

Dating Aggression Among Low Income African American Youth

*An Examination of Gender Differences
and Antagonistic Beliefs*

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Prevalence of aggression inflicted and sustained in dating relationships was investigated for 171 low income African American youth. More women were victims of choking, attempted forced intercourse, and hurt feelings. As perpetrators, more women reported making threats, throwing objects, and hitting their partner. However, men perpetrated more serious sexual and psychological aggression, including forced breast fondling, attempted forced intercourse, and making a partner feel inferior and degrading her. Women victims of sexual aggression, when compared to nonvictims, expressed more agreement with adversarial sexual beliefs regarding male-female relationships. More than one third of the participants endorsed antagonistic beliefs concerning Black male-female relationships. Suggestions for intervention are presented.

Based on two decades of research, it is clear that dating aggression is a serious problem. To date, much of the research has focused on White, middle class college students (Jackson, 1999; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989) and has neglected African Americans and other ethnic minorities, as well as low income youth. This is, indeed, an oversight because some groups, due to their marginalized status, are at increased risk for violence. For example, homicide committed by intimate partners is the leading cause of death for Black women between the ages of 15 and 24 (National Center for Health Statistics, 1997). Physical, sexual, and psychological aggression in

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dating relationships may be important precursors of lethal violence against young Black women. Beliefs that relations between men and women are antagonistic also may be associated with violence (Malamuth, 1988; White, 1997). Thus, the main objectives in the present research were (a) to investigate the prevalence of dating aggression experienced by young Black women and men from low-income families; (b) to examine gender differences in the types of aggression sustained and inflicted; and (c) to explore the association between dating aggression and antagonistic beliefs concerning Black male-female relationships.

DATING AGGRESSION AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS

Dating aggression among White middle-class youth is a common occurrence. Between 20% and 30% of White high school and college students have inflicted or sustained physical violence in a dating relationship (Bennett & Fineran, 1998; O'Keefe, 1997; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989; White & Koss, 1991). Less severe forms of violence, such as throwing objects, slapping, and pushing, are most prevalent, but life-threatening violence may occur as well. About 3% to 5% of White undergraduates report having been choked, beaten, or threatened with a weapon (Aizenman & Kelley, 1988; Riggs, 1993). Although it appears that women are equally as likely as men to inflict dating aggression, these findings should be interpreted with caution because researchers have often failed to consider the context of the violence. For example, in some studies, investigators have merely counted violent acts without considering gender differences in motives for the aggression, such as self-defense (Currie, 1998). Sexual violence is also a common occurrence in dating relationships. Rape research indicates that approximately 25% of White women have been the victims of attempted or completed rape, and most of these rapes (57%) occurred in the context of a dating relationship (Warshaw, 1994). Women more often than men report being the victim of all types of sexual coercion, including forced kissing, touching, pressure to have sex, attempted rape, and completed rape. Men more often than women indicated perpetrating all forms of sexual aggression (Waldner-Haugrud & Magruder, 1995). Psychological

and verbal aggression is a third aspect of dating violence that is known to be widespread. More than 80% of young White men and women have experienced verbal aggression such as insults, name calling, and threats (White & Koss, 1991). This form of abuse appears to be sustained and inflicted by as many women as men (Kasian & Painter, 1992; Stets, 1991).

Dating aggression among young, middle class African American students appears to be as prevalent as among their White counterparts. About one third of Black college students indicated they had sustained or inflicted physical aggression in a dating relationship, with pushing, slapping, and hitting being reported most often (Clark, Beckett, Wells, & Dungee-Anderson, 1994; DeMaris, 1990). A similar percentage of Black couples seeking marriage licenses reported physical aggression in dating relationships (McLaughlin, Leonard, & Senchak, 1992). Few empirical studies have focused on sexual assault among Black youth, but interviews with Black women have revealed substantial rates of sexual victimization (Pierce-Baker, 1998; White, 1997). Both Black female and male undergraduates reported that their partner pressured them to have sex (34% and 50%, respectively). However, when severe sexual aggression was considered, more Black women than men reported being forced to have intercourse and sustaining sexual injury (Rouse, 1988). Although less is known about verbal and psychological aggression among African American couples, it appears to be the most common form of dating abuse. More than 90% of both Black male and female college students experienced verbal aggression, including insults and swearing, either as an aggressor or victim (Clark et al., 1994). In addition, psychological aggression, including possessiveness and rejection, was reported by more than 80% of Black undergraduates (Rouse, 1988). Equal proportions of women and men indicated both sustaining and inflicting verbal and psychological aggression.

