

**THE ROLE OF DIFFERENTIATION OF SELF AND GENDER ON THE  
EXPERIENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL AGGRESSION BY A ROMANTIC  
PARTNER**

by

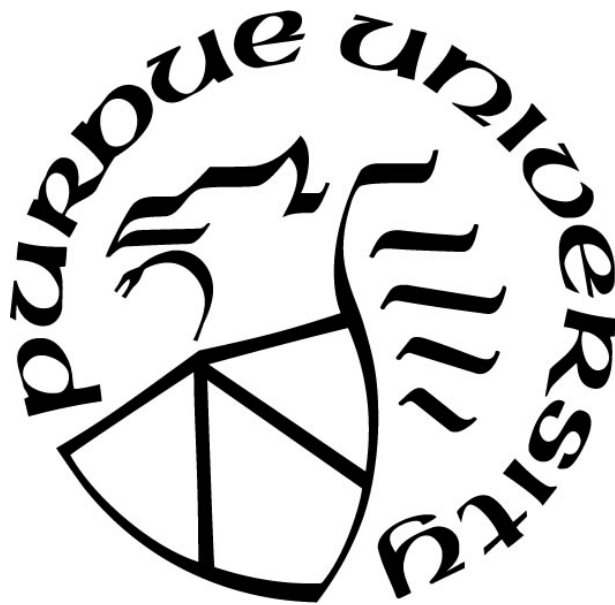
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## ABSTRACT

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Title: The Role of Differentiation of Self and Gender on the Experience of Psychological Aggression by a Romantic Partner

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The study aimed to understand and advance the dynamics that influence psychological aggression. Psychological aggression can be defined as, verbal and non-verbal communication with the intent to harm another person mentally or emotionally, and/or control another person. In our society, the occurrence of psychological aggression in relationships is far more tolerated than physical aggression, but the effects can be more long term and harmful. The study hypothesized that an individual's level of differentiation of self--a person's ability to differentiate between feeling and thinking in times of stress--and their gender have a role in the severity of psychological aggression. The study asked participants about experiencing and perpetrating psychological aggression. One hundred and ninety-two people participated in the study, in which multiple regressions provided some support that the level of differentiation of self and severity of psychological aggression, experiencing and perpetrating, have a negative significant relationship. Gender was found to not impact the relationship between differentiation of self and severity of psychological aggression. Clinical implications, limitations, and future directions for research were addressed.



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

Psychological aggression is a relational phenomenon that is frequently under reported and may put individuals at a greater risk for psychological distress and mental health diagnoses compared to some other forms of abuse (Arriaga & Schkeryantz, 2015; Chirichella-Besemer & Motta, 2008; Follingstad, 2009). Psychological aggression as defined by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in a review of an intimate partner violence literature is “use of verbal and non-verbal communication with the intent to: a) harm another person mentally or emotionally, and/or b) exert control over another person” (Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black, & Mahendra, 2015, p. 15). Psychological aggression consists of behaviors such as verbal assaults, dominance or control, isolation, ridicule, or the use of intimate knowledge used with the intention to degrade (Karakurt & Silver, 2013). Psychological aggression has been noted in many research studies to be connected to intimate partner violence (Leisring, 2013; Swan, Gambone, Caldwell, Sullivan, & Snow, 2008); however, there is far less conclusive research on psychological aggression as compared to research on physical abuse in romantic relationships.

The rates of psychological aggression are high; it has been reported that 80% of people will experience it in their lifetime. Psychological aggression in intimate relationships can be detrimental to a person’s well-being and health as well as cause distress in their relationship because the partner is the source of such harmful behavior (Arriaga & Schkeryantz, 2015). Approximately 40% of women and 32% of men have reported experiencing expressive aggression, which is displaying aggressive behavior for the purpose of feeling good (e.g., name-calling, humiliating) and coercive control (e.g., limiting access to transportation, money, friends,

and family; excessive monitoring of whereabouts). Additionally, 41% of women and 43% of men reported coercive control as main aspects of relationship aggression (Carney & Barner, 2012; Murphy & Hoover, 1999).

Studies show that men and women perpetrate about the same amount of psychological aggression towards a partner (Swan et al., 2008). However, women are significantly more likely than men to report being victimized by an intimate partner and show more adverse effects, like psychological distress and being diagnosed with a mental health disorder (Follingstad & Rogers, 2012; Swan et al., 2008). Examining the effects of psychological aggression and an individual's gender may provide information to address current gaps in the literature. The previous binary distinction between individuals having experienced abuse versus not experiencing abuse is out of date and may produce misleading results by using yes or no questions (Follingstad & Rogers, 2012). When assessing psychological aggression, severity level needs to be considered and the construct should be measured as a continuum because multiple occurrences of psychological aggression may have a greater impact on a person's well-being. A more precise measure for psychological aggression is required; however, this is not plausible until there is a full understanding of this form of abuse and how it affects aspects of a romantic relationship.

The purpose of this study was to further research the impact of psychological aggression on people, as well as to determine if an individual's level of differentiation contributes to their experience and the severity of psychological aggression. This research could help provide information to solidify the definition of psychological aggression and could help clinicians intervene in relationships where psychological aggression is present. By researching these aspects of psychological aggression, the information may help victims become aware of this form of abuse and potentially prevent aggression before it becomes a precursor to intensified

aggression or forms of physical abuse (Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, & Polek, 1990).

Leisring (2013) specified that psychological abuse is a common precursor to physical abuse.

Psychological aggression is a form of abuse that goes unacknowledged in our society and it is critical that it starts to be addressed.

## CHAPTER 2: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

### Definition of Psychological Aggression

Both the definition and understanding of psychological aggression have changed over time; psychological aggression has been referred to by the following terms: emotional abuse, psychological abuse, psychological maltreatment, emotional/verbal abuse, and non-physical aggression (Chirichella-Besemer & Motta, 2008; Follingstad, Coyne, & Gambone, 2005). Follingstad and colleagues (2009) state, “*Psychological aggression* is a more useful term which represents the full range of potentially negative intimate interpersonal behaviors” (p. 272). For the purpose of this study, the term ‘psychological aggression’ was used because it demonstrates the intended repetition of aggressive behaviors in a relational dynamic to psychologically or emotionally harm a partner. The term “psychological aggression” fits under the umbrella term of ‘psychological abuse,’ which is used to discuss the full continuum of abuse and its harmful effects (Murphy & Cascardi, 1999).

A difficulty that researchers face is lack of agreement over what exactly psychological aggression is and the components that pertain to this form of relational abuse (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008). Research has so far found acts of psychological aggression to be defined as actions or speech that make a partner feel degraded, humiliated, in which causes isolation, restrictions of partners social contact, destruction of property, withdrawal in hostile ways, creation of fear, criticism and threats of harm (Murphy & Hoover, 1999). The CDC reports the significance of using the term ‘psychological aggression’ instead of psychological abuse because the experiences of aggression exist on a continuum. After repeated acts of psychological aggression, a person may be experiencing the larger term of ‘psychological abuse’ (Breiding et

al., 2015). The evolution of the terminology for psychosocial aggression has allowed researchers and victims to understand the complexity of this form of abuse.

### **Effects of Psychological Aggression**

Capezza and Arriaga (2008) examined comparisons of physical and psychological aggression; they found that even low levels of physical aggression were perceived by the general public as more severe than any degree of psychological aggression. In addition, physical and psychological aggression together were found to be more abusive and violent than psychological aggression alone (Williams, Richardson, Hammock, & Janit, 2012). There is a public perception that physical violence is very damaging and psychological abuse is manageable, but research shows that psychological abuse is just as harmful to a person as physical abuse.

Researchers have discovered that the effects and outcomes of psychological aggression may be more harmful than physical aggression in relationships (Follingstad, 2009; Taft et al., 2006). It is common for people to relate aggression to an action or threat of physical violence and forget the impact of verbal and psychological harm. Physical abuse consists of more than just physical acts; for example, it may include, “being repeatedly denigrated, threatened, or overly controlled, predicts distress beyond the effects of physically aggressive acts” (Arriaga & Schkeryantsz, 2015, p. 1341). Physical aggression is easily labeled and recognized as intolerable, whereas acts of psychological aggression can go unacknowledged for longer periods of time (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008). Psychological aggressive acts that are not properly identified could be harmful to an individual’s sense of self, quality of relationships, increase alcohol and substance use, and damage their overall health (Follingstad, 2009; Shorey et al., 2012). Victims of psychological aggression may not end or leave an abusive relationship because they deny or manage the feelings surrounding the occurrences. However, after abuse escalates and the longer

spans of time it takes place then victims may be more likely to look into options of leaving and terminating the relationship (N.A., 2017).

Dashnaw (2017) describes mental intimidation as a substitute for physical acts because control can be implemented and gained through psychological acts like chronic complaining, put-downs, social ostracism and insults. For female victims, threats of abuse were found to be a strong predictor of later physical abuse (Follingstad et al., 1990). The influence of power and threat are seen in physically abusive relationships, but they are not often labeled as psychological aggression because physical abuse is the primary focus.

In a study of older women and relationship violence, one-third of women reported experiencing intimate partner violence and did not make a clear distinction between physical and nonphysical forms of abuse (Seff, Beaulaurier, & Newman, 2008). It has been discovered that abusive partners often relied on the use of “coercive power (e.g., threats of severe physical harm) to establish dominance over the battered women” (Follingstad et al., 1990, p. 108).

There may be differences between men and women’s perceptions of psychological aggression and other concepts about themselves. Gender ideas and roles greatly affect individuals’ concepts of self. This research may provide information about victims’ reactions and understandings of psychological aggression and assist with closing gaps in the literature by examining and defining what constitutes psychological aggression. It may be beneficial to explore how do individuals evaluate experiences of psychological aggression and what factors affect their evaluations? The experience of psychological abuse within close relationships could transform one’s idea of self and their attachment to others (O’Hearn & Davis, 1997).

In a study on marital violence, it found that dismissing husbands with insecure attachment, which is an attachment to others rooted in fear and anxiety, spent more time

stonewalling than husbands with secure attachment, since they feel secure and have interdependence with a partner (Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, & Yerington, 2000). There are many different causes of marital violence; not all men who engage in physical aggression have attachment or differentiation issues, but it could be a leading factor. Husbands with dismissing or preoccupied attachments were more likely to engage in domineering acts with their wives than securely attached husbands, and preoccupied husbands use the most emotional abuse towards their wives (Babcock et al., 2000).

