





offers an enhanced opportunity to examine the role of gender orientation in the use of ODV across both sexes (Black et al., 2011; Hines & Saudino, 2003; O'Leary, 1999; Romito & Grassi, 2007). As such, we investigate the role of masculine orientation in the use of maladaptive coping strategies as a possible explanation for the sex disparity in ODV among those who have been victims of psychological intimate partner abuse.

## Background

Although much research has investigated how violent victimization increases the likelihood of maladaptive coping strategies, such as engagement in violent behavior, little empirical research exists on behavioral responses among victims of a specific form of victimization: psychological intimate partner abuse (Baron, 2009; Hay & Evans, 2006; Turanovic & Pratt, 2013). Moreover, although many studies have established a sex disparity in ODV, there remains a dearth of empirically supported theorizing on what it is about "maleness" that is associated with ODV, particularly among those who have experienced victimization. In other words, beyond being a male, are socialized masculine qualities (i.e., masculine orientation) associated with ODV? For males in particular, scholars have found victimhood is often viewed as a feminine status—Thus, when men are subjected to victimization, they tend to utilize violence as a way to reconstruct or reestablish their masculinity (Anderson & Umberson, 2001; Daigle & Mummert, 2014; Jakupcak, Lisak, & Roemer, 2002; Messerschmidt, 1993). As one scholar noted, "when success, power (and also control), and competition are threatened by a partner then the man will respond by defending his masculine self-esteem" (O'Neil & Harway, 1997, p. 193). Although there is a considerable amount of research that examines masculinity and male victimhood, there is a paucity of research that investigates how masculine-oriented female or feminine-oriented male victims might cope and hence respond to victimization.

Why so little is known about the impact of masculinity on violence perpetration is likely because researchers often conflate sex (i.e., being male vs. female) with gender orientation (i.e., being masculine vs. feminine). Quite frequently, researchers state they are investigating "gender differences" in violence perpetration when in effect they are examining sex differences (i.e., male vs. female disparities; Anderson, 2005; Courtenay, 2000; Mahalik, Lagan, & Morrison, 2006; Messerschmidt, 1993). In addition, researchers routinely equate masculinity with males and femininity with females, neglecting the fact that gender operates on a spectrum in which individuals can express a range of both masculine and feminine characteristics (Courtenay, 2000; West & Zimmerman, 1987). As a consequence, little is known about

whether masculine and/or feminine orientation might be associated with male versus female status in terms of propensity to use ODV. That is, it is currently unclear, for example, if “masculine females” are as likely to partici-



Men and women actively contribute to dominant gender norms through interaction with others. Although masculine ideologies vary by culture and context, a dominant form of masculinity, referred to as hegemonic masculinity, informs expectations and stereotypes of men, which may drive individuals to engage in health risks to adhere to gendered social expectations and to avoid femininity or homosexual characterization (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Courtenay, 2000; Locke & Mahalik, 2005). Scholars of masculinity note that a singular masculinity does not exist but that *masculinities* exist and are informed by the intersecting nature of race, social class, and sexuality, among other identities (Peralta, 2007; Peralta, Tuttle, & Steele, 2010). Hegemonic masculinity in the present context refers quite specifically to White and heterosexual masculinity.

College students may be particularly at risk of engaging in violence, and this risk may be associated with their developmental stage: emerging adulthood. College students of traditional age are undergoing tremendous psychological and emotional development (see Edwards & Jones, 2009; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009; Pittman & Richmond, 2008). Moreover, researching college students provides an appropriate situated context to study gender given the gendered nature of the college experience (e.g., the gendered: organization of sexual assault among students, selection of major [e.g., engineering vs. nursing], participation in college athletics, availability and utilization of college resources and services such as sexual assault victimization support, academic and social organization participation, stratification of the academy by rank and/or administrator role/title [Allen, Ridgeway, & Swan, 2015; Watt & Eccles, 2008], the relatively high levels of ODV that occur among college students, and the unique developmental stage college students find themselves in regard to marital, employment, and parenthood status) (Black et al., 2011; Desmarais, Reeves, Nicholls, Telford, & Fiebert, 2012; Katsiaficas, Suarez-Orozco, & Dias, 2015; Mason & Smithey, 2012; O'Malley & Johnston, 2002; Salvatore, Taniguchi, & Welsh, 2012; Smith, Morrison, & Wolf, 1994). The processes of emotional and psychological development, coupled with gender role expectations for those entering emergent adulthood, are important to consider as facets of outward violence.