The current research has raised awareness about dating violence. Nevertheless, there are some limitations. First, much of the dating violence literature has focused on White, middle class college students. Consequently, there is a dearth of information on diverse populations (Jackson, 1999; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989). The lack of attention given to African American and low income youth is particularly noticeable. When African Americans are

included, researchers often use a race comparative approach. Racial comparisons may contribute to inappropriate interpretations. For instance, comparing a subsample of 38 Black participants with 195 White participants, researchers concluded the following:

The finding that Blacks were more involved in violence in courtship than other racial groups was expected. The violence that characterizes the Black subculture seems to enter also in courtship relations. (Plass & Gessner, 1983, p. 202)

Conclusions based on race comparisons may be misleading if social class is not taken into account. First, when social class is addressed, racial differences in dating violence disappear. Thus, social class variables tend to be related to dating aggression, with low-income youth being more vulnerable to violence (DeMaris, 1990). This points to the importance of studying this population specifically. Second, when dating violence among African Americans has been studied, many investigators have neglected to assess gender differences (O'Keefe, 1997; O'Keefe, Brockopp, & Chew, 1986; Symons, Groer, Kepler-Youngblood, & Slater, 1994). Consequently, little is known about gender differences in the types of aggression inflicted and sustained by Black males and females. Third, physical aggression has most often been the focus of the research. However, to capture the full range of violence in relationships, sexual and psychological abuse should be included as well (Smith, 1994; Smith, Smith, & Earp, 1999). The intent of the proposed research was to address these issues by exploring victimization and perpetration of physical, sexual, and psychological dating aggression among a population of young, low income African American women and men.

ANTAGONISTIC BELIEFS

ADVERSARIAL SEXUAL BELIEFS

Regardless of ethnic background, some women and men may endorse adversarial sexual beliefs. These beliefs, in turn, might play a role in sexual dating aggression. More specifically, women and men may enter relationships with the "expectation that

sexual relationships are fundamentally exploitive, that each party to them is manipulative, sly, cheating, opaque to the other's understanding, and not to be trusted" (Burt, 1980, p. 218). The direction of the association between these beliefs and sexual aggression has not been established. It is possible that adversarial sexual beliefs could be either a consequence or cause of violence. Nevertheless, research indicates that adversarial sexual beliefs tend to be present in violent relationships among Whites. For instance, sexually victimized White women (Spence, Losoff, & Robbins, 1991) and sexually aggressive White men (Malamuth, 1988) tend to report greater adversarial sexual beliefs than non-victims and nonaggressors. Although little research has explored adversarial sexual beliefs among African Americans, one study indicated that Black male and female undergraduates endorsed these beliefs about as frequently as White undergraduates. However, Black female undergraduates perceived male-female relationships as negative and antagonistic more often than White females did (Edmonds & Cahoon, 1993). Thus, adversarial beliefs might be equally relevant to sexual dating aggression among Black women and men.

ANTAGONISTIC BELIEFS ABOUT BLACK MALE-FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS

It is reasonable to speculate that antagonistic beliefs might have different origins for African Americans than Whites. Conflict in Black relationships frequently has been linked to three factors, including economic inequalities, gender roles, and oppressive images (Benjamin, 1983; Cazenave, 1983; Fairchild, 1985; Jewell, 1983). Economic inequalities are hypothesized to place African Americans at increased risk for all forms of violence, including dating aggression (DeMaris, 1990). Couples may perceive relationships as more antagonistic if they believe that Black women are more economically privileged than are Black men. For example, endorsing the belief that "Black women have more opportunity" has been associated with the acceptability of wife slapping among middle-class Black men (Cazenave, 1983). Also, it has been speculated that the increased social and economic status of Black women has contributed to higher rates of wife-to-husband assaults in Black families than in White families. Perhaps Black

women who have greater economic resources feel more empowered. Therefore, they are less tolerant of abuse and more willing to retaliate with physical violence (Hampton, Gelles, & Harrop, 1989). On the other hand, battered Black women may attempt to reduce the level of conflict in their relationships by denying their own economic hardships. Instead, they may make external attributions and blame their abuse on the frustration and anger that Black men experience as a result of unemployment and limited economic options. If victims perceive themselves as having greater opportunities in the larger society, they may find it difficult to extract themselves from abusive relationships (Peterson-Lewis, Turner, & Adams, 1988; Richie, 1996).

