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Violence Against Women 2011 17: 500 originally published online 8 April 2011
DOI: 10.1177/1077801211404312

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What is This?
Attitudinal Correlates of Girls’ Use of Violence in Teen Dating Relationships

Poco D. Kernsmith¹ and Richard M. Tolman²

Abstract
This article explores the applicability of the Theory of Planned Behavior in understanding female perpetrated adolescent dating violence. The Theory of Planned Behavior is intended to predict behavioral intention by examining the actor’s perceptions of consequences and rewards associated with the behavior, social acceptability of the behavior, and behavioral control. Previous research on adult populations has found that the planned behavior model is correlated with violent behavior among males (Tolman, Edleson, & Fendrich, 1996), but not females (Kernsmith, 2005). The current study found that the model partially explained the violent behavior of girls, but only perceptions of social norms were significant.

Keywords
adolescents, dating violence, intention, perpetrators, theories

Research about intimate partner violence among adolescents and young adults has begun to explore gender differences in perpetration of dating violence. Some studies show female violence in dating relationships appears to be less severe than male perpetrated violence and frequently occurs in a relationship where the male partner is also violent (Makepeace, 1986; Molidor & Tolman, 1998). Other research has indicated that adolescent girls may be equally, if not more likely, to use violence (Gray & Foshee, 1997; Miller & White, 2003; O’Keefe & Treister, 1998). Although some research shows that girls are less likely to initiate violence (Molidor & Tolman, 1998), other research indicates that females are as likely to initiate and males as likely to retaliate (Capaldi, Kim, & Shortt, 2007). The context in which the abuse occurs and its meaning to the victim and perpetrator show some distinct gender differences (Molidor & Tolman, 1998; O’Keefe & Treister, 1998; Saunders, 2002). Evidence is clear that, despite gender differences, girls sometimes do use physical force in

¹Wayne State University, Detroit, MI
²University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

Corresponding Author:
Poco D. Kernsmith, Wayne State University, School of Social Work, 4756 Cass Ave., Detroit, MI 48202
Email: poco@wayne.edu
their intimate partner relationships and sometimes claim to initiate it (Molidor & Tolman, 1998; O’Keefe & Treister, 1998).

There have been few attempts, however, to apply theory to help explain girls’ use of physical force in their adolescent relationships. In this article, we first review the existing research on why adolescents may use violence in their intimate relationships and the impact that violence may have. We examine the evidence for gender differences in these areas and discuss one possible theoretical framework for explaining the use of physical violence in adolescent relationships, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). We then describe our application of the TPB to data from a study of intimate partner violence among a sample of high school students. We find some evidence that supports TPB in explaining girls’ intentions to use partner violence.

Adolescent Dating Violence

Research suggests there may be a variety of reasons for using violence against a dating partner. One reason frequently cited is jealousy. Both males and females, aged 14 to 20, frequently reported jealousy as the primary reason for abusing a partner (O’Keefe & Treister, 1998). Molidor and Tolman (1998) reported that, in a sample of high school students in two Midwestern communities, twice as many males as females stated that their own jealousy was the reason their partners had used violence against them. Since male jealousy may frequently be used as a tactic to control the behavior of female partners (Miller & White, 2003; Pence & Paymar, 1986), this finding may lend support to the hypothesis that women use violence to resist control by their partners.

Males have also identified “trying to get back at me” as a reason their partners used violence against them (O’Keefe & Treister, 1998). Although retaliation as a motivation for abuse was mentioned by both males and females, the meaning and context of the retaliation may differ. In a study of Mexican American youth, males said they employed physical violence as retaliation for behavior they did not like, such as flirting with someone else or sexually “teasing,” while girls mentioned using retaliatory violence when a partner initiated the abuse (Black & Weisz, 2004). Makepeace (1986) identified the primary goal of male courtship violence as intimidation, while girls reported self-defense to be the most important.

