternal relationship quality is protective against dating violence perpetration and victimization; however, paternal relationship quality was not. This finding provides partial support for *hypothesis #3*, which stated that individuals who have higher quality relationship with their mother and father (higher quality indicates more positive) were expected to have lower odds of experiencing victimization and perpetration compared to individuals with lower quality relationships with their mother and father. The current finding that maternal relationship quality is significantly related to dating violence victimization and perpetration is consistent with previous literature (Davis et al., 2019; Hébert et al., 2019). One possible reason why maternal relationship quality is important for protection against dating violence victimization and perpetration while paternal relationship quality is not may be because of absent fathers. That is, women typically remain the custodial parent when parents' divorce or intimate

relationships end (Grall, 2016), though not always. Another possible explanation that may explain the importance of maternal relationship quality is that of parental monitoring. Parental monitoring tends to influence the quality of relationship one has with their mother (Davis et al., 2019; Hèbert et al., 2019). Moreover, communication contributes to maternal relationship quality in that those with open communication may confide in one's mother about difficult topics such as dating violence, which validates the important role positive relationships with parents play in reducing dating violence perpetration and victimization (Komody et al., 2020; Testa et al., 2010). Finally, establishing positive relationship ties with one's mother may provide young adults with the support they need, protecting them from forming relationships with abusive partners (Hèbert et al., 2019), and thus protecting young adults from dating violence perpetration and victimization.

Lower Entitlement

Results demonstrate that having lower entitlement is protective against dating violence which is consistent with *hypothesis #4*. In alignment with prior research, individuals who are more entitled are at an increased risk of perpetrating dating violence (Hill & Fischer, 2001; Pornari et al., 2013; Santana et al., 2006; Tyler et al., 2017) suggesting that having lower entitlement is protective against dating violence perpetration and victimization. One possible explanation for why lower entitlement protects against perpetrating and experiencing dating violence may be due to those individuals engaging in less risky behaviors (Tyler et al., 2017). That is, research has shown that college students with entitled tendencies engaged in more high-risk behaviors and those high-risk behaviors were associated with the perpetration of dating violence (Tyler et al., 2017). A

second plausible explanation as to why less entitled persons perpetrate less dating violence may be because they hold more egalitarian views and think of themselves as equals to their partners (Hill & Fischer, 2001; Pornari et al., 2013). In contrast, when individuals think of themselves as superior, they believe it is their right to punish their partner as they see fit (Pornari et al., 2013). As such, less entitled people may adhere to rules because they do not think of themselves as more worthy of certain advantages than more entitled individuals (Greenberger et al., 2008).

Religion

Religious attendance results show that the frequency at which one attends religious services is protective against dating violence perpetration and victimization. This finding is consistent with *hypothesis #5*: Individuals who frequently attend religious services were expected to have lower odds of experiencing victimization and perpetration compared with individuals who attend religious services less frequently. Religious attendance is significantly related to dating violence, which is consistent with the literature (Ellison & Anderson, 2001; Ellison et al., 1999; Ellison et al., 2007; Jung & Olson, 2017). One possible explanation as to why religious attendance protects against dating violence may be attributed to the community that can be fostered in religious institutions and the social support individuals may get from that community and their faith (Ellison & Anderson, 2001). That is, when individuals have more social support, they may have more people to talk to and receive advice from when problem do arise. Also, having a sense of community may afford individuals the knowledge that support is available if needed.

Religious influence was not associated with dating violence victimization and perpetration, which is inconsistent with *hypothesis #6*: Individuals who indicated religion is of high importance in their daily life were expected to have lower odds of experiencing and perpetrating dating violence compared to those who indicated religion was not important. One possible explanation as to why religious influence was not significant is that the act of attending religious services demonstrates the importance of religion in one's life. However, one can say that religion is an important factor in their decision-making process but that may not be true. When an individual physically attends religious services, however, it demonstrates the importance of and dedication to their faith. All in all, the act of attending religious services may be indicative of the importance of religion in one's life and outweigh the self-reported importance of religion.

Protective Drinking Strategies

The following section focuses on meso-level variables. First, protective drinking strategies were not significantly related to dating violence perpetration nor victimization. This finding is inconsistent with *hypothesis #7*: Individuals who engage in more PBS are expected to have lower odds of experiencing and perpetrating dating violence compared to those who engage in less PBS. One possible explanation for why there was no significant association between PBS and the perpetration and victimization of dating violence may be explained by the act of abstaining from drinking. That is, if an individual does not drink alcohol then PBS do not apply to them. In other words, the act of not drinking is protective in and of itself. Thus, engaging in PBS may not be applicable to those individuals who are not drinking and thus, are not associated with experiencing and perpetrating dating violence. PBS may be protective factors against dating violence

perpetration and victimization, but it may only be applicable if the person is drinking and enacting such strategies. Further research is needed to assess this relationship.