Gender roles also have been implicated in dating violence among African Americans. Historically, Black women have been able to adopt relatively androgynous roles; for example, they have been able to function as both wage earners and family caretakers. In contrast, a substantial percentage of Black men cannot function in the traditional role of provider for their families because they have been denied access to economic resources and jobs (Asbury, 1987; Franklin, 1984; Ucko, 1994). Nevertheless, many African American couples attempt to enact traditional gender roles and family configurations that may contribute to conflict, violence, and negative perceptions about relationships. For example, the young Black women surveyed by White (1997) perceived their boyfriends as dominant and aggressive. Although they did not enjoy the sexual abuse that accompanied these gender roles, they frequently acquiesced to the sexual demands of their partners. They believed that sexuality was one of the few arenas where their boyfriends could assert their fragile sense of masculinity. Characterizing themselves as supporters and caretakers required them to avoid the "emasculatation" of their boyfriends by refusing sexual contact, even if it meant tolerating sexual aggression. Despite the aggression in their dating relationships, they had a strong desire to perform as traditional caretakers and for their boyfriends to behave as protectors, roles that have been linked to partner violence (Sugarman & Frankel, 1996).

Oppressive images of Black women, which are prevalent in White culture, also may promote dating violence. For example, the Jezebel image characterizes Black women as promiscuous and sexually precocious. A belief that Black women have multiple

sexual partners and become sexually active in the early stages of their relationships might be derived from this stereotype. Black men who adhere to these beliefs might be more likely to engage in date rape, whereas Black women who endorse these beliefs may blame themselves for their sexual victimization (Brice-Baker, 1994; West, 2000). The patriarchal image portrays Black women as having too much power and control in their families. Black men who endorse this stereotype may use violence to restore the balance of power in the relationship, and Black women may perceive this violence as justifiable punishment for refusing to function in their traditional female role (Harrison & Esqueda, 1999; Peterson-Lewis et al., 1988).

Oppressive images of Black men exist as well. They are sometimes labeled *dogs* if they engage in sexual behavior with multiple partners, are dishonest in intimate relationships, or perpetrate physical and emotional abuse. Related to this belief is the notion that Black men purposefully oppress and disrespect Black women (Benjamin, 1983). Although this behavior is not representative, some marginalized Black men may adopt this behavior as a form of control and power over their female partners (Oliver, 1989). Some young Black women may come to accept this behavior. One participant in White's (1997) study commented, "We love each other, and all of that, but I also can say that he still is a dog. They all are on some level" (p. 38). The perception that Black men are dogs may lead some Black women to perceive relationships as acrimonious. Thus, African American youth who believe that Black male-female relationships are antagonistic in terms of economic inequalities, gender roles, and oppressive images might more often experience violent dating relationships.

GOALS OF THE STUDY

Previous research shows that the pattern of dating aggression appears to be similar among White and Black college students. However, less is known about dating violence among young, low-income African Americans (Jackson, 1999; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989; West, 1998). Questions about the prevalence of dating violence and gender differences in victimization and perpetration of violence remain. In addition, sexual dating aggression has been linked to adversarial sexual beliefs, particularly

among victims and aggressors (Malamuth, 1988; Spence et al., 1991). Although these beliefs may occur regardless of ethnic background, few researchers have focused on these beliefs among African Americans (Edmonds & Cahoon, 1993). Also, few researchers have investigated the association between antagonistic beliefs concerning Black male-female relationships and dating aggression.

The intent of the proposed research was to explore dating aggression among a seldom studied population of young, low income African American women and men. The goals were (a) to assess the prevalence of physical, sexual, and psychological aggression in dating relationships; (b) to determine gender differences in the types of violence both inflicted and sustained; and (c) to examine adversarial sexual beliefs and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships and the extent to which they were present in violent relationships.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Two hundred forty-three single African American women and men were recruited from a Job Corps Center located in a large midwestern city. Job Corps is a government-sponsored youth training program that provides vocational skills primarily for impoverished youth. Participants were receiving training to enter working-class jobs, including trades (37%), health occupations (23%), business/clerical (20%), food service (10%), and security (5%) (5% failed to respond).

Seventy-two of the surveys returned were incomplete and were eliminated from the sample. The final sample was composed of 171 participants (88 females and 83 males) ranging in age from 16 to 24, with a mean age of 18 ($SD = 2.8$). About 73% of participants were currently dating an African American partner of the opposite sex; most (57%) were dating one partner exclusively.

Most participants (56%) were raised by single mothers or in "other" (9%) family configurations. Fewer were raised in two-parent homes (35%). Parents' occupations were predominantly working class (44%); most were employed as clerical staff, skilled manual workers, or private houseworkers. Another 19% of

parents were unemployed. About 24% of parents held professional jobs. Approximately 13% of participants did not specify their parents' occupations. Slightly more than one half (52%) of the participants had witnessed violence in their families of origin.

INSTRUMENT

The instrument was a 10-page, 149-item survey on dating relationships among African Americans that included the following items.