Some studies also suggest that the effects of violence on males and females were very different. Vivian and Langhinrichsen-Rohling (1994), in a study in which both partners had been identified as using physical force, found that females were far more likely to experience negative consequences from the violence, both psychologically and physically, likely because males are using more severe forms of violence. Among teens, this appears to be true also. Molidor and Tolman (1998) surveyed a sample of high school students regarding their experiences with physical and emotional dating violence. Regarding the “worst” incident of physical violence, males report no physical effect or that it “hurt a little” in 90% of cases, whereas girls reported it “hurt a lot” or caused physical injury in 81% of cases (Molidor & Tolman, 1998). In another study examining dating violence among high school students, female victims reported their most common response to the violence was “fear,” while males most commonly reported they “thought it was funny” (O’Keefe &
Treister, 1998). When males experienced violence, more than half said they reacted by laughing, and nearly one third ignored it. Among girls, 40% cried and 36% defended themselves (Molidor & Tolman, 1998). In another study, female violence was described as nonthreatening and merely the result of their emotionality (Miller & White, 2003). This may indicate they are using less severe forms of violence. Although both parties in the relationship may be acting violently, the term “mutual” does not seem to accurately describe the dynamics of the abuse.

In a longitudinal study of adolescents recruited from a health maintenance organization, aged 16 to 20, Ozer, Tschann, Pasch, and Flores (2004) found that patterns of violence were not consistent among girls. Boys who had used violence at the baseline continued to use it at the 4- and 5-year follow-up. Among girls, use of violence at the baseline did not predict future violence. Among girls, use of violence significantly decreased over time while male-perpetrated violence remained consistent. This seems to indicate that a young male who uses violence will continue to use violence in that and other relationships. However, female violence seems to be less likely part of a pattern of control and may instead be a response to violence perpetrated against her, as it does not continue in subsequent relationships. Capaldi et al. (2007) also reported that rates of female initiation of violence decreased as female adolescents became young adults.

Many women who report using violence in relationships have previous histories of physical or sexual victimization in childhood or in dating relationships (Foshee, Linder, MacDougall, & Bangdiwala, 2001; Kernsmith, 2006; White & Humphrey, 1994). White and Humphrey (1994) found that more than one quarter of all women using violence had experienced parental aggression and nearly half had experienced sexual assault as adolescents. More than 85% had experienced verbal aggression and nearly half were physically abused in a dating relationship. They hypothesize that due to these high levels of past victimization, such young women may be less trusting and more alienated from others, leading them to feel more threatened by their partner’s intimidating behaviors (see also Kernsmith, 2006). This may heighten the perceived need by women for self-defensive behavior.

These findings generally seem to indicate that violence by girls is not as severe or damaging and stems from different motivations than male violence (Molidor & Tolman, 1998; O’Keefe & Treister, 1998) even though females may use force as frequently as males (Archer, 2000; Miller & White, 2003). Other research indicates that the focus on males as perpetrators and females as victims may be limiting in understanding the didactic processes that exist in a violent relationship, including developmental issues in adolescence and young adulthood (Capaldi et al., 2007; Capaldi, Kim, & Shortt, 2004). Thus research in this area remains controversial.

Although girls may be more likely to be injured by boys’ violence (Molidor & Tolman, 1998) or to experience dangerous retaliatory violence after they have initiated violence towards boys (Swan & Snow, 2002), it is important to note that boys also may experience negative effects from girls’ violence. Coker et al. (2000) identified that severe dating violence victimization among males was associated with poor health, lower life satisfaction, and suicidal ideation. These findings make it clear that understanding female violence is an important component for prevention efforts. In this article, we consider the internal
processes around young women’s decisions to use force in a relationship. The Theory of Planned Behavior provides one theoretical explanation.

**Theory of Planned Behavior**

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1985), is a model used to predict an individual’s behavioral intention. This model is rooted in a framework of learning theories and is an extension of the theory of propositional control (Dunlany, 1967) and the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1970). The theory of reasoned action states that behavioral intentions mediate behavior. These intentions are affected by attitudes toward performing the act and beliefs about what behavior is expected in given situations. TPB extends the theory of reasoned action by including consideration of an individual’s perception of their control over their behavior as a predictor of behavioral intentions. TPB effectively predicts behavioral intention and behavior during a variety of activities, including smoking, contraceptive use, and donating blood (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Sheppard, Hartwich, & Warshaw, 1988).