### *Interpersonal Violence: Sex Versus Gender*

We know little about whether male college students are at higher risk of ODV due to their sex category or because of masculine socialization. We know even less about whether female students who demonstrate or exhibit masculine traits are similarly at risk for perpetrating ODV. We do know that outwardly aggressive acts are gendered behaviors that are symbolic of

toughness, strength, virility, and heterosexuality, and are stereotypically associated with the male sex (Courtenay, 2000; Levant, 2011; Neff, 2001). Although sex category is uniform, masculine socialization can vary, which may explain why rates of risk behavior vary between both men and women as well as among men (Courtenay, 2000; Levant, 2011; Neff, 2001). Theoretically, students who strongly conform to masculine constructs but who experience victimization may be experiencing gender role strain, which may lead to ODV (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Levant, Wimer, Williams, Smalley, & Noronha, 2009). Alternatively, students who conform to feminine constructs may be protected from such risk behaviors regardless of sex category.

Accounting only for sex category in interpersonal violence research may yield specificity and sensitivity error, which can result in the incorrect interpretation of data. For example, young women who have a masculine identity

**Research Question 1:** Are men more likely to respond to psychological victimization with ODV than women?

**Research Question 2:** Are masculine individuals more likely to respond to psychological victimization with ODV than feminine individuals?

**Research Question 3:** Are masculine individuals more likely to respond to psychological victimization with ODV than feminine individuals, irrespective of sex?

To answer our research questions, we analyze survey responses from victims of psychological IPV via a general strain theory framework (Agnew, 2001; Broidy & Agnew, 1997; Piquero & Sealock, 2004). This approach allows us to determine how exposure to a strenuous life event—psychological intimate partner victimization—is related to the use of ODV by sex and gender. Although, it is worth noting that to date, researchers have yet to consider femininity as a protective factor for ODV perpetration. Thus, some of our hypotheses below are exploratory in that they consider femininity as potentially protective in terms of responding to strain via ODV.

As such, we address the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Men who have experienced psychological victimization will be more likely to self-report ODV compared with women who have experienced psychological victimization.

**Hypothesis 2a (H2a):** Masculine-oriented individuals who have experienced psychological victimization will be more likely to self-report ODV compared with their feminine counterparts.

**Hypothesis 2b (H2b):** Feminine-oriented individuals who have experienced psychological victimization will be less likely to self-report ODV compared with their masculine counterparts.

**Hypothesis 3a (H3a):** Masculine-oriented individuals who have experienced psychological victimization will be more likely to self-report ODV compared with their feminine counterparts, irrespective of sex.

**Hypothesis 3b (H3b):** Feminine-oriented individuals who have experienced psychological victimization will be less likely to self-report ODV compared with their masculine counterparts, irrespective of sex.

## **Data and Measurement**

### *Data Collection and Sample*

To test the five hypotheses posed above, this project utilizes data from an online survey. The survey was developed to collect data on health risk



behavior, criminal and deviant behaviors, and victimization among college students. The survey included measures of violence (including self- and ODV), alcohol and drug use, depression, victimization, and gender identity.

Participants were recruited through advertising to Introduction to Sociology students at a mid-sized Midwestern public university from fall semester of 2013 and spring semester of 2014. Advertisement and recruitment was extended to all Introduction to Sociology courses, except distance learning classes, as these classes contain a large number of high school students. Instructors of Introduction to Sociology courses provided students with a link to the survey. Students were eligible to participate as long as they were 18 years of age, enrolled in an Introduction to Sociology course, and thereby enrolled at the university in which the study occurred.

Data were collected using Survey Gizmo, an online survey service provider. Before students could answer any survey questions, they were required to provide informed consent by reading the informed consent page found at the beginning of the online survey. To protect respondents, no personal identifying information was collected and only the primary investigator and corresponding members of the research team had access to the data. Given the sensitive nature of the topics, respondents were also provided with a list of facilities and programs specializing in mental health, substance abuse, and violence prevention in case intervention was desired. The online survey took an average of 50 minutes to complete, and respondents were given the option to print the "thank you" note that appeared at the end of the survey to claim extra credit.

A total of 2,327 students were enrolled at the time of data collection and received invitations to participate. Of those students, 1,026 completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 44%. This exceeds the average online survey response rate of 33% (Nulty, 2008) and the average response rate (30%-40%) for surveys conducted by Survey Gizmo (Fryrear, 2015). Considering this article is focused on ODV among college students, any respondents below the age of 18 and over the age of 24 were excluded from the sample. This resulted in the exclusion of 148 cases.