Demographic information. This portion of the survey asked participants to indicate the following: age, gender, Job Corps' vocational level, parents' annual income level, family structure (e.g., two parent, single parent, etc.), highest grade completed by parents, and experience with violence in the family of origin.

Dating aggression. The type of physical, sexual, and psychological aggression sustained and inflicted in dating relationships was assessed. The prevalence of each aggressive behavior was assessed by coding participants' responses as a dichotomy, where a value of "1" indicated that a specific behavior had been present in at least one dating relationship, and a value of "0" indicated that no violent behavior of that type ever had occurred.

Physical aggression was assessed using an 11-item modified version of the Conflict Tactic Scales (CTS) (Straus, 1979). The scale begins with those tactics "low in coerciveness and becomes gradually more coercive and aggressive towards the end of the list" (Straus, 1979, p. 78). Less injurious forms of violence included the following acts: threatened to hit or throw something; threw, smashed, hit or kicked something; threw something at partner; pushed, grabbed, or shoved; and slapped. The following acts were categorized as severe violence: kicked, bit, hit with something; hit, tried to hit with something; beat up; choked; threatened with knife or gun; and used knife or fired gun. For the present sample, the CTS was highly reliable with alpha coefficients of approximately .90 for sustained and inflicted physical aggression.

Sexual aggression was assessed using seven items from research conducted by Stets and Pirog-Good (1989a, 1989b). The Sexual Aggression (SA) scale included both mild sexual

aggression, such as forced kissing, and severe aggression, such as forced oral sex and forced intercourse. The SA scale was highly reliable for the present sample, with alpha coefficients of approximately .80 for both sustained and inflicted sexual aggression.

Psychological aggression (PA), defined as "insults or behavior that results in making another feel guilty, upset, or worthless," was measured by an eight-item scale developed by Stets (1991, p. 101). The PA scale was found to be highly reliable, with alpha coefficients of over .80 for sustained and inflicted aggression.

Antagonistic beliefs. Antagonistic beliefs were assessed by two measures, the Adversarial Sexual Beliefs scale (ASB)(Burt, 1980), a measure that has frequently been used with White samples, and the Antagonistic Beliefs About Black Relationships measure that was created for this study.

The ASB (Burt, 1980) includes nine items such as "Men are only out for one thing" and "A lot of women seem to get pleasure in putting men down." Participants ranked their responses on a five-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Possible scores ranged from 0 to 45, with higher scores indicating more adversarial beliefs. According to previous research, the ASB has a standardized Cronbach's alpha of .80 (Burt, 1980), but for the present sample, the alpha coefficient was .67.

The Antagonistic Beliefs About Black Relationships measure designed for this study was composed of 12 items derived from previous studies that measured conflict in African American relationships (Benjamin, 1983; Cazenave, 1983; Fairchild, 1985; Jewell, 1983). Three areas were assessed. Economic inequalities were measured by two items, including "Black women seem to have more opportunities today than Black men." Traditional female and male gender roles were assessed with three items, such as "Raising the children should be the role of the woman" and "The male's first priority is to protect his woman from harm." Finally, seven items were used to assess various oppressive images, including the Jezebel image—"It is natural for a Black woman to have more than one man," the matriarch image—"Black women have too much control and power in their families," the image of Black men as dogs—"All Black men have a little dog in them," and Black men as oppressors—"Black men have helped to keep Black women down." Participants ranked their responses on a

five-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The responses were coded as a dichotomy, where a value of "1" indicated that the participants *strongly agree* or *agree* with the belief. A value of "0" indicated that the participants *strongly disagree* or *disagree* with the belief.

PROCEDURE

Participants were surveyed in groups during regular 50 minute class periods. The questionnaire was presented in an envelope, and participants were instructed to refrain from discussing the survey before completion. Both the examiner and teacher were available to answer questions. On completion, participants returned the survey in an envelope. Most questionnaires were completed in 15 minutes. Debriefing entailed explaining the research goals and describing Job Corps resources that were available to provide help with dating aggression.

RESULTS

DATING AGGRESSION

Physical aggression in dating relationships appeared to be quite prevalent, particularly for "less injurious" forms of abuse (see Table 1). More than one half of women and men sustained and inflicted physical violence. Milder forms, such as threats, throwing objects, and pushing, were most common, with between 40% and 67% of the sample experiencing these forms of abuse. Although the percentage of life-threatening violence was somewhat lower—almost one fourth of the participants had been threatened with a gun or knife, and nearly one third had been beaten by a date.