Three predictors of behavioral intention comprise the model as follows: attitudes toward behavior, perceived social acceptability, and perceived behavioral control (see Figure 1). One is the individual’s beliefs about the rewards and negative consequences of a behavior, identified as *attitudes toward behavior* (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1970). This variable is similar to one component of social learning theory, which states that behavior in a particular situation is determined by the expectation that the behavior will be reinforced and the value of the reinforcement to the actor (Rotter, 1982). The predicted gain and loss associated with a behavior are measured against one another to assist in selecting the behavior that maximizes gain and minimizes expected loss.

The second is the degree to which individuals are motivated by beliefs about subjective norms of what constitutes socially acceptable behavior. These norms include societal expectations but are often limited to those closest and most significant to the individual. In some adaptations of the model, an individual’s rating of the normative beliefs, identified as *perceived social acceptability*, is multiplied by their rating of their motivation to comply with the norms, thereby weighting the beliefs of those most motivated to comply more heavily (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1970).

Ajzen (1985) extended the theory of reasoned action to include *perceived behavioral control* as a predictor of both behavioral intention and behavior and named the model the Theory of Planned Behavior. This extension states that how strongly an individual believes that he or she has the resources and opportunities to perform the behavior will impact the likelihood of employing the behavior. This construct also includes the ability to control behavior, such as choosing not to use force in a relationship.

The Theory of Planned Behavior has important implications for applications in domestic violence research because batterer intervention appears to share many of the same assumptions. Legal interventions have been strengthened with the goal of increasing the negative consequences for abuse as well as decreasing the batterer’s sense that abusive behavior is acceptable (Pate & Hamilton, 1992; Stark, 1993). Counseling interventions, based in
psychoeducational models, also work to increase the batterer’s sense that he has the ability to change his abusive behavior and make nonviolent choices. Learning to recognize cues of escalating tension and increased risk of abuse can assist the batterer in acting to decrease the risk and reduce violence (Bryant, 1994; Sakai, 1991).

Tolman et al. (1996) applied the Theory of Planned Behavior to domestic violence in a longitudinal study, measuring the theory’s ability to predict future physically abusive behavior among males convicted of domestic violence. The model predicted men’s expectations to use violence and correctly identified the likelihood of future abusive behavior in 85.9% of those who did not continue to use violence. Among those who did recidivate, the model correctly identified only 37.2%. Thus the model was better at predicting nonrecidivism than recidivism. Perceived likelihood of perpetration is identified by Tolman et al. (1996) as a preferable measure of behavioral expectation, due to the inability or unwillingness of individuals to report their intention to do so. Abusive males have been found to blame violent behavior on external stressors or temporary, modifiable states within themselves such as alcohol or drug use, anger, or jealousy (Cantos, Neidig, & O’Leary, 1993), thereby eliminating their attribution of their own intention and eliminating self-blame. To address this, Tolman et al. (1996) modified the original planned behavior model by measuring expectation of future violence instead of intention to use violence. The present study follows this recommendation.

Kernsmith (2005) applied the model to a sample of males and females in batterer intervention counseling. This study expanded previous work by including emotionally abusive behaviors. The findings indicate that the model was a significant predictor of male behavior

Figure 1. Planned behavior model
but not female behavior. However, this study examined only behavior and did not include the essential component of behavioral intention.

The goal of the present study is to examine the predictive ability of the TPB model on the behavior of female adolescents. We focus here on girls because less is known about the context and attitudes related to girls’ use of force in relationships, and therefore we explore girls’ attitudes and behavior in greater depth. This study also expands previous research by examining a population of a different age and by including youth in both abusive and non-abusive relationships. It is expected that the findings may have implications for the prevention of violence among girls who have not used force in a relationship as well as preventing future violence among those who have.

**Method**

The sample was drawn from a high school in southeastern Michigan with approximately 526 students, primarily from lower to middle-class families. Self-addressed stamped envelopes and permission slips describing the purpose and goals of this study and requesting the parent’s permission for the adolescent to participate in the study were mailed to the adolescents’ parent’s homes and distributed to the students in the school. Students who returned a permission slip signed by the parent, either by mail to the university or by delivery to the school by the adolescent, were eligible to participate in the study. Participating adolescents received US$5. The response rate for the study was 42.6%, possibly due to the failure of students to give the form to the parent or disinterest on the part of the parents.