As suggested by Poulin, MacNeil, and Mitic (1993), to detect participants who may have not been truthful in their responses, a fictitious drug was incorporated into the drug use section. However, very few participants ( $n = 19$ ) indicated having taken the fictitious drug, suggesting that an overwhelming majority of participants were forthcoming in their responses to the survey questions. After excluding those below 18 and above 24 and those who reported taking the fictitious drug, the sample totaled 841 college students. From here, a subsample ( $n = 523$ ) of students who identified as victims of psychological IPV were analyzed. After evaluating missing data, multiple

imputation was used to account for missing observations. For regression

victimization, respondents were asked to answer the following items in regards to their experiences over last 12 months: (a) my partner insulted or swore at me, (b) my partner shouted or yelled at me, (c) my partner stomped out on me during a discussion, (d) my partner did something to spite me, (e) my partner called me fat or ugly, (f) my partner destroyed something of mine, (g) my partner said I was a lousy lover, and (h) my partner threatened to hit me. The Cronbach's alpha for our sample is .75.

From there, *psychological intimate partner violence* was collapsed into a dichotomous variable with 0 indicating no experience of psychological aggression from one's partner in the last year and 1 representing psychological aggression from one's partner within the last year. Almost two thirds of the original sample, 62.7%, had experienced psychological victimization from an intimate partner within the last year. This is commensurate with the rate of psychological intimate partner victimization in the general population (40%-60%), but is much lower than the reports of previous studies among college students (82%; Black et al., 2011; Hines & Saudino, 2003; Shook, Gerrity, Jurich, & Seagrist, 2000).

There are some limitations to the use of the CTS2 in measuring psychological intimate partner abuse in that the indicators consist of a range of behaviors from minor acts such as insults to more severe behaviors such as threats of harm (Follingstad et



life?" Given limited variability within responses, this measure was dichotomized for which 0 represents "little to no importance" and 1 indicates "significant importance."

## **Anal ic S a eg.**

Considering the outcome variable, *ODV*, is dichotomous, binary logistic regression was used to determine the log odds of engaging in ODV. Binary logistic regression results are presented in Table 3. Model 1 is a base model (results not shown), which generates the coefficient for the log odds of ODV for the sample of victims without considering any exploratory variables. Model 2 introduces sex into the model to determine its effect on the log odds of engagement in ODV. Models 3 and 4 eliminate sex and incorporate masculinity and femininity, respectively, to examine each one's effect on the log odds of engaging in ODV. Models 5 and 6 reintroduce sex into each model to determine whether masculinity and femininity, respectively, each retain their significance in estimating the log odds of ODV engagement. Model 7 is the full model that includes all study and control variables.

## **Re l**

Descriptive statistics are illustrated in Table 1. Of all 523 victims, nearly 48% ( $n = 250$ ) engaged in ODV within the past year. Forty-six percent ( $n = 239$ ) participated in heavy episodic drinking within the last 2 weeks. The average depression score was 8.65. Demographically, 36.3% of the sample ( $n = 190$ ) was male and 75.5% ( $n = 395$ ) White. The average masculinity and femininity scores were 4.90 and 5.41, respectively.

When the sample is disaggregated by sex, we can see that a significantly larger proportion of males engage in heavy episodic drinking, 54.4%, compared with 43.6% of females. These results yield a statistically significant difference in heavy episodic drinking between males and females ( $\chi^2 = 64.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ). There are also statistically significant differences in reported depression ( $t = 4.037$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The average depression score for females is 8.89 whereas the average score for males is 8.4.

Table 2 shows the percentage of psychological IPV victims who engage in ODV broken down by sex and gender. Of the 508 students who experienced psychological victimization, 92 identified as masculine males, 86 were masculine females, 92 were feminine males, and 238 were feminine females. These categories were constructed by subtracting each respondent's masculinity score from their femininity score. If a respondent's total was greater

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics of Psychological IPV ( $n = 523$ ).