### **Power and Abuse in Relationships**

Control and power play a large part in the ongoing dynamics of abusive relationships. The Power and Control Wheel (See Appendix A) is used as a visual aid by therapists in intimate partner violence situations to identify the dynamics of intimate partner violence. The wheel provides specific examples in order for people to understand what non-physical partner abuse can look like. In an abusive relationship, there can be times when psychological aggression is not a precursor to physical aggression and the abuse remains non-physical; however, it is not clear what factors control these outcomes. The power and control wheel can be used as an intervention to help individuals recognize the potential factors in their own or other people's relationships that may warrant seeking help. For clinicians, it is important to comprehend that relationship dynamics are complex, and what some people may view as harmful, others may not. Therefore, the wheel provides some concrete notion for what psychological aggression can look like in a relationship. Overall, Hammond, McNulty, and Finkel (2016) discussed the need for power in a non-egalitarian relationship as a factor in abuse, because one partner is trying to gain a higher power stance or some sort of control over the other and reverts to the power dynamic to feel better.

At times, psychological aggression can be found in relationships when there is a power imbalance and one partner is in a lower power position. Overall et al. (2016) discussed power as an important reason for why men choose to use aggressive behaviors in relationships, although their findings also showed women using more psychological aggression in relationships. Power imbalances in relationships need to be addressed; if not, psychological aggression could be used by low-positioned partners to gain power. This, in turn, could have serious effects on victims' emotional and psychological well-being (Karakurt & Silver, 2013) as well as the stability of the relationship (Overall et al., 2016). Some researchers have found reasons as to why perpetrators commit psychological and physical aggression, such as substance abuse and having been victims of abuse and neglect in their childhoods (Shorey et al., 2012).

### **Mental Health Outcomes of Psychological Aggression**

Although it is rarely discussed as a serious and prevalent form of abuse, psychological aggression should be considered as such because it has a lasting and long impact on a person (Murphy & Hoover, 1999). Capezza and Arriaga (2008) studied how psychological aggression results in low self-esteem and diagnoses like depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Common outcomes for psychological aggression consist of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and relational distress, with depression being the most studied outcome (Arriaga & Schkeryantz, 2015; Follingstad, 2009; Follingstad & Rogers, 2012). The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence reviewed literature to find there is a strong relationship between intimate partner violence and victims' rates of depression and suicidal behavior (N.A., 2015).

It may be detrimental for clients if clinicians overlook the signs and patterns of psychological aggression (Dashnaw, 2017). It is the duty of clinicians to ensure the safety of



clients by starting conversations, asking questions, and examining situations that may risk their safety and overall health. The *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services* website for women (N.A., 2017) states, “emotional or verbal abuse may be short-term but has long-term effects and is just as serious as physical abuse” (p. 3). Some clinicians may not see the seriousness of psychological aggression because it is not screened for like other forms of abuse. It is critical for clinicians to screen for psychological abuse in their clients’ relationships and raise clients’ awareness of the impact and effects. Clinicians need to know the warning signs and identify individuals at risk for these types of abusive behaviors (Vidourek, 2017).

Additionally, correlations exist between an individual’s experience of psychological aggression and outcomes such as feelings of loneliness, hopelessness, and anger, as well as intentional self-injury and consideration of or attempts at suicide. Depression and anxiety are conditions that may arise from experiences of psychological aggression because the results of aggression can form negative feelings focused on a person’s self-image (Chirichella-Besemer & Motta, 2008). Since psychological aggression usually occurs in an intimate relationship, victims may blame themselves or be told the aggression was their own fault. This may produce negative cognitions about themselves and elicit feelings like shame and guilt. This may cause victims to have low self-esteem or negative beliefs about their self-worth. Arriaga and Schkeryantz (2015) examined perpetrators and victims of psychological aggression experiences and their commitment to their relationship as factors for distress. They found that experiencing multiple occurrences of psychological aggression from an intimate partner predicted higher levels of personal distress, as well as people who had more distress also had felt highly committed and were more likely to remain in the relationship (Arriaga & Schkeryantz, 2015).

Isolation is a significant behavior in perpetrating psychological aggression. Karakurt and Silver (2013) stated, “isolation aims to undermine the victim’s life and identity outside the relationship and foster a sense of dependency” (p. 10). People in abusive relationships may feel separated or cut-off from their support systems, which may help them recognize the abuse and initiate changes in the relationship or contemplate leaving the relationship. Women who experienced less psychological aggression had positive coping strategies (i.e. social support), whereas women who presented with negative coping strategies experienced ongoing and multiple forms of psychological aggression (Follingstad & Rogers, 2012). Curtis, Epstein, and Wheeler (2017) examined levels of dyadic psychological aggression and the factors or support associated with leaving the relationship. Social support was observed as a factor in leaving. In addition, a partner’s level of relationship satisfaction was a significant mediator for the level of perpetration and the results were similar across genders (Curtis et al., 2017). There is little research in examining the severity of aggressive actions when it is initially perceived as negative, and how gender may influence the perception of abuse (Masci & Sanderson, 2017).

Follingstad and Rogers (2012) examined low and high occurrences of psychological aggression. Women who experienced acts of psychological aggression only once in the relationship were comparable to those women who never experienced aggression in terms of possible outcomes. Women who experienced higher rates of psychological aggression had more adverse outcomes such as anxiety, depression, diminished view of self, and harm to the quality of the relationship. Women with more occurrences of psychological aggression used more negative coping skills than women with lower occurrences of aggression. Follingstad and Rogers (2012) reported women who identified many occurrences of psychological aggression behaviors in their relationships had lower levels of love and commitment, although their ratings of

investment and perceptions of alternative were similar to women with few occurrences (Follingstad & Rogers, 2012).

### **Gender and Relationship Abuse**

Survivors and perpetrators of psychological aggression were found to be both men and women, although most previous research of psychological aggression has focused on male perpetrators and female victim's outcomes (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008; Follingstad, 2009; Swan et al., 2008; Taft et al., 2006). Gold and Pitariu (2004) discuss the disparities recognized in abuse behavior between genders and how males are often overlooked as victims. Most abuse victims are identified as females and male victims are underreported even though studies have found equal rates with females being perpetrators of abuse on males (Breiding et al., 2015; Karakurt & Silver, 2013). There are findings of male-perpetrated aggression leading to female-initiated relationship dissolution, but less research on female-perpetrated aggression and male's decisions to dissolve the relationship (Curtis et al., 2017).

There is a need for studies to further research the impact of psychological aggression on both men and women. Our society portrays abuse most often with males as perpetrators and females as victims. Gender stereotypes about abuse can negatively affect people's ability to recognize abuse. It is important to understand that both women and men perpetrate intimate partner violence, and both men and women are victims. A study of college women reported anger as the main reason why women perpetuate psychological aggression (Leisring, 2013). Researchers examined female perpetrators of psychological aggression in college dating relationships and found that psychological aggression was reinforcing behavior when it helped regulate negative emotional feelings (Shorey et al., 2012). When female perpetrators felt angry or hurt, acts of psychological aggression helped calm them, so in turn, it became a negative

coping strategy. The inability to regulate emotions, which is being aware and in control of feelings, leads to expressing the issues by projecting feelings on to another person in a relationship (Skowron & Dendy, 2004). Carney and Barner (2012) note that “violence in relationships is bidirectional and relationship abuse is currently based in a rigid gender-based framework” (p. 242).

Psychological abuse is less likely to be related to person’s physical strength or abilities, unlike physical abuse, where a person’s physical form may create a power advantage. Any person may be capable of inflicting and being a victim of abuse psychologically. Any individual, regardless of gender, is susceptible to psychological abuse, and future research could provide evidence on the disparities. Follingstad, Coyne, and Gambone (2005) found gender differences when assessing the severity of psychological aggression and the effects on victims. In a study on college-aged couples experiencing psychological aggression, comparable rates of perpetration from both men and women were found. Taft et al. (2006) investigated power dynamics and gender ideas as main factors for the intimate partner aggression factors and no significant results were found. A possible explanation for gender-based ideas about intimate partner aggression is the socialization factors surrounding aggression and how in media and society, men are often portrayed as the perpetrators or aggressors. In addition, Chirichella-Besemer and Motta (2008) assessed PTSD in individuals who had been psychologically maltreated, and they found no significant differences between men and women. Taft et al. (2006) found the impact of depression rates to be associated with male perpetrators and female victims, compared to female perpetrators and male victims. Depression is more commonly treated and diagnosed in women than men with forms of abuse(Hegarty, Gunn, Chondros, & Small, 2004).

Examining the impact of gender roles and cultural influences on emotional connectedness is important in understanding how males and females may differ in their experiences of psychological aggression. Masci and Sanderson (2017) discuss that equal empathy for both genders may lead to enhanced reporting of all types of abuse. Men typically intellectualize issues to problem solve instead of being emotionally reactive, which may be an explanation for gender differences in abuse situations (Hertlein, Ray, Wetchler, & Killmer, 2003). Men using their intellect and problem-solving strategies when faced with stressors may show higher rates of differentiation, which is the separation of thoughts from emotions. However, this could be an outcome of the ways males and females are socialized. Historically, females are raised to enforce togetherness and embrace and show emotions, whereas males are taught to hold individuality in high regard and to suppress emotions (Knudson-Martin, 2002).

### **Family Systems Theory**

Bowen's family systems theory provides insight as to how family members relate to and function with one another throughout the lifespan and demonstrates the effect an individual's family upbringing has on their future. Murray (2006) describes, "family systems theory as the ideas that individuals within families are intricately connected to one another and that experiences in one part of the system affect all other parts of the system as well" (p. 234). The theory works to understand and interpret how behaviors influence the system, instead of focusing on the behaviors being as good or bad (Murray, 2006). Family systems theory considers individuals' past influences and the effect they can have on current relationships. Craft and Serovich (2005) found that family violence in one's family of origin was positively correlated with having violence in an adult intimate relationship. Family influence plays a large part in one's actions, feelings and thoughts. Yet family systems theory suggests not using family

influences as excuses because individuals need to accept personal responsibility for their actions (Murray, 2006).