Chi-square analyses were used to determine gender differences in the proportion of women and men who reported sustaining and inflicting each type of physical aggression. In terms of sustaining aggression, one gender difference was observed. Significantly more women than men reported being choked by a date, $\chi^2(1, N = 169) = 5.94, p < .01$. Four gender differences in perpetrating physical aggression also were revealed. More women than men threatened to hit or throw something, $\chi^2(1, N = 165) =$

TABLE 1
Percentage of Participants Reporting Physical Aggression
in Dating Relationships by Gender

<i>Type of Physical Aggression</i>	<i>Victim</i>		<i>Aggressor</i>	
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
	(<i>n</i> = 88) % ^a	(<i>n</i> = 83) %	(<i>n</i> = 88) %	(<i>n</i> = 83) %
Threatened to hit or throw something	52.9	53.0	66.3	49.4*
Threw, smashed, hit, or kicked something	43.7	43.2	53.5	54.3
Threw something at partner	41.9	43.4	62.1	45.0*
Pushed, grabbed, or shoved	67.8	58.5	65.1	63.4
Slapped	53.4	52.4	53.5	38.6*
Kicked, bit, hit with something	39.8	41.0	47.1	35.8
Hit, tried to hit with something	38.6	37.3	47.1	30.9*
Beat up	28.7	16.9	23.3	24.7
Choked	35.2	18.5**	17.6	28.9
Threatened with knife or gun	22.7	25.3	20.9	22.5
Used knife, fired gun	8.1	13.3	16.3	21.0

a. Percentage of participants who reported ever inflicting each type of aggression.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

4.84, $p < .05$, actually threw objects, $\chi^2(1, N = 167) = 4.88, p < .05$, or slapped a partner, $\chi^2(1, N = 168) = 3.79, p < .05$. For severe forms of aggression, more women hit or tried to hit their partner with something, $\chi^2(1, N = 168) = 4.65, p < .05$.

As shown in Table 2, sexual aggression was experienced less often than physical abuse. Approximately one third reported being victims, and almost one fourth indicated having been perpetrators. Milder forms of sexual aggression, such as forced kissing and breast and genital fondling, were most often reported. In terms of gender differences, in general, more women reported sexual victimization and more men reported being perpetrators. Specifically, more women reported being the victim of attempted rape, $\chi^2(1, N = 171) = 5.26, p < .05$. Men were significantly more likely than women to be the perpetrators of forced breast fondling, $\chi^2(1, N = 170) = 5.41, p < .01$ and of attempts to force intercourse, $\chi^2(1, N = 170) = 9.89, p < .001$.

Psychological aggression was the most common form of dating aggression experienced, with between 36% and 88% of participants acting as victims or perpetrators (see Table 3). Three quarters of the sample had experienced insults and name calling. Nevertheless, there were several gender differences. In terms of

TABLE 2
Percentage of Participants Reporting Sexual Aggression
in Dating Relationships by Gender

Type of Sexual Aggression	Victim		Aggressor	
	Female (n = 88)	Male (n = 83)	Female (n = 88)	Male (n = 83)
	% ^a	%	%	%
Forced kissing	41.4	30.1	19.5	31.3
Forced breast/chest fondling	27.3	15.7	8.0	20.5**
Forced genital fondling	26.1	21.7	10.3	15.7
Forced oral sex	12.6	16.9	6.9	14.5
Tried to force intercourse	36.4	20.5*	4.6	20.5***
Forced intercourse	17.0	10.8	6.9	14.5

a. Percentage of participants who reported ever inflicting each type of aggression.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

sustaining aggression, more women than men reported having their feelings hurt by a partner, $\chi^2(1, N = 170) = 3.59, p < .05$. In terms of perpetrating aggression, more women than men said they had made a partner feel guilty, $\chi^2(1, N = 170) = 10.5, p < .001$, but more men reported making their partners feel inferior, $\chi^2(1, N = 165) = 7.32, p < .05$, or degrading them, $\chi^2(1, N = 169) = 4.20, p < .05$.

ANTAGONISTIC BELIEFS

Adversarial sexual beliefs. A 2 x 2 Analysis of Variance (Gender x Victim Status) was conducted to test the prediction that sexually abused women would score higher on the ASB scale than nonsexually abused women and men. As predicted, a significant interaction effect was observed, $F(1, 169) = 4.46, p = .03$. Sexually victimized women perceived relationships as more adversarial than their nonvictimized counterparts ($M = 2.7$ vs. 2.4 , respectively). In contrast, men reported similar scores on the ASB scale, regardless of whether they were victims of sexual aggression ($M = 2.8$ vs. 2.9 , respectively).