	Transgender	Females	Males
<b>Dominance</b>			
Overall ( $M = 0, SD = 1$ )	47.8	40.5	60.5***
<b>Kaplan-Meier</b>			
Male (1-7)	4.90	4.90	5.12
Female (1-7)	5.41	5.55	5.05
<b>Chastity</b>			
Score ( $M = 0, SD = 1$ )		63.7	36.3
High ( $M = 0, SD = 1$ )	49.9	56.4	45.6
Low ( $M = 0, SD = 1$ )	47.6	43.6	54.4***
<b>Ratios</b>			
Overall ( $M = 0, SD = 1$ )	75.5	74.4	73
High ( $M = 0, SD = 1$ )	24.5	25.6	28
<b>Dominance Scale</b>	8.65	8.89	8.4***
<b>Submissiveness Scale</b>	4.41	4.36	4.44
<b>Equality</b>			
Overall ( $M = 0, SD = 1$ )	34.4	31.3	39.5
High ( $M = 0, SD = 1$ )	65.6	68.7	60.5
<b>Low Equality</b>			
Overall ( $M = 0, SD = 1$ )	54.5	54.2	55
High ( $M = 0, SD = 1$ )	45.8	45.8	45

Note. IPV = Psychological IPV.  $p < .05$ .  $**p < .01$ .  $***p < .001$ .

than 0, they were categorized as masculine, regardless of their sex category. Similarly, if a respondent's total was less than or equal to 0, she or he was considered feminine.

As illustrated in Table 2, 69.6% of masculine men ( $n = 64$ ) who were victims of psychological IPV engaged in ODV. Interestingly, the next largest group to participate in ODV was masculine women (61.6%) followed by feminine men (52.2%), with feminine women exhibiting the lowest engagement in ODV (33.6%). These results suggest that the variation in ODV by the four gender/sex combinations is statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 43.34, p < .001$ ).

These findings illustrate the importance of considering both gender and sex when examining the use of ODV. For example, Figure 1 shows the

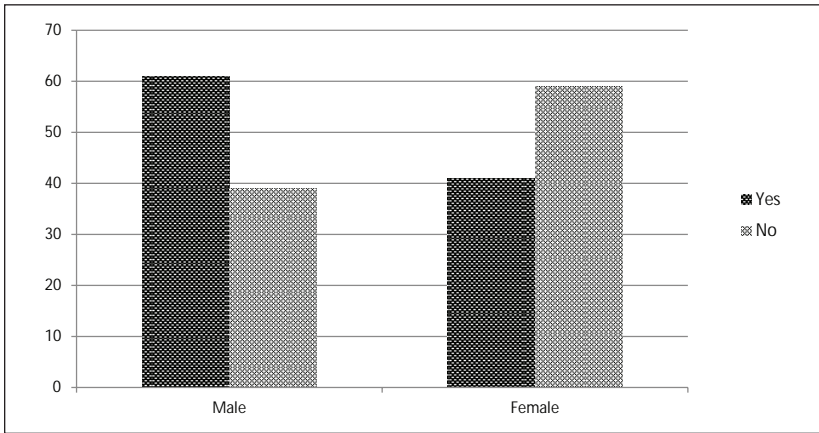
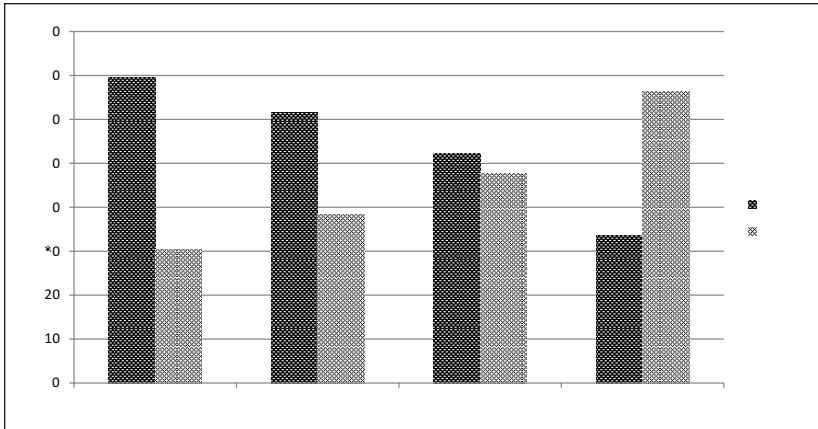


Figure 1. Proportion of psychological IPV victims who used ODV by sex only.

proportion of psychological IPV victims who used ODV by sex only. As illustrated by the graph, 61% of males engaged in ODV compared with 41% of females. Thus, reiterating the expected relationship, males engage in ODV at much higher rates than females. However, when the gender of the victim is incorporated, the results are significantly more illuminating.