Fingerman and Bermann (2000) discuss how studying families leads to better understanding of how they adjust to stressors or change. “Families are generally homeostatic; we must consider discontinuity to understand how the family system functions” (p. 22). Homeostasis is a factor in systems theory and describes how individuals and families function when faced with issues of change. Typically, families may adhere to homeostasis in order to avoid the discomfort of change (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000) and to maintain consistency in their system or induce change to reestablish equilibrium (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Both are methods towards achieving balance in a family system and managing life stressors. “There is a strong tendency to maintain stability. The family system tends to pursue the status quo and equilibrium, minimizing disruptions rather than living with unfamiliar change” (Kim & Rose, 2014, p. 2461). Disrupting homeostasis to deal with issues and resolve conflicts can be difficult for individuals with lower levels of differentiation because in conflicts they have less neutrality to think and learn from their emotions. Homeostasis is important for systems thinking and comprehending how people interconnect.

Kerr and Bowen (1988) discussed how physical abuse is fairly common in relationships with lower levels of individual differentiation; however, there is no discussion of psychological abuse. Partners in a relationship with less differentiation may frequently experience psychological distress. When overdependence occurs within a couple relationship, they may “use any of several strategies to alleviate their discomfort while remaining attached to one another in the relationship” (Scaturo, 2005, p. 103). Breaking negative cycles and identifying the abnormal events disrupts homeostasis and creates change in a system. This could be a possible explanation

as to why some relationships dissolve when psychological aggression is present; individuals with higher levels of differentiation are better able to upset homeostasis than individuals with lower differentiation.

Abuse in romantic relationships is a prevalent issue; however, there is far too little literature and research available on psychological aggression in romantic relationships. This research can help clinicians providing treatment to individuals, couples, and families experiencing psychological aggression. Information offered in this research may advance the field of couple and family therapy and supply the public with more knowledge and recognition of psychological aggression for both males and females. Differentiation of self is an important factor in how individuals manage and react to life stressors and in a romantic relationship if a partner is not able to cope with stressors then distress is likely to happen. Consequently, differentiation of self might be a contributing factor for the occurrences of psychologically aggressive behaviors in romantic relationships. There has been no literature on differentiation of self and romantic relationships with psychological aggression. The field of marriage and family therapy may benefit from examining the ties between differentiation of self and individual's experiences of psychological aggression in romantic relationships.

### **Differentiation of Self**

Differentiation refers to an individual's ability to differentiate between thinking and feeling in certain stress-related situations and experiences (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Murray Bowen's *Family Systems Theory* explains how individuals evaluate adulthood problems based on their family of origin, the family a person is born or raised in, and emotional interactions (Knudson-Martin, 2002). The construct of differentiation of self explains how an individual's separateness or togetherness, in relation to their family of origin, can influence different levels of

functioning in adulthood, such as emotional reactivity and cognitive appraisal in interpersonal relationships. It was believed that an individual's emotional maturity was synonymous with their degree of differentiation of self (Scaturo, 2005). A person with a higher score of differentiation is able to manage emotions and have positive outlooks compared to a person with low differentiation of self who may become emotionally reactive and experience more distress (Scaturo, 2005).

Individuals with higher levels of differentiation can be emotionally close to romantic partners and adapt to stress in relationships, whereas lower differentiated people experience more stress and anxiety in adult relationships (Holman & Busby, 2011). Kerr and Bowen (1988) examined the idea that patterns in an individual's family of origin are often replayed in the person's adult relationships. Sheikh, Khodabakhshi Koolae, and Rahmati Zadeh (2013) describe the levels of differentiation:

Differentiation is described on a continuum where at one end (high differentiation) an individual is able to maintain a strong sense of self in the midst of circumstances and intense emotional relationships. At the other end of the continuum (low differentiation), a person loses self in situations that produce anxiety, becoming emotionally dependent and enmeshed or fused psychologically with others (p. 67).

Kerr and Bowen (1988) described differences between people's levels of differentiation as an important factor in stress related experiences. Differentiation of self is associated with psychological health and social well-being (Hainlen, Jankowski, Paine, & Sandage, 2015). Differentiation of self is related to anxiety and stress and a person's level of differentiation may help determine how they handle stressors such as psychological aggression. It can also affect an individual's emotional reactions and the connections they have to others (Hainlen et al., 2015).



Studies examining differences in differentiation of self and gender have revealed that those differences may be related to how males and females deal with issues (Hertlein et al., 2003; Knudson-Martin, 2002). An individual's level of differentiation and their experience with extramarital affairs was investigated and results showed that men who had higher levels of physical infidelity were less emotionally reactive and had higher levels of differentiation. However, women who showed greater emotional reactivity were more likely to engage in emotional infidelity and those who were less differentiated engaged in higher levels of physical infidelity (Hertlein et al., 2003). Individuals' emotional reactivity and gender may play a part in their decision-making processes. If a person has a higher level of differentiation, they are able to understand their values and emotions and will not be as influenced by the emotional reactivity of others (Sheikh et al., 2013). Krycak, Murdock, and Marszalek (2012) found that emotional reactivity mediated a positive association between levels of stressors and psychological distress. A person who is highly differentiated and has a strong sense of self in the midst of uncertain circumstances and intense emotional relationships, and will be able to identify emotions and solve their problems.

Skowron and Dendy (2004) studied persons of color and differentiation of self scores; the results revealed that "ethnic minorities had higher scores for sense of belonging to family members and community, reported better social problem solving, and ownership of thoughts and feelings" (Skowron & Dendy, 2004, p. 454). Also, Holman and Busby (2011) concluded that African Americans' scores for differentiation of self are consistently different than White and Asian and sometimes Hispanic groups. This may be because fusion with others and the sense of community is stronger in minority cultures (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Additionally, the I-position is seen as a valuable trait in most western cultures.

Adults with lower levels of differentiation may face psychological distress and coping problems. Skowron and Dendy (2004) examined whether differentiation of self was associated with greater regulatory control and self-regulation skills. They found people with lower levels of differentiation had greater attachment anxiety. This represents the importance of emotional regulating with attachments in relationships. “The maintenance of positive connections with caregivers and partners goes hand in hand with the achievement of mature autonomy” (Skowron & Dendy, 2004, p. 349). In intimate relationships, a person who is highly differentiated has the ability to remain connected to others while being able to have a sense of self and achieve goals. Emotional regulation was associated with less avoidance and emotional cutoff, which could affect experiences of relationship distress (Skowron & Dendy, 2004). Experiences and intensity of intimate partner violence would be an evident stressor in a person’s life and may be dependent on an individual’s degree of differentiation.

Individuals develop their levels of differentiation from their family of origin and in cases where the family upbringing was chaotic or insecure attachments occurred, individuals may have developed low levels of differentiation and perpetuate unhealthy relationship patterns (Holman & Busby, 2011; Knudson-Martin, 2002). These patterns in adult relationships may lead to higher occurrences of psychological aggressive behaviors because it may relate to what a person experienced in their upbringing. Differentiation is dependent on individuals being able to regulate emotions and thoughts during relational stress and the inability to do or inexperience with learning to do it in childhood, can carry over into adult relationships and cause negative effects.

To summarize, differentiation of self is a component of self that allows individuals to function and overcome stressful situations within a relational context. In cases where an

individual has low levels differentiation of self, they may experience or use unhealthy coping skills or be unable to self-regulate their thoughts and emotions. This may impact the relationships and lead to higher possibilities of unhealthy behaviors, like psychological aggression. Psychological aggression has been shown to lower relationship satisfaction and affect commitment and play into gender role ideas. The literature shows time and time again that psychological aggression has a large impact on individuals' well-being, with possible outcomes such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and negative impact on the overall relationship. This research is needed to understand the relationship between level of differentiation of self and the severity of psychological aggression in romantic relationships. There is a need to add to the literature about why individuals experience and perpetrate psychological aggression. In some psychological aggression research, there are still unanswered questions about accurate levels of gendered-based abuse in relationships. The hypotheses below are intended to provide further knowledge on differentiation of self and the relational dynamic of psychological aggression, as well as the influence of gender.

### **Research Questions and Test of Hypotheses**

#### **Research Question 1**

Is a person's degree of differentiation of self associated with the severity of psychological aggression that they experienced in a relationship?

#### **Hypothesis 1**

Differentiation of self is negatively related to severity of psychological aggression a person experienced in a relationship.

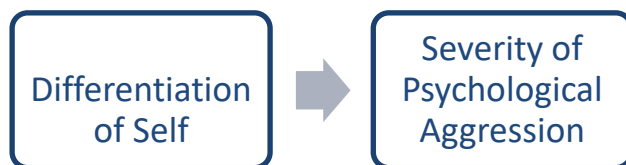


Figure 1. Hypothesized Model for Hypothesis 1

### Research Question 2

Does a person's gender impact the relationship between degree of differentiation of self and severity of psychological aggression they experienced in a relationship?

### Hypothesis 2

Gender is associated with the negatively correlated relationship between degree of differentiation and severity of psychological aggression for the person who has experienced psychological aggression.

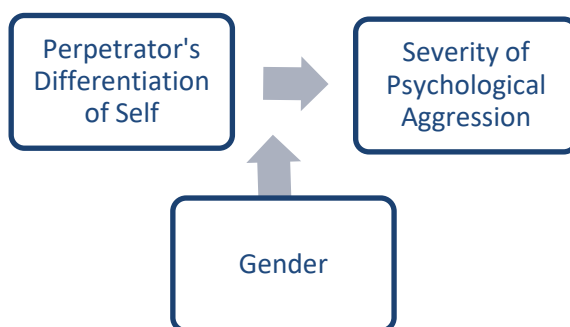


Figure 2. Hypothesized Model for Hypothesis 2

### Research Question 3

Is a person's degree of differentiation of self associated with the severity of psychological aggression they have perpetrated in a relationship?

**Hypothesis 3**

Differentiation of self is negatively related to severity of psychological aggression a person has perpetrated in a relationship.

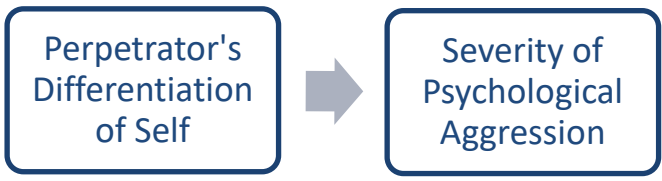


Figure 3. Hypothesized Model for Hypothesis 3

**Research Question 4**

Does a person's gender impact the relationship between degree of differentiation of self and severity of psychological aggression they perpetrated in a relationship?

**Hypothesis 4**

Gender is associated with the negatively correlated relationship between the degree of differentiation and severity of psychological aggression for the person who has perpetrated psychological aggression.