Antagonistic beliefs about Black male-female relationships. Chi-square analyses were conducted to determine if more women than men agreed with each antagonistic belief about Black male-

TABLE 3
Percentage of Participants Reporting Psychological Aggression
in Dating Relationships by Gender

<i>Type of Psychological Aggression</i>	<i>Victim</i>		<i>Aggressor</i>	
	<i>Female</i> (n = 88) % ^a	<i>Male</i> (n = 83) %	<i>Female</i> (n = 88) %	<i>Male</i> (n = 83) %
Hurt feelings	86.2	74.7*	80.7	79.5
Made him or her feel guilty	77.9	69.1	88.6	68.3**
Said mean things	77.0	67.5	82.8	72.0
Called names	69.0	67.5	75.0	71.1
Criticized	71.3	69.5	72.7	73.2
Insulted	72.9	67.5	75.0	69.5
Made him or her feel inferior	39.1	49.4	36.5	57.5*
Degraded	41.4	48.8	37.9	53.7*

a. Percentage of participants who reported ever inflicting each type of aggression.

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

female relationships. Table 4 indicates that there were no gender differences on the items that measured economic inequalities. Approximately one half of the sample desired a partner with a substantial income. More than two thirds believed that Black women had more opportunities than Black men.

Generally, participants did not endorse items that emphasized traditional gender roles for women. One third of the sample believed that childbearing and domestic work were important functions for women. Even fewer participants believed that raising the children should be the role of women. In contrast, the majority of participants believed that men should function in their traditional role as protectors of women.

Equally high rates of Black women and men endorsed some oppressive images. For example, more than two thirds of the sample "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the belief that all Black men have some "doggish" traits. However, beliefs about oppressive images differed by gender. Specifically, men were twice as likely as women to believe that it was acceptable for a Black woman to have sexual relations on the first date, $\chi^2(1, N = 132) = 5.00, p < .05$. In contrast, more Black women believed that Black men abused their girlfriends because of their doggish traits, $\chi^2(1, N = 146) = 8.70, p < .005$. In addition, they felt that Black men oppress Black women because of their low regard for them, $\chi^2(1, N = 131)$

TABLE 4
Percentage of Participants Endorsing Antagonistic Beliefs
About Black Relationships by Gender

	<i>Female</i> (n = 88) % ^a	<i>Male</i> (n = 83) %
Economics inequalities		
A person must have a substantial income before I would consider a serious/intimate relationship with him or her	48.6	40.6
Black women seem to have more opportunities today than Black men	74.6	66.2
Traditional gender roles		
Raising the children should be the role of the woman	11.7	11.0
The most important functions of a woman are child-bearing and domestic work	34.7	33.8
The male's first priority is to protect his woman from harm	81.3	86.3
Oppressive images		
It's okay for a Black woman to have a sexual relationship on or before the first date	15.3	31.7*
It is natural for a Black woman to have more than one man	29.7	33.3
Black women have too much control and power in their families	28.0	33.3
Black men abuse their girlfriends because they are just "dogs"	46.6	23.3**
All Black men have a little "dog" in them	69.1	72.6
Many Black men, without realizing it, have helped to keep the Black woman down because of their low regard for her	73.6	54.2*
Black men don't respect Black women	67.6	35.6***

a. Percentage of participants who "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with each item.
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .005$. *** $p < .001$.

= 5.34, $p < .05$, and that Black men disrespect Black women, $\chi^2(1, N = 130) = 13.25, p < .001$.

To examine the relationship between dating aggression and antagonistic beliefs about Black relationships, a total aggression score was calculated by tallying how many types of abuse each participant reported sustaining or inflicting. Correlational analyses were then conducted between scores on each of the antagonistic beliefs about the Black relationships measure and the total physical, sexual, and psychological aggression score. In terms of sustaining violence, three significant but modest correlations were found for Black women. One belief was associated with sustaining more aggression and two beliefs were associated with sustaining less aggression. Black women who more strongly endorsed the statement "Black women have more opportunities than Black men" had been the victim of more types of

psychological abuse than Black women who did not subscribe to this belief ($r = .31, p < .01$). In contrast, women who more strongly agreed with the statement that a partner must have a substantial income before establishing an intimate relationship reported fewer types of psychological aggression ($r = -.25, p < .01$). Also, high endorsement of the item indicating "It is permissible for Black women to have sexual relationships on the first date" was associated with sustaining less sexual aggression ($r = -.24, p < .05$). In terms of inflicting aggression, one significant correlation was observed. Black women who disagreed with the statement "Black men have kept Black women down" reported inflicting a higher frequency of physical aggression than women who agreed ($r = -.32, p < .01$).