Surveys were administered to 224 male and female students who returned consent forms from their parents. Within this school, 65% of the students were “Title 1 Participants” who scored below average in reading and math. In addition, 65% of the students received free or reduced-price lunch, indicating relatively low socioeconomic status.

To focus on the issues specific to young women who use violence, the sample for the present study excludes the male participants and includes only the 102 girls who completed the survey. Over one third of the girl participants were in the 9th grade ($n = 39$), with the remaining equally distributed in 10th through 12th grades ($n = 21, 19, \text{ and } 22$, respectively). Of the participants, 91.2% had been or were currently in a dating relationship. The majority reported being either African American ($n = 51, 50.5\%$) or White ($n = 45, 44.1\%$). Five students identified as other races (3 Chicana/Latina and 2 Native American) and one declined to state a racial identification. The median reported education for both mothers and fathers was a high school diploma or GED. Thirty-two percent of the sample received free or reduced-cost lunch ($n = 33$), a proxy for low socioeconomic status. African American students were significantly more likely to receive free lunch ($43\%, n = 22$) than other students, $\chi^2(1) = 5.128, p = .024$.

**Measures**

*Theory of planned behavior variables.* The dependent variable for the study is behavioral intention. Because intention is difficult to measure in the context of dating violence,
expectation that one would use force in the next year was measured as a proxy for intention, as suggested by Ajzen (1988) and Tolman et al. (1996). Expectation was measured in one item which asked, “What are the chances that you would use physical violence against a partner in the next year? (0 = no chance, 10 = certain).

Perceived social acceptability was measured as the product of one’s perception of others’ attitudes about the acceptability of dating violence, and the importance of the opinion of that person, using the Normative Beliefs Scale (Tolman et al., 1996). The scale included both the individual’s perceptions of whether others would approve or disapprove of violent behavior and her motivation to comply with those beliefs. See Table 1 for specific items. The scale measured the degree to which the subject believed that others supported her use of violence. It consists of seven items measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly approve to strongly disapprove (α = .91). For each item, respondents were also asked to what degree the opinions of that person would influence their behavior. Responses were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from not at all important to very important (α = .75). When the items were multiplied, lower scores indicated greater perceived social acceptability.

Attitudes toward violent behavior were measured using a two-part scale developed by Harrell (1991). This scale measured the perceived consequences of violent behavior against one’s partner, such as going to jail or losing self respect (α = .76). For each of the 9 items, subjects were asked to rate the likelihood of the consequence occurring and how good or bad the outcome would be (α = .81). Each scale was measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Higher numbers indicate greater perceived consequences for the participant.

A Perceived Behavioral Control index used by Tolman et al. (1996), as derived from Harrell (1991), was used to measure the level to which respondents believe they are able to control their behavior under given circumstances. This concept differs from behavioral intention in that it measures self-control instead of the expectation of what they will do. For example, one may feel that they would be able to control their behavior, scoring high on

Table 1. Perceived Social Acceptability of Dating Violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approval of violence</th>
<th>Importance of approval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>5.44 (1.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>5.75 (1.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>5.95 (1.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>6.01 (1.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyfriend/girlfriend</td>
<td>6.18 (1.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious leaders</td>
<td>6.34 (1.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>6.42 (1.29)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 1 = strongly approve, 7 = strongly disapprove.
b. 1 = not at all important, 7 = very important.
Perceived Behavioral Control, yet simultaneously know that they will not make that choice, scoring low on Behavioral Intention. The measure consists of 11 items and asks to what degree the respondent feels confident in her ability to refrain from using force. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from not at all confident to very confident ($\alpha = .91$).

**Prior use of force.** To determine if the model explains behavior for both those who have never used force and those who have, the history of dating violence among respondents was also considered in the analysis. Use of force and experience as a victim were measured using a modified version of the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). A 10-item, modified version of the CTS2 was used to assess participants’ worst experience with dating violence perpetration to select items most appropriate for an adolescent sample. Items from the physical assault and sexual coercion subscales were selected from the five CTS2 subscales. Straus et al.’s (1996) theoretical distinctions between mild and severe violence were utilized to create two scales for dating violence perpetration: mild violence (grabbed, pushed, threw, or threatened to throw something, slapped) and severe violence (kicked, choked, punched, beaten up, being forced to engage in sexual activity, or being threatened with or harmed by a knife or a gun). The conceptually based distinction between mild and severe violence has been supported by factor analyses (Gelles, 1991; Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994; Straus et al., 1996). In addition, participants were asked several contextual questions about the violent incidents in the relationship. This included measures of initiation of violence, situational context, and motivations for the use of force.