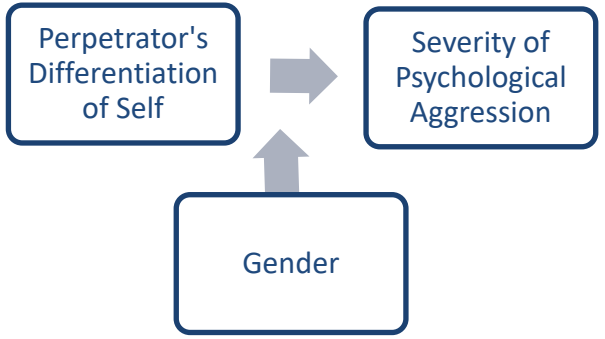


Figure 4. Hypothesized Model for Hypothesis 4

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants and Procedure**

Following approval from Purdue University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), participants were assembled through a survey facilitated with Qualtrics. The survey was provided to the participants via MTurk, which is a very reliable data gathering engine and provides quality data. MTurk is an online survey system that pays participants to take part in online surveys. Each participant was given \$0.40 cents for completing this survey. MTurk has been found to be more demographically diverse than other internet samples and far more than college university drawn samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). First, participants needed to read through the informed consent and agree to participate. Participants must have been a U.S. resident, older than 18 years of age, and younger than 65 years old. If they met the criteria for residence and age, they selected a button option to agree to participate or selected disagree to terminate their participant in the survey. Participants were also asked about their relationship status and if they answered 'never been in a relationship' they were excluded and brought to the end of the survey. Individuals answered questions about themselves and a conflictual romantic relationship they are in or previously had been in. Participants needed to fully complete the survey to be included in the data.

### **Measures**

#### **Demographic and Qualitative Questions**

The following demographic data was collected: race, household income, gender, education level, age, and degree of religious and spiritual beliefs. In addition, participants were asked about their current relationship status and length of relationship. Qualitative questions

were asked so that the participants whose conflictual relationship ended could describe how it ended, and what supports the participant had in ending the relationship.

## **Scales**

The study used the following scales; Conflict Tactic Scale- 2 revised (CTS2), Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse (MMEA) and Differentiation of Self-Inventory (DSI).

### **Conflict Tactic Scale**

The Revised Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS-2) was developed to explore intimate partner violence (Anderson & Leigh, 2010). The CTS-2 has five subscales of physical assault, psychological aggression, negotiation, physical injury, and sexual coercion. The questions and language were adapted to examine only instances of victimization and not perpetration. Anderson and Leigh (2010) found that the scale is internally consistent for victimization, with a Cronbach's alpha score between .61 to .92. The CTS-2 uses a Likert 7-point scale based on *Never* (0), *Once* (1), *Twice* (2), *3-5 times* (3), *6-10 times* (4), *11-20 times* (5), and *More than 20 times* (6). For this study the *never in the past never 6 months, but it has happened before* point was not be used. Each item asks what the partner initiated (victimization) and what the participant initiated (perpetration). The survey only used victimization questions in order to explore a full range of victimization. Items from the CTS-2 include "my partner shouted or yelled at me" and "my partner threatened to hit or throw something at me."

### **Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse**

The Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse (MMEA) was created to examine behaviors in psychologically abusive relationships (Murphy & Hoover, 1999). Participants rate

the prevalence of items concerning psychological abuse, based on their own and their partner's actions. The scale contains 28-items, with four subscales: restrictive engulfment, denigration, hostile withdrawal, and dominance /intimidation, and the scale was used as one variable. Each item asks how many times a particular behavior has been perpetrated by them (you) and how many times their partners has done the behaviors to them (your partner). The items use a 7-point Likert-scale based on *Once* (1), *Twice* (2), *3-5 times* (3), *6-10 times* (4), *11-20 times* (5), *More than 20 times* (6), *Never in the past six months, but it has happened before* (7), and *This has never happened* (0). The Cronbach's alpha for the MMEA scale is from 0.83 to 0.91 (Murphy & Hoover, 1999). For this study the *never in the past never 6 months, but it has happened before* point was not used. Examples of questions on the MMEA are: "Tried to stop the other person from seeing certain friends or family members" and "Became so angry that they were unable or unwilling to talk."

### **Differentiation of Self**

Differentiation of Self-Inventory (DSI) is a scale assessing individuals' levels of differentiation using four subscales, however, the entire scale will be used as one scale (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Emotional reactivity (ER) pertains to questions about a person's emotional responses to others, a question example is, "I'm overly sensitive to criticism." I position (IP) assesses a person's intrapersonal dimensions and sense of self with questions such as, "I tend to remain pretty calm even under stress." Emotional cutoff (EC) assesses interpersonal dimensions and vulnerability in relationships with questions such as, "when things go wrong, talking about them usually makes it worse." Lastly, fusion with others (FO) examines individuals' relations to others especially their family of origin and an example of a question is, "I find myself thinking a lot about my relationship with my spouse or partner." The Cronbach's alpha for the DSI full-



scale is .73 (Sheikh et al., 2013). The scale is a 43-item self-report measure with a 6-point Likert-scale; 1 (*not at all true of me*) to 6 (*very true of me*). The DSI required reverse coding for multiple items, the scores were flipped before analysis. The scale intends to determine through situational questions, how a person may handle stress and emotions through cognitive thoughts and feelings. A higher score represents a higher level of differentiation and participants' ability to maintain a sense of self and regulate their emotions. In a study of differentiation of self and extramarital affairs, researchers found no significant differences between males' and females' total DSI scores (Hertlein et al., 2003).

### **Data Analysis**

To answer the first two research questions in this study, two multiple regression analyses were used to study victims' experiences of psychological aggression. In the first analysis, differentiation of self, gender, and the interaction between gender and differentiation as independent variables. Control variables were age, strength of religious beliefs, strength of spiritual beliefs, race, income, education, and length of relationship, and commitment to the relationship. The dependent variable was severity of psychological aggression (measured by the Conflict Tactic Scale-2). Only using one scale to measure psychological aggression would not provide enough information on an individual's full extent of experiencing aggression in a relationship. Because of this a similar regression model was used. Differentiation of self, as well as gender and the interaction between gender and differentiation were independent variables. Age, strength of religious beliefs, strength of spiritual beliefs, race, income, education, length of relationship, and commitment to the relationship were control variables, and severity of psychological aggression (measured by the victimization question of the MMEA) was the dependent variable.

To answer the last two research questions in this study about the individual's perpetration of abuse, a multiple regression analysis was used. Differentiation of self, gender, and the interaction between gender and differentiation were independent variables. Age, strength of religious beliefs, strength of spiritual beliefs, race, income, education, and length of relationship, and commitment to the relationship were control variables. The dependent variable was the severity of committing psychological aggression (as measured by the perpetration questions of the MMEA). Additionally, qualitative questions, such as how the relationship ended, the reason for the termination of it, factors of support and the severity and length of time psychological aggression took place were examined. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and variance, among other statistics examined, in order to assess for bias violations of statistical assumptions in the data.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

### **Data Screening**

A total of 247 participants accessed the online survey. All of the participants consented to participate in the survey, and 211 participants completed the survey and met the requirements of being between 18-65 years of age and a U.S. resident. Fifty-six participants were excluded for missing, very short amount of time taking the survey, or inconsistent patterns to answering questions. In the final analyses, 192 participants were included, which was 77% of the participants who originally accessed the survey. Five participants did not answer about their racial identification and were missing from the analysis. Also, 8 participants did not answer the length of their relationships question and were missing from the analysis. The participants who identified as Hispanic or Native American, participants who selected 'Other' and wrote in Native American were removed from the analysis because of low numbers. All data screening and analyses used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program. Before conducting the analyses, all data were screened for statistical assumptions, outliers, and normality. The z-scores for each statistical measure were calculated and no scores were found to have be outliers.

### **Demographics**

The survey was available to anyone over the age of 18 and younger than 65, the participants' ages ranged from 21 years old to 65 years old, with most participants (55.3%) falling between the ages of 26-35 (see Table 1). There were slightly more male participants (58.3%) in the study than female participants (41.7%) (see Table 1). The participants varied in race; 129 participants identified (67%) as White, 26 participants (14%) identified as Black, 10 (5%) participants identified as Asian American, and 16 participants (8%) identified as Hispanic

(see Table 1). Participants responded to a question about their current relationship status, and anyone who never had a relationship was excluded from the sample, some results were missing and excluded from analysis. The participants reported relationship statuses; 21 participants (10.9%) were “not currently in relationship,” 25 participants (13%) were “dating or engaged,” 20 participants (10.9%) were “living together,” 116 participants (60.4%) were “married or in a civil union,” and 7 participants (3.6%) were “divorced” (see Table 1). A majority of the sample was currently married or in a civil union.

Participants asked were asked about their education level, household income, and spiritual and religious beliefs. One hundred and thirty-eight participants (71.8%) held a 4-year college degree, graduate, or doctorate degree (see Table 1), which shows that the sample was mostly comprised of very educated participants. Most participants had annual household incomes between \$25,000 and 70,0000 (64.5%) (see Table 1). Participants reported having stronger spiritual beliefs than religious beliefs. About 117 participants (60.9%) reported the strength of religious beliefs being “moderate, somewhat strong, and very strong” (see Table 1) and 139 participants (71%) reported that the strength of their spiritual beliefs were “moderate, somewhat strong, and very strong” (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographics ( $n=192$ )

	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>1. Sex</b>				
Male	112	58.3		
Female	80	41.7		
<b>2. Age</b>	-	-	33.94	9.23
<b>3. Race</b>	Frequency	Percentage		
White	129	67.2		

Table 1. Continued

Black	26	13.5		
Hispanic	16	8.3		
Asian American	10	5.2		
Missing	5	2.6		
<b>4. Participant's Current Relationship Status</b>	Frequency	Percentage		
Not Currently in a Relationship	21	10.9		
Dating or Engaged	25	13.0		
Living Together	20	10.4		
Married or Civil Union	116	60.4		
Divorced	7	3.6		
Missing	3	1.6		
<b>5. Length of Past or Current Relationship</b>	-	-	16.03	8.43
<b>6. Highest Level of Education</b>	Frequency	Percentage		
Less than high school	1	.5		
High school/ GED	13	6.8		
Some college	22	11.5		
Associates Degree	18	9.4		
College degree (4 years)	102	53.1		
Post-graduate Degree	17	8.9		
Professional Degree	18	9.4		
Other	1	.5		
<b>7. Income</b>	Frequency	Percentage		
Less than \$10,000	4	2.1		
\$10,000 - \$24,999	6	3.1		
\$25,000 - \$39,999	49	25.5		
\$40,000 - \$54,999	40	20.8		
\$55,000 - \$69,999	35	18.2		
\$70,000 - \$84,999	21	10.9		