DISCUSSION

In this study, we investigated dating aggression among 171 African American members of Job Corps, a government sponsored poverty program. The goals were to examine the prevalence of dating aggression and to assess gender differences in the types of physical, sexual, and psychological aggression that had been sustained and inflicted. Adversarial sexual beliefs and antagonistic beliefs about Black male-female relationships and their association with dating aggression were also explored.

DATING AGGRESSION

As predicted, a substantial percentage of the participants experienced physical, sexual, and psychological dating aggression. More than one half of the sample reported less injurious forms of physical violence, such as pushing and slapping. Severe forms of physical aggression, such as being beaten and threatened with a weapon, also were inflicted and sustained by about one in four participants. In addition, sexual aggression was reported by a sizable percentage of the sample, with between 10% and 17% of the participants reporting forced intercourse. Finally, three quarters of the sample reported various forms of psychological aggression such as insults and name calling.

These findings are consistent with previous research that documents the widespread occurrence of dating aggression. Also similar to the pattern of aggression reported by White and Black undergraduates (Clark et al., 1994; Rouse, 1988), African American participants in this study reported more psychological than physical and sexual aggression. Nevertheless, there are some important differences between these findings and previous research. The frequency of physical aggression was higher in the present sample than has been reported previously. For instance, research using college students as participants shows that about 20% to 30% have experienced physical violence in dating relationships (Jackson, 1999). In contrast, 40% to 67% of the low income African American youth studied here reported physical violence.

The present results are consistent with research that indicates that African Americans are at greater risk for partner violence due to their marginalized socioeconomic status. Alternatively stated, African Americans are not inherently more violent than Whites; rather, they are overrepresented in demographic categories that are at greater risk for physical violence, such as the youthful and impoverished (DeMaris, 1990; West, 1998). Moreover, the elevated rates of dating aggression could also be related to the life experiences of the surveyed participants. Although not assessed in this study, previous research on Job Corps students indicates that they experience substantial rates of physical violence, either as witnesses, victims, or perpetrators. The aggressive behavior involved family members, including parents and siblings, friends, and strangers. In the majority of cases, the violence involved the threat or actual use of a weapon (Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Neidig, 1995). It is also probable that Job Corps participants, similar to other impoverished youth, are exposed to community violence as well, which places them at greater risk for dating aggression (Malik, Sorenson, & Aneshensel, 1997). This highlights the importance of studying this population. The present study should be replicated using larger, randomized samples of low income Black adolescents. In addition, recent research has emphasized the importance of surveying a wide range of socioeconomic classes when investigating violence among African Americans (Russo, Denious, Keita, & Koss, 1997). Therefore, future research should be conducted to ascertain if these high rates of dating aggression are also present in samples of economically advantaged African American youth.

Also similar to prior studies (Clark et al., 1994; Stets, 1991), the physical and psychological aggression reported in the present study was both sustained and inflicted by as many women as men. However, these results cannot be used to conclude that violence is mutual or reciprocal. First, the measures used here did not assess frequency of behavior. The questions were aimed at determining only whether a particular act had occurred at least once. Even given the limitations in the way violence was measured here, it appeared that significantly more men than women perpetrated severe forms of sexual aggression, such as attempted rape. In addition, men were more likely to make their partner feel inferior or to degrade them. The harmful effects of these severe forms of psychological aggression have been well documented (Marshall, 1999; O'Leary, 1999).

In comparison, the Black women in this sample were significantly more likely to have their feelings hurt by a partner and be the victims of severe physical and sexual aggression, such as choking and attempted rape. This may explain why they were significantly more likely to threaten, slap, hit, and throw objects at their partners. The intent is not to minimize the violence inflicted by Black women. However, the motives for the violence must be considered. Although not assessed in this study, previous studies indicate that women often use aggression as a form of self-defense in retaliation for the abuse perpetrated against them or in response to hurt feelings (Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991; Makepeace, 1986).

ANTAGONISTIC BELIEFS

As expected, adversarial sexual beliefs and antagonistic beliefs concerning Black male-female relationships are associated with dating aggression in the present study. However, it is not possible to know the temporal order of these beliefs and dating aggression. It is possible that these beliefs may have developed after an experience with dating aggression. It is equally probable that participants developed these beliefs prior to victimization, perhaps through peer influences (White, 1997) or family messages, that may have been passed down through the generations with the purpose of enabling Black girls to avoid economic and emotional exploitation or abuse (Joseph, 1981). Regardless of the origins of these antagonistic beliefs, they were quite prevalent among

participants in this study. For example, more than two thirds of the sample believed that Black men possess doggish traits. However, more Black women believed that Black men abused their girlfriends because of their doggish traits, that Black men oppress Black women because of their low regard for them, and that Black men disrespect Black women.