**Findings**

**Descriptive Statistics**

Fifty-nine percent of girls reported committing some nonsevere violence ($n = 60$) and 28% ($n = 28$) reported using severe violence in a relationship. Only one female student reported perpetrating sexual violence against a partner. No significant differences were found in terms of grade or SES on mild violence. African American girls (69%, $n = 35$) reported significantly more nonsevere violence than non-African American girls (48%, $n = 24$), $\chi^2(1) = 4.422$, $p = .035$. No significant differences on severe violence were found for grade, SES, or race.

Victimization and perpetration of dating violence were highly correlated. Nonsevere victimization correlated significantly with nonsevere perpetration ($r = .513$, $p = .000$) and severe victimization was correlated with severe perpetration ($r = .509$, $p = .000$). Of those who reported using violence in their relationships, only 32% ($n = 20$) reported no dating violence victimization. However, even among those who reported no dating violence victimization, 40% reported using physical force to protect themselves at least some of the time. In the worst reported incidents of dating violence, 53% of girls reported that their partner was violent first and 22% reported both partners were violent. No significant differences were found for race, SES, or grade on self-defense or initiation.
Most participants reported that they would be unlikely to perpetrate violence in the future. On a scale from 0 to 10 with 0 meaning *no chance at all* and 10 meaning *certain I will*, the mean participant response was 1.40 ($SD = 2.285$). Eighty-one percent of girls ($n = 82$) reported they would be unlikely to use violence in the future (indicated by scores below three). Those who had previously perpetrated violence were significantly more likely to report expecting to use violence in the future than those who had not, $t(99) = 2.892, p = .005$. However, both groups reported they did not expect to use violence in the future ($M = 1.89, SD = 2.329$ and $M = .58, SD = 1.981$, respectively). Those who had previously used severe violence reported the highest likelihood of future violence ($M = 2.34, SD = 2.703$). No significant differences were found for grade, race, or SES on expected future use of violence.

In measuring the Theory of Planned Behavior components, most girls believed that others would disapprove if they were violent against a dating partner, measured by the subjective norms scale. On a scale from 1 to 7 in which 1 = *strongly approve* and 7 = *strongly disapprove*, most girls believed others would disapprove ($M = 5.95, SD = 1.37$). The mean scores of 77% of respondents indicated that others would slightly disapprove, disapprove, or strongly disapprove (see Table 1). Girls reported that police would be the least approving ($M = 6.42, SD = 1.29$). Girls also reported that approval of significant people in their lives was important to them. On a scale from 1 to 7 in which 1 = *not at all important* and 7 = *extremely important*, girls identified that approval of others was important ($M = 5.39, SD = 1.25$). Students were most concerned about the approval of their mothers ($M = 6.23, SD = 1.58$).

The responses on the two scales (others’ approval of violence and importance of others’ approval) were multiplied to create the perceived social acceptability scale, reflecting the perceived approval and salience of that approval, with a possible range between 1 and 49. The mean for the subjective norm scale was 32.90 ($SD = 11.20$), and this was the indicator used in subsequent regressions to determine whether social norms were a significant deterrent for expectation of future use of violence. Perceived social acceptability did not differ by race, grade, or SES. (see Table 2).

The attitudes toward behavior scale measured perceived consequences for violent behavior. Given a list of possible consequences of their use of violence, respondents rated the likelihood of receiving that consequence (1 = *very unlikely* and 7 = *very likely*). The total scale score reflected moderate likelihood of consequences ($M = 3.39, SD = 1.32$).
Table 3. Attitude Toward Behavior for Perpetrating Dating Violence

“How likely is it that you would use violence if . . .”a “How good or bad would it be if each of the following things happened . . .”b

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible consequences of violent behavior</th>
<th>Likelihood of consequence</th>
<th>Negativity of consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>Rated likely (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner fights back</td>
<td>3.16 (2.21)</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported to police</td>
<td>2.55 (2.03)</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends find out</td>
<td>4.51 (2.33)</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family finds out</td>
<td>3.48 (2.24)</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner stops arguing</td>
<td>3.73 (2.24)</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends put you down</td>
<td>2.63 (2.19)</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner breaks up</td>
<td>3.66 (2.33)</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose self-respect</td>
<td>2.68 (2.28)</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get rid of anger</td>
<td>4.17 (2.28)</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 1 = very unlikely, 7 = very likely; percentage includes those rated as likely (5-7).
b. 1 = very good, 7 = very bad; percentage includes those rated as bad (5-7).