Table 1. Continued

\$85,000 - \$99,999	17	8.9		
\$100,000 - \$124,999	12	6.3		
\$125,000 - \$149,999	4	2.1		
\$150,000 or more	4	2.1		
<b>8. Strength of Religious Beliefs</b>	Frequency	Percentage		
None	43	22.4		
Weak	10	5.2		
Somewhat Weak	22	11.5		
Moderate	44	22.9		
Somewhat Strong	44	22.9		
Very Strong	29	15.1		
<b>9. Strength of Spiritual Beliefs</b>	Frequency	Percentage		
None	35	18.2		
Weak	10	5.2		
Somewhat Weak	10	5.2		
Moderate	51	26.6		
Somewhat Strong	47	24.5		
Very Strong	39	20.3		

### Instrumentation

The instruments used in this study are the Differentiation of Self Inventory, Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse, and Conflict Tactic Scale-2. Each scale and their mean and standard deviation are listed in the table below (see Table 2). The scales in this study had their Cronbach's alpha scores calculated and all were within a reasonable range

Table 2. The Instruments and Descriptive Statistics

Scales	# of items	Theoretical Range	Observed Range	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha from This Study
<b>Conflict Tactic Scale-2 (CTS-2)</b>	39	0 - 25	.08- 16.72	192	2.09	1.52	.61-.92	.95
<b>Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse-Victimization Questions (MMEA_V)</b>	28	0-6	0-5.93	192	2.11	1.66	.83-.91	.97
<b>Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse-Perpetration Questions (MMEA_P)</b>	28	0-6	0 - 2.57	192	.84	.97	.83-.91	.97
<b>Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI)</b>	43	1-6	2.36- 5.23	192	3.29	.37	.73	.85

## Correlations

Pearson correlation analyses were conducted on variables to assess for possible relationships (N=192) (see Table 3). Since there were similar questions on the CTS-2 and MMEA scales they had a significant relationship  $r = .757, p < .001$ . Total differentiation of self and age were found to be significantly correlated  $r = .241, p < .001$ . Level of education and total differentiation of self scores were significantly negatively correlated  $r = -.173, p < .05$ . Level of education and income were significantly correlated  $r = .237, p < .001$ . Correlations were conducted to see the relationship between commitment to the relationship and strength of religious and spiritual beliefs, but no significant correlations were found.



Table 3. Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Total Differentiation of Self	-	-.418**	-.503**	-.466**	.129	.241**	-.218**	-.205**	-.173*	.176*
2. Conflict Tactic Scale	-	-	.757**	.875**	-.138	-.153*	.225**	.291**	.262**	-.094
3. MMEA_V	-	-	-	.797**	-.256**	-.094	.302**	.326**	.335**	-.066
4. MMEA_P	-	-	-	-	-.144*	-.160*	.241**	.283**	.312**	-.095
5. Gender	-	-	-	-	-	.067	-.011	-.026	-.119	.114
6. Age	-	-	-	-	-	-	.155*	.042	-.107	.077
7. Strength of Spiritual Beliefs	-	-	-	-	-	.	-	.836**	.085	-.103
8. Strength of Religious Beliefs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.088	-.100
9. Level of education	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.237**
10. Income	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

\* denotes significance  $p < .05$ \*\* denotes significance  $p < .01$

## Hypotheses 1 & 2

Two multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to study the first two hypotheses about the experience of psychological aggression, with differentiation of self, as well as gender and the interaction between gender and differentiation as independent variables, age, strength of religious beliefs, strength of spiritual beliefs, race, income, education, and length of relationship, and commitment to the relationship as control variables, and severity of psychological aggression as the dependent variable. The analysis used the following scales, Conflict Tactic Scale-2 (CTS-2) and Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse; victimization questions (MMEA\_V), to assess severity of psychological aggression. The dependent variable in the first regression was the Conflict Tactic Scale-2 (CTS-2) (see Table 4), and the Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse, victimization questions (MMEA\_V) (see Table 5), was the dependent variable in the second regression. The regression sample consisted of 179 participants, missing information excluded participants from the analysis, there were 8 participants missing data for length of relationship and 5 participants missing data for race.

The analysis with conflict tactic scale (CTS-2) as the dependent variable was significant,  $F(14, 165) = 5.316, p < .05$ , with an  $R^2 = .311$ . Variables found to be significant were education level and religious beliefs. Level of education ( $t = 2.790, p < .05$ ) and religious beliefs ( $t = 2.304, p < .05$ ) were positively associated with the severity of psychological aggression. There was neither a significant effect of participant's gender, differentiation of self, nor the interaction between gender and differentiation on severity of psychological aggression, therefore hypothesis one and two were not supported (see Table 4).

Table 4. CTS-2 for Severity of Psychological Aggression

<b>Predictor</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>t</b>
Constant	7.851	5.502	-	1.427
Gender	-.381	.478	-.054	-.798
DSI	-2.003	1.472	-.306	-1.361
Gender_X_DSI	-.029	.480	-.013	-.060
Age	-.027	.034	-.073	-.803
Length of Relationship	.012	.040	.029	.301
Commitment to Relationship	.060	.188	.023	.321
Religious Beliefs	.559	.243	.280	2.304*
Spiritual Beliefs	-.134	.251	-.066	-.534
Education level	.545	.195	.200	2.790**
Annual Income	-.098	.134	-.053	-.728
Race-White	-.840	.724	-.153	-1.161
Race-Black	.935	.633	.191	1.478
Race-Hispanic	-.042	.943	-.007	-.045
Race-Asian	-.338	.896	-.056	-.377

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

A regression analysis using the MMEA\_V as the dependent variable was found to be significant  $F(14, 166) = 10.082$ ,  $p < .05$ , with an  $R^2 = .460$ . A number of variables were significantly associated with severity of psychological aggression; gender, level of education, religious beliefs, and level of commitment to relationship (see Table 5). Gender was associated

with severity of psychological aggression ( $t = -2.413, p < .05$ ). Level of education ( $t = 3.609, p < .05$ ) and strengthen of religious beliefs ( $t = 1.986, p < .05$ ) were positively associated with the severity of psychological aggression. Level of commitment to the relationship was negatively associated with the severity of experiencing psychological aggression ( $t = -2.815, p < .05$ ). Participant's gender was significantly associated with severity of psychological aggression, however differentiation of self and the interaction between differentiation of self and gender were not significant. Hypothesis one and two were not found to be statistically supported because differentiation of self and severity of psychological aggression showed no significance. Although gender influenced severity of psychological aggression, it was not associated with the relationship between differentiation of self and psychological aggression, so hypothesis two is not statistically supported.

Table 5. MMEA\_V for Severity of Psychological Aggression

<b>Predictor</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>t</b>
Constant	5.520	2.327	-	2.372*
Gender	-.491	.203	-.144	-2.413*
DSI	-1.167	.620	-.371	-1.882
Gender_X_DSI	-.010	.203	.010	-.050
Age	.009	.014	.048	.596
Length of Relationship	-.011	.017	-.055	-.644
Commitment to Relationship	-.226	.080	-.178	-2.815**
Religious Beliefs	.205	.103	.215	1.986*

Table 5. Continued

Spiritual Beliefs	.044	.107	.046	.415
Education level	.299	.083	.228	3.609***
Annual Income	.009	.057	.011	.166
Race-White	-.069	.308	-.026	-.224
Race-Black	.386	.269	.164	1.432
Race-Hispanic	-.040	.402	.013	-.100
Race-Asian	-.568	.382	-.193	-1.487

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

### Hypotheses 3 & 4

A multiple linear regression analysis on the third and fourth hypotheses was used to examine the factors associated with the severity of perpetration of psychological aggression in conflictual relationships. Differentiation of self, gender, and the interaction between gender and differentiation were independent variables. Age, strength of religious beliefs, strength of spiritual beliefs, race, income, education, and length of relationship, and commitment to the relationship were control variables, and perpetration of psychological aggression through the MMEA\_P was the dependent variable. The sample size was 180 participants, missing information excluded participants from the analysis; 8 participants missing data for length of relationship and 5 participants missing data for race. The regression was found to be significant,  $F(14, 166) = 7.083, p < .05$ , with an  $R^2 = .374$ . Variables found to be significant were: total level of differentiation of self, level of education, strength of religious beliefs, and identifying as Black in comparison to White (Table 6). Individuals who reported lower degrees of differentiation of self were found to have higher severity of psychological aggression perpetration ( $t = -2.025, p < .05$ ).

Higher levels of education ( $t = 3.446, p < .01$ ) was positively associated with the severity of psychological aggression perpetration. Strength of religious beliefs ( $t = 2.204, p < .05$ ) was positively associated with the severity of psychological aggression perpetration, Black participants reported higher levels of psychological aggression perpetration in comparison to those who identified as White ( $t = 2.228, p < .05$ ). Gender was not significantly associated with perpetrating psychological aggression in conflictual romantic relationships.

Table 6. MMEA\_P for Severity of Psychological Aggression

<b>Predictor</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b><i>t</i></b>
Constant	1.763	.941	-	1.874
Gender	-.069	.082	-.054	-.836
DSI	-.507	.250	-.430	-2.025*
Gender_X_DSI	.035	.082	.090	.430
Age	-.004	.006	-.058	-.670
Length of Relationship	.000	.007	-.004	-.402
Commitment to Relationship	-.011	.032	-.022	-.328
Religious Beliefs	.085	.042	.236	2.024*
Spiritual Beliefs	-.013	.043	-.035	-.299
Education level	.116	.034	.234	3.446**
Annual Income	-.019	.023	-.058	-.849
Race-White	-.190	.125	-.191	-1.523
Race-Black	.242	.109	.274	2.228*

Table 6. Continued

Race-Hispanic	.004	.162	.003	.024
Race-Asian	-.109	.154	-.099	-.705

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

### Qualitative Questions about Relationship Termination

Participants were asked if the relationships they were thinking about while answering the instrument questions had been terminated or continued. One hundred and ten participants who reported that their conflictual relationship had terminated and then were asked to answer three open-ended questions. The questions included: If the relationship ended, for what length of time did you experience these behaviors in the relationship? What was a main factor in deciding to terminate the relationship? What factors of support (i.e. finances or safe shelter) or support from others (i.e. community, friends, & family) did you feel you had? The qualitative answers were examined for themes and similarities. One-hundred and ten people reported terminating the partnership and seventy-four participants provided answers to all three questions about the termination. The length of time experiencing the behaviors were varied and some participants did not specify year or month, so no conclusions were drawn from the questions. Out of the 74 participants, 9 participants reported misunderstandings, 6 participants reported specifically anger and aggressive behaviors, including physical acts, and 6 reported trust or infidelity issues. The question about support factors was intended to find trends or helpful factors for leaving conflictual relationships. Out of the 74 participants, 28 participants indicated friends as their main support, 20 reported family as their main support, and 8 reported having finances or financial support.