Figure 2 illustrates the proportion of psychological IPV victims that use ODV by both sex and gender. As demonstrated by the figure, the importance of masculinity in the use of ODV becomes apparent. Not only do masculine men have the highest rates of ODV but it is masculine women who make up second highest rate of ODV. These descriptive analyses suggest that (a) men and women have different behavioral responses to psychological victimization as illustrated in Figure 1, and (b) masculinity has an impact on the use of ODV, regardless of sex as demonstrated in Table 2 and Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Percentage of individuals using ODV by sex and gender.

Note. ODV = *Offensive Digital Violence*.

Results from the binary logistic regression are reported in Table 3 and support the patterns suggested by the descriptive statistics. Model 2 indicates that male victims of psychological IPV experience a .872 increase in the log odds of engaging in ODV, controlling for all other study variables. Thus, the expected odds of male victims using ODV is 2.39 times that of female victims. These results support H1.

As demonstrated by Table 2 and Figure 2, the descriptive statistics suggest that masculinity has an impact on the use of ODV. Those who use ODV at the highest rates are masculine men followed by masculine women. Model 3 indicates that for every one unit increase in masculinity, there is a .411 increase in log odds using ODV, without controlling for sex. Results also suggest that femininity acts as a protective factor against ODV as for every one unit increase in femininity, there is a .468 decrease in the log odds of using ODV, without controlling for sex. These results indicate support for both H2a and H2b.

To test whether masculinity has an independent effect on ODV, Model 5 includes masculinity while controlling for sex. Results suggest that although the masculinity coefficient decreases slightly when sex is controlled for, its effect on ODV remains significant ( $\beta = .378, p < .01$ ). Thus, support is found for H3a. Similarly, to test whether femininity has an independent effect on ODV, Model 6 includes femininity while controlling for sex. Results indicate that femininity protects individuals from engaging in ODV, independent of sex ( $\beta = -.383, p < .001$ ). Once again, we find support for H3b. In Model 7,



**Table 3.**

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(Adkins, Wang, Dupre, Van den Oord, & Elder, 2009; Borooah, 2010; Hyde, Mezulis, & Abramson, 2008; Rosenfield & Mouzon, 2013).

Our multivariate results indicate that men and women react differently to psychological victimization in which male victims experience increased odds of exhibiting ODV in comparison with female victims. This research also sought to determine the impact of masculinity on the use of ODV. We conclude that victims who ascribe to a masculine identity have higher odds of engaging in ODV whereas those with a feminine identity have lower odds of engaging in ODV. This could be because social expectations regarding femininity and masculinity are very specific. To be conventionally feminine is to be docile, caring, and friendly. Thus, it is strongly counter-normative for feminine individuals, and especially feminine females, to be engaged in crime and violence. This means that among our sample, feminine females would likely face significant social consequences and stigmatization by engaging in ODV, whereas masculine males would likely face minimal social consequences and stigmatization for engaging in ODV (and in some instances, may be encouraged to engage in ODV; see Messerschmidt, 1993). The distribution of would-be social consequences and stigmatization mirrors the groups that are least to most likely to engage in ODV in our study.

The fact that the effects of masculine and feminine identity remain even after sex is introduced into the model suggests that gender orientation has an independent effect on ODV perpetration. This may mean that the internal consequences of being counter-normative in regard to gender identity are more potent than the external consequences of being counter-normative. For example, because masculine females were more likely to engage in ODV than feminine males, identifying with feminine qualities may have a stronger protective effect in terms of violence perpetration than being identified as physically male or female by others, which is how criminologists have traditionally studied the sex disparity in violence perpetration. Whether one identifies as female or male and whether one feels or expresses a masculine or feminine identity may be important intersecting correlates of crime for scholars to consider moving forward (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006).

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

Although the results of this study are intriguing, they should be interpreted with caution. The data were obtained via an online survey resulting in a convenience sample of college-aged students located in a Midwestern university. Therefore, we limit our interpretation and discussion of these results to this particular context. Moreover, there is a risk of selection bias considering the sample was self-selected and motivated to participate by an extra-credit



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a coping mechanism for psychological intimate partner victimization. First, we address the lack of investigation into the behavioral responses to psychological IPV. Much of the previous literature focuses on behavioral responses to violent victimization (Turanovic & Pratt, 2013). This study extends the use of Agnew's general strain theory by examining the sex and gender differ

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