Friends Drink Less

Having close friends who drink less alcohol is protective against dating violence perpetration and victimization. This finding is consistent with *hypothesis #8*: Individuals who have close friends that have lower levels of alcohol use are expected to have lower odds of experiencing and perpetrating dating violence compared to those who have friends with higher levels of alcohol use. One possible explanation for this relationship may be that having close friends who drink less alcohol is also characteristic of the respondent themselves. For example, an individual who reports having close friends that abstain from the consumption of alcohol may also abstain from using alcohol.

Conversely, an individual who reports having close friend who binge drink may also participate in binge drinking. Another reason for the significant relationship may be the perception that individuals have of their close friends' drinking habits. Recent literature has shown that when an individual perceives that their close friends consume higher amounts of alcohol than in reality, the individual themselves consumes more alcohol (Byrd, 2016; Cox et al., 2019; DiGuseppi et al., 2020; Kenny et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2019). The perception an individual believes to be true about the amount of alcohol their close friends drink can influence their own drinking behaviors which emphasizes the importance of peer relationships. Moreover, this highlights the importance that positive peer relationships can have on an individual (Beard & Wolff, 2020). Overwhelmingly, past literature on dating violence perpetration and victimization is linked to the use of

alcohol in some capacity (Collibee & Furman, 2018; Haynes et al., 2017; Ritter et al., 2019; Tyler et al., 2017). Thus, the friends you keep matter because they influence individuals drinking behaviors and having positive peer relationships protect against perpetrating and experiencing dating violence.

Lower Alcohol Expectancy

Results indicate that lower alcohol expectancy is marginally significant for dating violence perpetration and was not significant for victimization of dating violence. This is inconsistent with *hypothesis #9*, which stated that individuals with lower levels of alcohol expectancy are expected to have lower odds of experiencing and perpetrating dating violence compared to those with higher alcohol expectancy. Lower alcohol expectancy includes statements like “alcohol makes me feel happy” and “when I am drinking it is easier to open up and express my feelings.” One possible explanation for the lack of a significant finding may be that alcohol expectancy is not relevant if the individual abstains from drinking alcohol. In other words, if one does not drink, alcohol cannot make them feel happy. As discussed in previous paragraphs, the act of not drinking is a protective factor against dating violence perpetration and victimization. Thus, statements that we expect to be true when consuming alcohol may not be applicable to those who do not drink, and thus are not associated with perpetration and victimization of dating violence. Overall, individuals with lower levels of alcohol expectancy may have lower odds of experiencing and perpetrating dating violence compared to those with higher alcohol expectancy but may only be applicable to those who consume alcohol. Further research is needed to assess this relationship.

Lower Respondent Drinking

Lower respondent drinking was significantly associated with both victimization and perpetration of dating violence which is consistent with *hypothesis #10*: Individuals who have lower levels of heavy drinking are expected to have lower odds of experiencing and perpetrating dating violence than individuals who have higher levels of heavy drinking. This finding is consistent with existing research that finds that the amount and the frequency at which one drinks alcohol are both associated with an increased risk of perpetration and victimization of dating violence (Hill et al., 2020; Roudsari et al., 2008). One possible explanation for why lower respondent drinking protects against experiencing and perpetrating dating violence is alcohol abstinence. As discussed above, dating violence perpetration and victimization has been linked to the use of alcohol (Collibee & Furman, 2018; Tyler et al., 2017), so not drinking alcohol serves as a protective factor against dating violence. Another possible explanation is that low or alcohol abstinence on the part of the individual may be closely linked to having friends who drink less alcohol. Those who abstain from drinking are likely to associate with other individuals who do not drink. That is, research has found that peers have a profound influence on individual drinking behaviors based on drinking perceptions (Byrd, 2016; Cox et al., 2019; DiGuseppi et al., 2020; Kenny et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2019). Thus, associating with peers who do not drink is likely a further protective factor and highlights the importance that positive peer relationships can have on an individual (Beard & Wolff, 2020). Overall, lower respondent drinking highlights the importance of individual drinking behaviors and the importance of positive peer relationship as protective against dating violence.

The social ecological perspective is useful for explaining the current findings. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological perspective was developed to better understand the influence of social factors in various environmental settings. In the current study, the social ecological perspective is useful for explaining why some individuals experience and/or perpetrate dating violence while other individuals do not. For example, the social ecological perspective explains why micro-level factors such as maternal relationship quality, religion, and entitlement are all significant factors that protect against dating violence perpetration and victimization. Parents are the first agents of socialization in their children's lives and as such, parents have a direct influence on maternal relationship quality, religion, and entitlement.

Similarly, the social ecological perspective is also helpful in explaining meso-level factors and their protectiveness against the perpetration and victimization of dating violence. For instance, bivariate results show that having friends who drink less alcohol is associated with the amount of alcohol an individual consumes, both of which are meso-level factors. Having friends who drink less alcohol and its influence on the individual can be explained via the social ecological perspective because college is often a time in young adults' life where they are on their own for the first time. Parental influence may become a secondary influence and friends become the primary influence. While parents do play a pivotal role as protective agents against dating violence, the influence of peers becomes just as important as having positive peer role models also influences the individual in positive ways (Beard & Wolff, 2020). Moreover, having peers who drink less alcohol is protective against dating violence perpetration and victimization which highlights the important role that peers can have on an individual.