Using the same items, respondents were asked to rate how good or bad the consequence would be (1 = extremely good and 7 = extremely bad). Consequences were rated as moderately negative (M = 4.73, SD = 1.29). “I would lose self respect” was rated as the worst possible consequence (M = 5.91, SD = 1.95), but relatively unlikely to occur (M = 2.68, SD = 2.28). The two scales (likelihood of consequences and negativity of consequences) were multiplied, resulting in a 49-point scale, with higher numbers indicating more likely and more negative consequences. Girls reported relatively low levels of meaningful consequences that would result from their use of violence (M = 15.94, SD = 9.41; see Table 3).

Girls felt moderately confident in their ability to control violent behavior in the situations given. Measured on a scale from 1 to 7 in which 1 = not at all confident and 7 = extremely confident, the mean score was 4.72 (SD = 1.63; see Table 4). Girls reported they were least confident when they were drinking or using drugs (M = 4.04, SD = 2.47). Ninth-grade students reported significantly less behavioral control than 12th-grade students, F(97) = 4.896, p = .003. No significant differences were found for race or SES on perceived behavioral control.

Explaining Expectation of Violence with the Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) variables were entered into a regression model to explain the girls’ perceived likelihood of perpetrating violence in the future. The planned behavior model significantly explained expectation of future use of violence, F(84) = 4.911,
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However, only perceived social acceptability was significant ($p = .008$) when controlling for attitudes toward behavior and perceived behavioral control. Examining the model separately by race, the TPB model significantly explained expectations of future violence among both African American ($p = .048$) and Euro-American students ($p = .001$). When added to the TPB model, race did not significantly contribute ($p = .624$), indicating no significant racial differences.

Previous use of violence and perceived expectation of future violence were significantly correlated. The correlation was significant for both nonsevere ($r = .259, p = .009$) and severe ($r = .265, p = .007$) violence. Those who had used any severe or sexual violence reported having significantly less control of their use of violence, $t(97) = 3.337, p = .001$, than those who had only used mild forms. However, no significant differences were found in subjective norms or attitudes toward behavior between those with some history of violence and those with none.

The regression models were examined separately for each of the perpetration groups to examine patterns of relationships. The model was significant only among those who had never perpetrated violence, $F(31) = 4.186, p = .014$. The model did not significantly explain expectations of future violence among those who had used nonsevere violence only, $F(53) = 2.129, p = .108$, or severe and sexual violence only, $F(25) = .220, p = .881$.

When previous use of violence was entered into the TBP regression model, $F(85) = 4.994, p = .001$, previous use of violence significantly contributed to the model ($t = 2.04, p = .045$). In the expanded model, perceived social acceptability ($p = .013$) remained the only significant predictor of the likelihood of future violence from the planned behavior model (see Table 5).

