Day-to-Day Moderators of the link between Attachment Insecurity and Intimate Partner Violence in Emerging Adulthood: A Daily Diary Study

by

Lisa Haijing Gou

B.Sc., Queen’s University, 2012
M.Sc., University of Victoria, 2014

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In the Department of Psychology

© Lisa Haijing Gou, 2019

University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This dissertation may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.
Day-to-Day Moderators of the link between Attachment Insecurity and Intimate Partner Violence in Emerging Adulthood: A Daily Diary Study

by

Lisa Haijing Gou

B.Sc., Queen’s University, 2012

M.Sc., University of Victoria, 2014

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Erica Woodin, Supervisor
Department of Psychology

Dr. Marsha Runtz, Departmental Member
Department of Psychology

Dr. Danu Stinson, Departmental Member
Department of Psychology

Dr. Natalee Popadiuk, Outside Member
Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies
Abstract

Emerging adulthood (ages 18-25 years) is a developmental period marked by changes in attachment, the onset of serious dating relationships, and rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) up to 40 and 90% for physical and psychological IPV, respectively. This dissertation aims to investigate moderators of the link between insecure attachment, a known risk factor for IPV, and psychological IPV, coercive controlling behaviours, and relational aggression in emerging adulthood. One hundred and seventeen undergraduate students in dating relationships were recruited to partake in a baseline assessment followed by a 14-day daily diary study. During the baseline assessment, participants self-reported on putative trait level risk factors such as demographics and insecure attachment. During the daily diary portion, participants reported on their experiences of IPV, felt partner acceptance and rejection, support and conflict in their relationships, alcohol use, and ego depletion for each day. I hypothesized that attachment insecurity would be moderated by dyadic factors, such as daily anxiety about partner acceptance, felt rejection, partner support and conflict, and situational factors, such as daily alcohol use and ego depletion, to predict risk for IPV perpetration on a given day. Specifically, I hypothesized that individuals who were insecurely attached to their partners would be more likely to use aggression on days when dyadic factors (i.e., perceptions of inadequate support from or conflict with their partner, felt rejection and anxiety about acceptance) and situational factors (i.e., the consumption of alcohol or the experience of ego depleting stress) interacted to increase their risk. Data was analyzed using multilevel modeling in Hierarchical Linear Modeling. The results from this dissertation underscore the importance of attachment anxiety as an individual risk factor for IPV and identified more
proximal risk factors for different forms of IPV that fluctuate on a daily basis, including felt rejection, conflict, dyadic problems, and poor support fit. Attachment anxiety interacted with high conflict to predict greater risk for coercive control. Unexpectedly, stress suppressed the link between dyadic problems and risk for psychological IPV on a given day, and high stress paired with alcohol consumption was related to a decreased risk of coercive control. High stress and greater dyadic problems interacted to predict greater risk for coercive control as expected. This study did not find support for the perfect storm theory of aggression (in which a 3-way interaction between risk factors is associated with greatest risk of IPV). The findings from this study contribute to our knowledge of why some people perpetrate IPV and not others, and why people perpetrate IPV on some days and not others. These results inform the multiple possible points of entry for prevention and interventions aiming to promote healthy relationships in emerging adults.