Last, the participants answered a Likert scale question, “I experienced psychological aggression in this relationship” from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The table below

displays the participants' answers and the strong polarity between reporting strongly disagree and strongly agree to some extent of experiencing psychological aggression (see Table 7). This shows that individuals are able to definitively answer no to experiencing psychological aggression. However, when individuals report experiencing forms of psychological aggression their answers are more varied and this may be based on perception and acknowledgment.

Table 7. Psychological Aggression Statement: "I Experienced Psychological Aggression or Emotional Abuse in this Relationship?"

	Frequency N = 192	Percent
Strongly Disagree	49	25.5
Disagree	15	7.8
Somewhat Disagree	17	8.9
Neither Agree or Disagree	30	15.6
Somewhat Agree	28	14.6
Agree	30	15.6
Strongly Agree	21	10.9
Missing	2	1

The results of the analyses suggest a strong relationship between differentiation of self and the severity of psychological aggression. There were control variables, level of education, race, strength of religious beliefs, and commitment to the relationship, were found to have an impact on severity of psychological aggression. There were correlations found between multiple variables. In conclusion, the third hypothesis was supported by the multilinear regressions conducted. The first hypothesis was not supported by the analyses because level of differentiation of self was not associated severity of psychological aggression. The second and



fourth were not supported by the analyses because gender did not significantly play a role in the relationship between differentiation of self and severity of psychological aggression.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of individuals' levels of differentiation of self and gender on their experiences of psychological aggression in the romantic relationships. The intention of the research was to find if individuals with higher levels of differentiation of self in romantic relationships had lower levels of severity of psychological aggression, with victimization and perpetration. This study wanted to examine the interplay among gender, differentiation of self and severity of psychological aggression in conflictual relationships. The results indicated that differentiation of self not associated with severity of psychological aggression with victimization. Differentiation of self was negatively related to severity of psychological aggression with perpetration. The lower an individual's level of differentiation, the higher the severity of psychological aggression a person may perpetrate. Additionally, gender was not found to have an effect on the relationship between differentiation of self and severity of psychological aggression. Level of education was found to be positively associated with the severity of psychological aggression. The following discussion examines the results and discuss hypotheses, significant variables, clinical implications, limitations, and future directions.

### Hypotheses

The first hypothesis was studied using multiple linear regression analyses examining all participants and looked at results for the participants who did and did not report have experienced psychological aggression in romantic relationships. Hypothesis one had two different regression analyses, the first used the conflict tactic scale as the dependent variable and the second used the multidimensional measure for emotional abuse as the dependent variable. In these analyses for victimization, neither hypothesis one or two were supported although variables

were associated with the severity of psychological aggression. Gender was to be associated with severity of psychological aggression in the regression analyses using MMEA\_V as the dependent variable. This aligns with previous research on gender and victimization in romantic relationships. The following control variables were found to be significant in the regression model: education level, religious beliefs, gender, and commitment level to the relationship. As the level of education increased, the results showed the severity of psychological aggression increased, they had a positive relationship. Religious beliefs were found to have a positive relationship with experiencing psychological aggression; many participants reported none to somewhat weak religious beliefs and low severity of psychological aggression. Commitment to the relationship was found to be high in the entire sample and while commitment increased, the severity of experiencing psychological aggression lowered or maintained.

The third hypothesis was studied using a multiple linear regression analysis and the dependent variable was the total score for perpetration questions on the multidimensional measure of emotional abuse scale. The aim of this hypothesis was to find out the relationship between differentiation of self in individuals who may perpetrate psychological aggression in romantic relationships. A negative relationship was found between the total level of differentiation of self and severity of perpetration of psychological aggression. Level of education was found to be higher in participants that reported higher levels of severity with perpetrating aggression. Participants who identified as Black reported higher levels of perpetration than other racial groups. Strength of religious beliefs was positively associated with severity of psychological aggression. Hypothesis three was supported because the level of differentiation of self was associated with participants' level of perpetration.

The interaction between gender and differentiation of self was not significantly associated with the severity of psychological aggression, therefore hypotheses two and four were not supported. Gender was found to be negatively associated with psychological aggression in the analysis with MMEA\_V as the dependent variable, which helps support the idea that gender does influence psychological aggression in romantic relationships. Other studies have examined gender differences in intimate partner violence and have found significant results (Chirichella-Besemer et al., 2008; Swan et al., 2008). In this study, the examination of gender in psychological aggression experiences did not show similar results as an interaction term, men or woman did not have higher or lower levels of differentiation that impacted severity of psychological aggression. Although, gender as a control variable in the regression with the dependent variable of MMEA\_V was negatively associated with severity of psychological aggression. Showing similar results to previous studies that gender impacts victimization, other researchers have found that women reported experiencing higher levels of psychological aggression in romantic relationships, as compared to men (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008; Follingstad, 2009). Additionally, women were previously found to have higher degrees of differentiation because it was theorized that women try to maintain family connectedness and were more influenced by their family of origins than males in adult romantic relationships (Holman & Busby, 2011). In this study, the possible relationship between differentiation of self and severity of psychological aggression was not influenced by gender.

### **Additional Variables**

One factor that could have an impact on gender differences is the role of gender ideas. Skowron and Friedlander (1998) suggest that original ideas about differentiation of self not being affected by gender were not correct. Many feminist family theorists contested that gender

socialization is a powerful factor in relationships. More specifically, gender roles are taught in families to children and adolescents and rigid ideas/roles may have consequences in adult relationships. They may force the maintenance of stress-causing gender roles and affects levels of differentiation. It is important to note, that males have been found to have higher levels of differentiation because of how they are socialized, men are taught to be more independent and females to be well connected (Holman & Busby, 2011). Both men and women experience psychological aggression in romantic relationships; however, society has dominant messages about men not experiencing or being affected by acts of aggression. It could be that far fewer men report these occurrences as compared to women and men are likely to underreport abuse because it is socially inconsistent with male identity ideas (Masci & Sanderson, 2017).

Aggressive acts that are perpetrated by women are seen as less serious than those with male perpetrators (Williams et al., 2012). Therefore, the dominant idea is that males do not experience as much aggression and will underreport or deny it in self-reports. Gender ideals may influence a person's response to being in a conflictual relationship and experiencing or perpetrating abuse.

Previous literature has examined gender and psychological aggression. Karakurt and Silver (2013) studied the relationships between gender and age in individuals experiencing forms of psychological aggression. The study found that men had experienced increased levels of psychological aggression as age increased and women's levels of aggression decrease throughout their lifespans (Karakurt & Silver, 2013). This is consistent with data that psychological aggression commonly occurs in early adulthood, 18-34 years of age (N.A., 2015). Age and differentiation of self have previously been found to have a positive relationship, and differentiation of self and age were shown to be correlated.

Skowron and Friedlander (1998) found that I-Position, defining self and autonomy, were not related to age, however, emotional reactivity was different among age groups. Participants were asked to answer questions about their most conflictual relationship, past or present relationship, so participants age and level of differentiation could be different based on when the relationship occurred and could explain why age was not found to be significant regression analyses.

### **Significant Variables**

In this study, the level of commitment to the relationship was used as a control variable in the regressions and was found to be negatively related to severity of psychological aggression in the MMEA victimization analysis. Previous research by Arriaga and Schkeryantz (2015) investigated individuals' perceived commitment level to the relationship as factors predicting level of personal and relationship distress and experiences of psychological aggression. They found that relationship stress was not determined by partner's level of commitment and severity of psychological aggression. It should be noted, in this current study the commitment levels were relatively high for all participants, no matter the level of severity of psychological aggression. However, commitment levels were lower with very severe levels of psychological aggression. Follingstad and Rogers (2012) found that relationship satisfaction was associated with commitment to relationship and occurrences of psychological aggression, showing that commitment levels are associated with psychological aggression.

The results found that severity of perpetration of psychological aggression was higher among participants who identified as Black compared to those who identified as White. Not many previous studies have researched race and psychological aggression; in a study by Williams et al. (2012) scenarios about psychological aggression questions were used to rate

severity of acts and found that single and White individuals rated psychologically aggressive acts as less severe than non-White individuals. The findings that more Black participants reported perpetration may show they believe it to be more severe, where those who identify as White participants may underestimate the acts.

The demographic variable, level of education, was found to be significant in every regression. The descriptive data showed that many participants had some college to 4-year college degrees and created a vastly educated sample. Correlations between participants' level of education to their income were significant. There are many research studies on intimate partner violence (IPV) and dating relationship aggression that used college-aged samples, so previous samples are not as educated or have lower incomes (Chirichella-Besemer & Motta, 2008; Shorey et al., 2012). Additionally, previous research on non-college aged individuals has found that IPV is seen among females with lower incomes, however, IPV was also found to be less present in higher educated populations (Campbell, 2002). Follingstad and Rogers (2012) found that mental health outcomes in problematic relationships and psychological abuse were associated with education, age, and income.

Strength of religious beliefs was positively associated with the severity of psychological aggression in the regression with the MMEA victimization scale. Strength of religious beliefs was positively correlated but strength of spiritual beliefs was not; although, further correlation analysis found that religious and spiritual beliefs were highly correlated with each other, which was as expected. The strength of religious beliefs was higher with higher levels of psychological aggression. They may contribute to participants needing support and religious affiliations are usually support systems.

### **Qualitative Questions**

The questions regarding leaving the relationship, the length of time it took to terminate the relationship, and factors to support termination were vast and some themes were found. Length of relationship was inconclusive because many participants did not mark month or years, just a single digit, although this did illustrate that relationships continue after experiences with psychological aggression. Supportive factors during relationship termination were consistent with the Curtis et al. (2017) study on support factors in ending abusive relationships. Family, friends, and community were reported as main supports for leaving the relationship. Finances was another common answer to supportive factors question, as to be expected when leaving a partnership. Overall, the factor of support in terminating the relationship was greatly based on having personal or financial security.