### Table 4. Perceived Behavioral Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situational Factors</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Rated confident (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partner does things to irritate you</td>
<td>4.60 (2.14)</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are drinking or using drugs</td>
<td>4.04 (2.47)</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner complaining a lot</td>
<td>4.81 (2.21)</td>
<td>56.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You don’t get respect</td>
<td>4.72 (2.23)</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner is stubborn</td>
<td>4.94 (2.19)</td>
<td>60.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner spends too much money</td>
<td>4.86 (2.32)</td>
<td>58.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends or family criticize</td>
<td>4.50 (2.29)</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You want sex but partner doesn’t</td>
<td>5.24 (2.42)</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner starts yelling at you</td>
<td>4.57 (2.18)</td>
<td>51.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You feel jealous</td>
<td>4.86 (2.21)</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner tries to break up with you</td>
<td>4.90 (2.38)</td>
<td>62.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 1 = not at all confident, 7 = extremely confident; percentage includes those reporting feeling confident (5-7).
The Theory of Planned Behavior model was found to partially explain behavioral intentions to use violence among girls. Among the three component beliefs, only perceived acceptability of violence was found to be related to expectations of future use of violence. The importance of social acceptability is not surprising given the importance of “fitting in” for girls of this age, and previous findings that girls are more likely to use violence if their friends do (Foshee et al., 2001). Social pressure from peers and family members has been associated with the encouragement or prevention of a wide range of behaviors, including delinquency, eating disorders, and sexual behavior (Hovell et al., 1998; Lieberman, Gauvin, Bukowski, & White, 2001; Pleydon & Schner, 2001; Smith & Welchans, 2000). Purdie and Downey (2000) found that sensitivity to rejection and need for social acceptance were important predictors of relationship behaviors among adolescent girls. In the sample used for the current study, perceived social acceptability appears to be a deterrent against future violence because respondents perceived that others who were significant to them disapproved of violence.

However, attitudes toward behavior, in terms of perceptions of consequences and perceived behavioral control, were not related to behavioral intention in the regression analysis. Girls identified few meaningful consequences for violent behavior in terms of the likelihood and negativity of the consequences. In addition, beliefs about consequences were not

### Table 5. Relating TPB to Expectancy of Future Violence Among Previous Perpetrators of Violence and Nonperpetrators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>All respondents</th>
<th>Severe and sexual violence</th>
<th>Nonsevere violence</th>
<th>Never used violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of model</td>
<td>.003**</td>
<td>.881</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>.014*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized coefficients</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward behavior</td>
<td>$-0.72$</td>
<td>$-0.18$</td>
<td>$-0.09$</td>
<td>$-0.12$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived social acceptability</td>
<td>$-2.71^*$</td>
<td>$-0.06^*$</td>
<td>$-0.18$</td>
<td>$-0.52^{**}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived behavioral control</td>
<td>$-0.16$</td>
<td>$-0.01$</td>
<td>$-0.22$</td>
<td>$-0.02$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>All respondents</th>
<th>Severe and sexual violence</th>
<th>Nonsevere violence</th>
<th>Never used violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of model</td>
<td>0.001**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized coefficients</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward behavior</td>
<td>$-0.673$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived social acceptability</td>
<td>$-2.54^*$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived behavioral control</td>
<td>$-1.40$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous use of violence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$ level. ** $p < .01$ level.

### Discussion

The Theory of Planned Behavior model was found to partially explain behavioral intentions to use violence among girls. Among the three component beliefs, only perceived acceptability of violence was found to be related to expectations of future use of violence. The importance of social acceptability is not surprising given the importance of “fitting in” for girls of this age, and previous findings that girls are more likely to use violence if their friends do (Foshee et al., 2001). Social pressure from peers and family members has been associated with the encouragement or prevention of a wide range of behaviors, including delinquency, eating disorders, and sexual behavior (Hovell et al., 1998; Lieberman, Gauvin, Bukowski, & White, 2001; Pleydon & Schner, 2001; Smith & Welchans, 2000). Purdie and Downey (2000) found that sensitivity to rejection and need for social acceptance were important predictors of relationship behaviors among adolescent girls. In the sample used for the current study, perceived social acceptability appears to be a deterrent against future violence because respondents believed that others who were significant to them disapproved of violence.

However, attitudes toward behavior, in terms of perceptions of consequences and perceived behavioral control, were not related to behavioral intention in the regression analysis. Girls identified few meaningful consequences for violent behavior in terms of the likelihood and negativity of the consequences. In addition, beliefs about consequences were not
significantly related to behavioral intention, indicating that overall girls were not very concerned about the possible consequences of violence. However, as no relationship between attitudes about consequences and expectation of future violence was found in the regression analysis, the lack of consequences also may not be likely to encourage future violence.

Although the model was significantly related to behavioral intention among those who had never perpetrated violence, it was not significantly related for those with a history of violence. This indicates that perceived attitudes of others may serve as a deterrent for those who have not used violence but may have little impact on those who do, possibly because of neutralizing techniques (Matza, 1964) in which the individual rationalizes the behavior known to be unacceptable. Therefore, the model provides little information on how to prevent violence among those who have already used it one or more times. This might be explained by the low reported expectation of future perpetration among those who have previously used force. These low reported expectations could be the result of dishonesty in responding to the question or caused by the perception that the use of force in the past would not be repeated.