These antagonistic beliefs, as well as adversarial sexual beliefs, are linked to dating aggression. More specifically, disagreeing with the item that Black men have kept Black women down is associated with inflicting more physical aggression. Perhaps women who do not identify as oppressed by men use physical aggression against their partners because they perceive themselves as empowered, rather than as victims. Due to Black women's long history of physical abuse and oppression, both within their homes and in the larger society, they had to be prepared to defend themselves against violence. This may explain why Black women, when compared to their White peers, were more likely to fight back when sexually (Bart & O'Brien, 1985) or physically assaulted (Moss, Pitula, Campbell, & Halstead, 1997). Unfortunately, helping professionals may perceive Black women as domineering matriarchs who provoke their abuse or as mutual combatants, rather than as victims. In addition, Black women may minimize their victimization because they are invested in perceiving themselves as capable of self-defense (Ammons, 1995; Harrison & Esqueda, 1999; Peterson-Lewis et al., 1988).

In contrast, sexually victimized Black women perceive relationships as more adversarial than their nonvictimized counterparts and men, regardless of their sexual victimization status. Similar results were discovered in previous studies (Malamuth, 1988; Spence et al., 1991). However, the belief that sexual relations are acceptable on the first date is associated with less sexual victimization. It is possible that women who endorse more liberal beliefs about their sexual interactions may avoid victimization because they are willing participants. On the other hand, twice as many Black men believed that it is permissible to engage in sexual relations on the first date. Although not assessed in this study, this belief, coupled with the belief that Black men are dogs may lead them to use sexual aggression to force unwilling partners to comply with their sexual advances.

Finally, agreeing that a partner must have a substantial income before establishing an intimate relationship is associated with sustaining less psychological aggression. Perhaps women are less likely to tolerate verbal or psychological abuse from a partner who is financially unstable. Although this belief is correlated with a lower frequency of psychological abuse, such attitudes can still be problematic. A substantial percentage of young Black men cannot provide these economic resources. This may leave both partners frustrated, which in turn may contribute to partner violence (Asbury, 1987; Franklin, 1984; Ucko, 1994).

However, the belief that Black women have more opportunities is associated with being the victim of psychological abuse. The notion that Black women have more economic and social opportunities may be linked to a misinterpretation of history. Black women were able to obtain jobs, as domestics for example, when Black men were unemployed. Although it may appear that Black women are privileged, the reality is that race and gender discrimination frequently leave them more impoverished than other race-gender groups (Sanchez-Hucles, 1997). Because of their perceived economic advantage, some battered Black women may feel guilty about their accomplishments, while simultaneously feeling responsible for their partners' limited economic opportunities (Moss et al., 1997). According to Richie (1996), this set of belief patterns is an example of "gender entrapment," which can make it difficult for some battered Black women to extract themselves from abusive relationships. To more fully understand the association between adversarial sexual beliefs and antagonistic beliefs concerning Black male-female relationships, future researchers should use more in-depth measurements and personal interviews.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERVENTION

Researchers and community activists can conduct culturally appropriate education concerning partner violence. Information can be disseminated through community leaders, religious institutions, and ethnic events. A well-drafted, culturally sensitive statement concerning partner violence could also be published in Black newspapers. Such a statement could emphasize the frequency of intimate violence within the Black community, as well

as the association between this form of aggression and antagonistic beliefs. This technique has been used to successfully raise awareness concerning sexual harassment (Ransby, 1995) and rape (White, 1999) in the Black community.

Service providers should not negate the reality that Black women are vulnerable to victimization, however, they should work to empower these young women. This can be accomplished by raising their awareness of the dynamics of physical, sexual, and psychological dating aggression. In particular, helping professionals can focus on how young Black women may find themselves entrapped in abusive relationships by economic inequalities, contradictory gender roles, and oppressive images (Richie, 1996; West, 2000; White, 1997).

With regard to young Black men, helping professionals can provide culturally appropriate batterer treatment programs that entail acknowledging their oppression in the larger society while simultaneously holding them accountable for their abusive behavior (Williams, 1998). Intervention must also confront the internalized oppressive images that support dating aggression, such as the belief that Black men possess doggish traits. Awareness about the dynamics of abuse may be accomplished by instilling a greater awareness of both gender and race discrimination (White, Potgieter, Strube, Fisher, & Umana, 1997).

In conclusion, this study is further documentation that a substantial percentage of low income African American youth experience physical, sexual, and psychological dating aggression. Understanding the dynamics that place this population at increased risk is an important research priority.

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