### **Clinical Implications**

Clinicians should be aware that both men and women experience forms of psychological aggression in romantic relationships. The survey used a statement questions to agree or disagree with, "I experienced psychological aggression or emotional abuse in this relationship" at the end of the survey, and many participants wavered and did not definitively answer strongly agree or strongly disagree. This shows that one simple question is never enough to screen for psychological aggression and clinicians need to use assessments with multiple questions to thoroughly assess. Arriaga and Schkeryantz (2015) had discussed how some individuals' awareness of personal harm can be so low that they are not cognitively aware of the fact that relationship aggression can cause personal distress or harm similar to physical aggression. Using thorough assessments and helping raise a client's awareness about the impact of psychological aggression is something greatly needed in the mental health field. Clinicians need to screen both



men and women for aggression in romantic relationships because the results showed that both men and women experience this form of abuse. Clinicians may need to psychoeducate and look at levels of differentiation as ways to help clients identify and change psychological aggression in relationships.

Systemically, psychological aggression can have a large impact on the romantic relationship and other facets of an individual's life. Participants' support system relationships were very influential and with psychological aggression using actions like isolation or other threats, having strong social support can be a counteractive factor. The stress experienced in the relationship will greatly affect the individual's well-being and their overall functioning. Clinicians should be aware and assist clients in mapping the influence of psychological aggression. Psychological aggression may be based on one partner reacting to the actions of the other and could create a bi-directional reciprocal cycle. It is important for clinicians to have an understanding that aggression can be bi-directional, and must resist bias and assess both partners for victimization and perpetration, especially when working with couples.

What should be noted is that results show that more highly differentiated individuals report less severity of psychological aggression in relationships. Individuals that are in conflict with partners and are able to regulate emotions, are less likely to perpetrate or experience psychological aggression. When under relationship stress, highly differentiated individuals do not need to resort to aggression tactics and can maintain a sense of self and connection to the other person. Individuals with high levels of conflict may be unaware of thoughts and feelings, which explains why they may not identify their relationships as being psychologically aggressive. The statement of psychological aggression showed that individuals with forms of aggression in their relationships did not believe the relationship was psychologically aggressive.

Clearly, it can be shown that clinicians need to ask multiple questions to raise a client's awareness and thoroughly search for risks.

### **Limitations**

The current study had a few limitations that could impact the results and generalizability. The survey was distributed through the internet and could have created a sample with participants in a higher income bracket who had with more access to technology, like a smartphone or a computer with internet (Jansen, 2010). Also, the study was a self-report survey about a sensitive topic like abuse in conflictual relationships, which as a result could have made participants hesitant to answer questions truthfully. They may have avoided or left the study if they did not want to answer questions on the topic.

Additionally, due to the sample being only individuals, there was the inability to compare results for one participant with their partner's results. There needs to be dyadic data collected to understand the relational scope. This may provide further insight on how psychological aggression can be bi-directional and make the number of occurrences more consistent with partners reports being compared. Without participant's partners being involved there was no way to corroborate the results and verify rates of perpetration. Participants reported experiencing and perpetrating psychological aggression. Psychological aggression can be bi-directional, participants reported perpetuating far less than experiencing and this may be because it is not socially acceptable and they did not want to self-report. Overall, it is important to not be polarizing, assuming someone is either experiencing or perpetrating and instead examine the full picture of psychological aggression in romantic relationships because both may be occurring. It is difficult to do dyadic studies and equally as hard when they involve a sensitive topic like abuse, therefore this is a clear limitation that can be addressed in future research.

Past researchers have had difficulty with understanding psychological aggression since there is no clear definition and universal scale. Without a clear instrument and cut off levels, the results are left to previous interpretation by segmenting participants in experiencing low and high severity of psychological aggression (Follingstad et al., 2005). A clear universal statistical measure and cut off level for psychological aggression would help provide researchers and clinicians with the basis of when to intervene and at what point may a person be in serious harm.

### **Future Directions**

The aim of this study was to further examine an individual's experiences with psychological aggression, whether having experienced or perpetrated it, and the roles of differentiation of self and gender on the outcomes. An individual's level of differentiation was negatively associated with the severity of their experience in psychologically aggressive romantic relationships. The results found that other factors like commitment, level of education, strength in religious beliefs and race were significant variables and they may be examined in future research and help with researchers and the general public's understanding of psychological aggression. Gender was not associated with participants' level of differentiation of self and experiences of psychological aggression. Research in the future may examine the strong influence of race, religious and spiritual beliefs, and education level.

This study focused on relationship interactions but in future studies, it may be important to consider an individual's prior experiences with aggression or neglect in their family of origin and the impact it may have on aggression in adult romantic relationships. Using some scales like the Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale (ACES) may provide additional information on varying differentiation of self scores and the adherence to certain aggression practices in adult relationships. Other information and risk factors to consider about the adult relationship would

be orders of protection from law enforcement and substance use within romantic relationships. Shorey et al. (2012) found that most partners of those who perpetuated psychological aggression called the police to report aggression and most partners who have perpetuated psychological aggression used alcohol and controlled substances (Shorey et al., 2012). All these could be factors in the longevity and severity of psychological aggression in romantic relationships. In addition, future research can only help provide literature and further the community's understanding of psychological aggression.

Holman and Busby (2011) previously found romantic relationship quality to be positivity related to participants' level of differentiation of self—both male and female--which shows how a person's level of differentiation can impact their romantic relationships. Future research could help support the idea that psychological aggression could be seen in relationships with lower romantic relationship quality and individuals with lower differentiation. It may be helpful if findings could describe how lower levels of differentiation of self in individuals may correspond with poor relationship quality. Possibly because these partnerships may not have strong abilities to regulate emotion and maintain a strong mental health and proved evidence that these factors may lead to more experiences with psychologically aggressive behaviors. In the future, relationship quality can be researched in connection to lower levels of differentiation of self and experiencing psychological aggression in romantic relationships.

### **Conclusion**

Psychological aggression in romantic relationships can cause distress, harm, and a lasting impact on individuals, but typically it is not addressed in society because of its covert nature. Without research and community attention to discuss these acts of relationship aggression, we are leaving the people experiencing this form of aggression at a great disadvantage, because

psychological aggression does occur and needs acknowledgment. This research was intended to further the literature and address gaps in clinicians and the community's understanding of psychological aggression. Researchers can continue to explore other contextual factors for psychological aggression and other possible outcomes. This form of relationship aggression needs to be understood and preventative measures are required to help address this very serious relationship issue.

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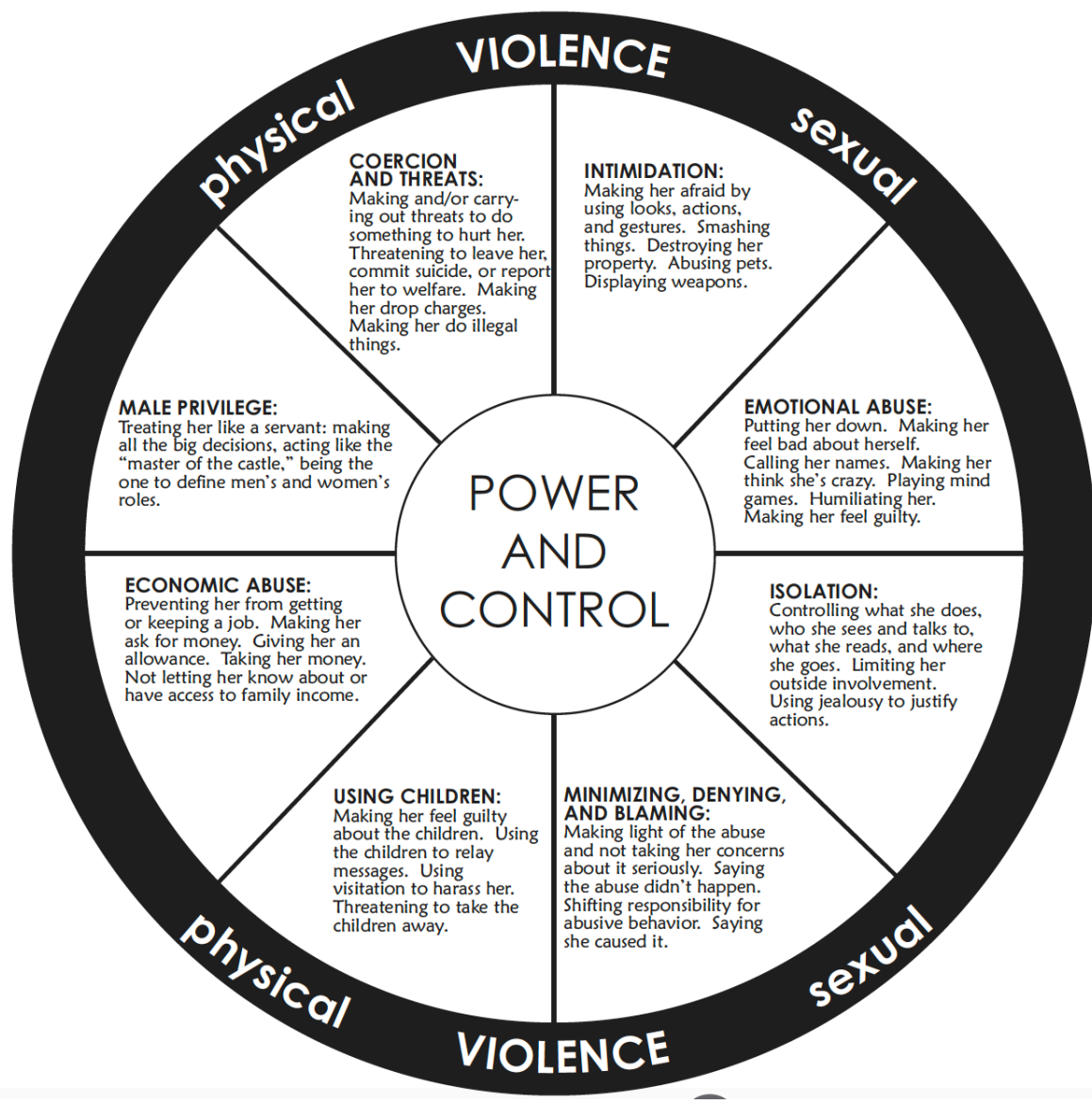
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## APPENDIX A. POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

Developed by:  
Domestic Abuse Intervention Project  
202 East Superior Street  
Duluth, MN 55802  
218.722.4134



## APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT

**What is the purpose of this study?** You are being asked to participate in a study designed by Dr. Anne B. Edwards and Mackenzie Sullivan of Purdue University. We want to understand interactions and some of the experience(s) in conflictual romantic relationships as well as differences in individual's experiences.