Even though PBS and alcohol expectancy were not associated with dating violence perpetration and victimization, the social ecological perspective can explain this lack of an association. As mentioned above, if one abstains from consuming alcohol then PBS and alcohol expectancy may not apply. Persons who abstain from alcohol likely do so for reasons related to their upbringing and the friends they associate with. That is, people tend to hang out with other likeminded individuals such that “birds of a feather flock together” (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001:417). Those who do not drink alcohol likely associate with other individuals who abstain from the use of alcohol and vice versa. Overall, the social ecological perspective explains both micro-level and meso-level factors that protect against dating violence perpetration and victimization.

Limitations

Some limitations should be noted. First, the study was cross sectional, meaning only correlated assumptions can be made and not causal ones. Second, findings cannot be generalized to reflect the entire college population because participants were not randomly selected. Third, due to the retrospective nature of some questions, respondents may over- or underreport on some measures due to misremembering behaviors. Fourth, religious influence and attendance are highly correlated with one another and when put together in the same model, religious attendance suppresses the relationship between religious influence and dating violence. Finally, this study only focused on dating violence experiences of male and female respondents; thus, we do not know how these experiences may differ for transgender and non-binary individuals.

Conclusion

Overall, this study contributes to the limited research in this area by examining protective factors that are associated with dating violence. The purpose of this study was to examine factors that protect against dating violence perpetration and victimization. Results indicate that both positive peer and maternal relationships lower the odds of an individual experiencing and/or perpetrating dating violence. Furthermore, this study highlights the role alcohol can have on dating violence. In the current study, alcohol abstinence was found to be protective against perpetrating dating violence and experiencing dating violence.

Policy Implications

This study has implications for policy. Specifically, this study highlights that both females and males experience dating violence and that both females and males also perpetrate dating violence. Social programs aimed at preventing dating violence victimization should also inform individuals that dating violence can affect anyone regardless of gender. Additionally, prevention programs should not underestimate the role of having positive maternal and peer relationships because results from this study show they can protect against dating violence. Programs should target parents and educate them on the dangers of dating violence while emphasizing the influential role parents have that can protect their children against dating violence. For example, parents may regularly check in with their young adult child and ask about new peer and dating relationships. Checking in with their adult children can open a line of communication and thus make young adults confident confiding with the parent(s), should they need to. Perhaps another way parents can become aware of the dangers of dating violence would involve universities sending out educational pamphlets to parents. Parents may then be

more likely to check in with their child and be aware of the increased risk of dating violence that college students face.

Future Research

Current study results emphasize a need for additional exploration into protective factors against dating violence victimization and perpetration as little research exists on the topic. Specifically, future research should examine religion more closely in relation to dating violence. As noted, the current study utilized religious influence and attendance as key indicators of individual religiosity. Future research may give way to more nuance of the relationship between religion and dating violence. In addition, literature on religion and dating violence has largely focused on individuals who practice Christianity. Future research should aim to assess the relationship between non-Christian religions and dating violence. Lastly, future research should consider dating violence among individuals who do not identify as male or female, such as transgender and non-binary individuals. This is important because lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer persons tend to be underrepresented in dating violence research, though research suggests they experience higher rates of dating violence perpetration and victimization (Bolam & Bates, 2016).

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Appendix: Pearson Correlations for All Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1 DV perp	-													
2 DV vict	.785**	--												
3 Female	.121**	.046	--											
4 Greek aff	.046	.054	-.007	--										
5 Parents married	-.020	-.022	.015	.052	--									
6 Maternal RQ	-.112**	-.087**	.072**	.111**	.126**	--								
7 Paternal RQ	-.043	-.061*	.124**	.086**	.171**	.425**	--							
8 Entitlement	-.119**	-.083**	.045	.022	-.012	.120**	.114**	--						
9 Rel attendance	-.158**	-.137**	.062*	.432	.658**	.127**	.128**	.104**	--					
10 Rel import	-.114**	-.094**	.083**	.530	.073**	.134**	.138**	.056*	.665**	--				
11 PBS	-.028	-.034	.229**	.018	.013	.080**	.036	.026	.099**	.115**	--			
12 Fri. drink less	-.146**	-.146**	.237**	-.184**	.001	.020	-.003	.044	.205**	.174**	.079**	--		
13 Lower alc exp	-.129**	-.116**	.117**	-.184**	-.056*	-.017	-.002	.096**	.150**	.127**	.044	.362**	--	
14 Lower res drk	-.148**	-.172**	.257**	-.349**	-.020	-.019	-.024	.070*	.272**	.231**	.218**	.499**	.476**	--

Note: $N = 1282$ DV = Dating Violence, Perp = perpetration, Vict = victimization, Aff = affiliation, RQ = relationship quality, Rel = religious, Import = importance; PBS = protective behavior strategies; Fri = Friends, Alc = alcohol; Exp = expectancy, Res = respondent, Drk = drinking

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$