**What will I do if I choose to be in this study?** If you choose to participate, you acknowledge that you are between the ages of 18-65 and you are a resident of the United States of America. You will be asked to complete a survey asking about your ability to relate to others and handle stress, as well as about past relationship behaviors. You are free not to answer any particular questions if they make you feel uncomfortable, or withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

**How long will I be in the study?** The survey should take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete.

**What are the possible risks or discomforts?** Breach of confidentiality is a risk. To minimize this risk, only the researchers listed above will access the data from this study, and no personally identifying information will be collected during the study. The questions may also make you feel uncomfortable and may result in emotional distress. You can go to [aamft.org](http://aamft.org), [therapists.psychologytoday.com](http://therapists.psychologytoday.com), or [mentalhealthamerica.net/finding-therapy](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/finding-therapy) to find someone to speak to about any distress that may come of participating in this survey.

**Are there potential benefits?** You will not directly benefit from this study. You will have a chance to take part in research, and your participation may, thus, contribute to the scientific understanding relationship dynamics.

**Will I receive payment or other incentive?** You will receive payment of one dollar for participating in this research project, so long as you meet the study inclusion criteria, you complete all relevant questions in the survey, and you complete the appropriate verification question to ensure your active participation.

**Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?** There is no personally identifying information on this survey; all responses will remain anonymous and will be used only in combination with the responses of other participants in this and related studies. Additionally, you may choose not to answer particular questions or to withdraw your participation at any time, without penalty. All data gathered in this study will be accessed by the researchers. The data file will be used for preparation of research reports related to this study and kept for a period of three years after publication of any articles related to this study. The project's research records may be reviewed by departments at Purdue University responsible for regulatory and research oversight. In addition, IP addresses will not be linked to identifying information.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and if you agree to participate, you can withdraw your participation before the data is gathered at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Who can I contact if I have questions about the study?** If you have questions, comments, or concerns about this research project, you can talk to one of the researchers. Please contact Dr. Anne Edwards at [abedward@pnw.edu](mailto:abedward@pnw.edu) or Mackenzie Sullivan at [sulli212@pnw.edu](mailto:sulli212@pnw.edu). If you have questions about your rights while taking part in the study or have concerns about the

treatment of research participants, please call the Human Research Protection Program at (765) 494-5942, email (irb@purdue.edu), or write to: Human Research Protection Program - Purdue University Ernest C. Young Hall, Room 1032 155 S. Grant St., West Lafayette, IN 47907-2114

**Documentation of Informed Consent** I have had the opportunity to read this consent form and have the research study explained. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research study, and my questions have been answered. I am prepared to participate in the research study described above.

- I certify that I am above the age of 18 and a resident of the United States and agree to participate in this study.
- I do not agree to participate in this study

*Skip To: End of Survey If What is the purpose of this study? You are being asked to participate in a study designed by Dr.... = I do not agree to participate in this study*

## APPENDIX C. SURVEY

**Q1** Are you a resident of the United States?

- Yes
- No

Skip to: End of survey if 'No'

**Q2** What is your age?

---

Skip to: End of survey if age is <18 or >65

**Q3** What is your current gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Q4** What is your current relationship status? Please select all that apply.

- Not currently in a relationship
- Never been in a relationship
- Dating
- Living Together
- Engaged
- Married
- Civil Union

Skip To: End of Survey. "Never been in a relationship" Is Selected.









It's important for me to keep in touch with my parents regularly (17)	●	●	●	●	●	●
At times, I feel as if I'm riding an emotional roller coaster (18)	●	●	●	●	●	●
There's no point in getting upset about things I cannot change (19)	●	●	●	●	●	●
I'm concerned about losing my independence in intimate relationships (20)	●	●	●	●	●	●
I'm overly sensitive to criticism (21)	●	●	●	●	●	●
When my spouse or partner is away for too long, I feel like I am missing a part of me (22)	●	●	●	●	●	●
I'm fairly self-accepting (23)	●	●	●	●	●	●
I often feel that my spouse or partner wants too much from me (24)	●	●	●	●	●	●
I try to live up to my parents' expectations (25)	●	●	●	●	●	●
If I have had an argument with my spouse or partner, I tend to think about it all day (26)	●	●	●	●	●	●
I am able to say no to others even when I feel pressured by them (27)	●	●	●	●	●	●
When one of my relationships becomes	●	●	●	●	●	●

very intense, I feel the  
urge to run away from it  
(28)

Arguments with my  
parent(s) or sibling(s)  
can still make me feel  
awful (29)

If someone is upset with  
me, I can't seem to let it  
go easily (30)

I'm less concerned that  
others approve of me  
than I am about doing  
what I think is right (31)

I would never consider  
turning to any of my  
family members for  
emotional support (32)

I find myself thinking a  
lot about my  
relationship with my  
spouse or partner (33)

I'm very sensitive to  
being hurt by others (34)

My self-esteem really  
depends on how others  
think of me (35)

When I'm with my  
spouse or partner, I  
often feel smothered  
(36)

I worry about people  
close to me getting sick,  
hurt, or upset (37)

I often wonder about the  
kind of impression I  
create (38)

When things go wrong,  
talking about them

● ● ● ● ● ●

● ● ● ● ● ●

● ● ● ● ● ●

● ● ● ● ● ●

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● ● ● ● ● ●

● ● ● ● ● ●



My partner twisted my  
arm or hair (5)



I had a sprain, bruise,  
or small cut because of  
a fight with my partner  
(6)



My partner showed  
respect for my feelings  
about an issue (7)



My partner made me  
have sex without a  
condom (8)



My partner pushed or  
shoved me (9)



My partner used force  
(like hitting holding  
down or using a  
weapon) to make me  
have oral or anal sex  
(10)



My partner used a  
knife or gun on me (11)



I passed out from being  
hit on the head by my  
partner in a fight (12)



My partner called me  
fat or ugly (13)



My partner punched or  
hit me with something  
that could hurt (14)



My partner destroyed  
something that  
belonged to me (15)



I went to a doctor  
because of a fight with  
my partner (16)



My partner choked me  
(17)



My partner shouted or  
yelled at me (18)



My partner slammed  
me against a wall (19)



My partner was sure  
we could work it out  
(20)



I needed to see a doctor  
because of a fight with  
my partner, but I didn't  
(21)



My partner beat me up  
(22)



My partner grabbed me  
(23)



My partner used force  
to make me have sex  
(24)



My partner stomped  
out of the room or  
house or yard during a  
disagreement (25)



My partner insisted that  
I have sex when I  
didn't want to (but did  
not use physical force  
(26)



My partner slapped me  
(27)



I had a broken bone  
from a fight with my  
partner (28)



My partner used threats  
to make me have oral  
or anal sex (29)



My partner suggested a  
compromise to a  
disagreement (30)



My partner burned or  
scalded me on purpose  
(31)



My partner insisted I  
have oral or anal sex  
(but did not use  
physical force) (32)



My partner accused me  
of being a lousy lover  
(33)



My partner did  
something to spite me  
(34)



My partner threatened  
to hit or throw  
something at me (35)



I felt physical pain that  
still hurt the next day  
because of a fight we  
had (36)



My partner kicked me  
(37)



My partner used threats  
to make me have sex  
(38)







Said or implied that you were stupid (8)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Called you worthless (9)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Called you ugly (10)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Criticized your appearance (11)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Called you a loser, failure, or similar term (12)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Belittled you in front of other people (13)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Said that someone else would be a better partner (better spouse, better girlfriend or boyfriend) (14)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Became so angry that they were unable or unwilling to talk (15)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Acted cold or distant when angry (16)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Refused to have any discussion of a problem (17)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Changed the subject on purpose when you were trying to discuss a problem (18)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Refused to acknowledge a problem that you felt was important (19)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sulked or refused to talk about an issue (20)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●





Called your partner worthless (9)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Called your partner ugly (10)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Criticized your partner's appearance (11)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Called your partner a loser, failure, or similar term (12)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Belittled your partner in front of other people (13)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Said that someone else would be a better partner (better spouse, better girlfriend or boyfriend) (14)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Became so angry that you were unable or unwilling to talk (15)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Acted cold or distant when angry (16)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Refused to have any discussion of a problem (17)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Changed the subject on purpose when your partner was trying to discuss a problem (18)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Refused to acknowledge a problem that your partner felt was important (19)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Sulked or refused to talk about an issue (20)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Intentionally avoided your partner during a conflict or disagreement (21)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Became angry enough to frighten your partner (22)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Put your face right in front of your partner's face to make a point more forcefully (23)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Threatened to hit your partner (24)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Threatened to throw something at your partner (25)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Threw, smashed, hit, or kicked something in front of your partner (26)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Drove recklessly to frighten your partner (27)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stood or hovered over your partner during a conflict or disagreement (28)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q16** Has the relationship for which you answered the questions ended?

- Yes
- No

Skip To: Q21 If Has the relationship for which you answered the questions ended? = No

**Q17** If the relationship ended, for what length of time did you experience these behaviors in the relationship?

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**Q18** If you ended the relationship, what was a main factor in deciding to terminate the relationship?

---

**Q19** If you ended the relationship, what factors of support (i.e. finances or safe shelter) or support from others (i.e. community, friends, & family) did you feel you had?

---

**Q20** Do you agree with the statement "I experienced psychological aggression or emotional abuse in this relationship?"

- Strongly disagree (1) ... Strongly agree (7)

**Q21** How would you describe your race? Check all that apply

- Black (African-American)
- White (Caucasian)
- Hispanic (Non-Black)
- Asian-American
- Multiracial
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Q22** What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than high school
- High school/ GED
- Some college
- Associates Degree
- 4-year College Degree
- Post-graduate Degree
- Professional Degree
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Q23** What is your annual household income?

- Less than \$10,000



- \$10,000 - \$24,999
- \$25,000 - \$39,999
- \$40,000 - \$54,999
- \$55,000 - \$69,999
- \$70,000 - \$84,999
- \$85,000 - \$99,999
- \$100,000 - \$124,999
- \$125,000 - \$149,999
- \$150,000 or more