The context in which girls use force in relationships may also affect the relationship between TPB and perpetration. Research indicates that females often use violence in self-defense or retaliation to respond to ongoing violence and emotional abuse from their partner (Black & Weisz, 2004; Makepeace, 1986; Miller & White, 2003). This context of self-defense or retaliation may influence the perceived acceptability of the behavior as well as the anticipation of possible consequences. Likely, those using force in response to abuse by a partner may believe others would find their behavior justified. Further research examining these areas might provide information on how motivations affect the relationship between TPB and dating violence.

The finding that TPB was related to behavioral expectation only among those who have not already used violence may indicate that those who have used violence may begin to perceive the behavior differently at the time they use violence or shortly after. Drift theory describes the ways in which individuals find rationalizations and justifications for doing things they would normally think are unacceptable (Matza, 1964). Although girls may believe that violence in relationships is wrong in general, they may simultaneously feel personally justified and socially supported in their use of retaliatory force (Black & Weisz, 2004). Foshee et al. (2001) found that social norms were not a significant predictor of future violence by girls. These findings may indicate that girls may be able to rationalize that their use of force is not serious, therefore allowing those that have used violence to find a rationale for violating social norms.

In addition, the variables used in this study to construct the TPB model did not measure the attitudes and beliefs related to choosing not to use force in a relationship where a girl is being abused. Should a girl choose not to fight back or protect herself with force, there may be other consequences, such as fear of injury, shame of feeling dominated, or others encouraging her to “stand up for yourself” (Smith, 2003). Young women may feel they have no other choice when their partner becomes aggressive. Perhaps the model would be more explanatory if the measure was expanded to include the rewards and consequences of using force as well as the rewards and consequences of choosing to behave nonviolently.


Limitations of the Study

Due to the cross-sectional design, the study was not able to examine the degree to which attitudes and behavioral intention affect actual future behavior. Instead, it was possible only to examine the relationship of the TPB variables to prior behavior and current behavioral intention. Also because of the design it was not possible to ascertain a causal direction between behavior and attitudes. It is possible that past use of violence influences one’s attitudes toward the behavior, social acceptability, and behavioral control.

It is also possible that the likelihood of future violence question is not sufficient to measure whether an adolescent girl will use violence in the future. Similar to the findings of Tolman et al. (1996), it is possible that the participants underestimated their likelihood of using violence in the future. It may be that a scale or other measure would be better able to measure this concept.

The sample also limits generalizability as respondents were from a relatively small high school in one geographic area. The sample was limited further by the response rate for the survey. It is possible that although the sample was representative in terms of demographic characteristics, the response rate may have been systematically biased in terms of dating characteristics and history of violence.

Conclusions

The relationship of the TPB components to behavioral expectation among girls with no history of using violence indicates that the model may have important implications in primary prevention. Decreasing social acceptance of violence among peers, school personnel, and families may be a promising method for preventing girls’ use of violence. Studies have indicated that creating an environment that is intolerant of any form of violence or abuse shows promise in decreasing levels of violence (Hazler, Miller, Carney, & Green, 2001; Smith et al., 2004; Smith & Welchans, 2000).

Students identified that many of the consequences of perpetrating violence could be bad. Yet they rated most consequences as unlikely. Changing the students’ perceptions about the likelihood of consequences rated as negative (such as disapproving reactions from family and friends) may be a deterrent. Deterrence theory indicates that many perpetrators do not recognize the consequences of their behaviors (Silberman, 1965). Perhaps highly visible campaigns to address dating violence, such as zero-tolerance policies in schools or teaching students how to address and confront dating violence in ways that hold the perpetrator responsible, could increase the perception that violence has consequences.

Because the model was only significant among those with no prior perpetration, the findings indicate that early intervention is critical in the prevention of dating violence. Prior research has highlighted the importance of early intervention in developing healthy dating behaviors (James, West, Deters, & Armijo, 2000). Therefore, initiating prevention programs before youth begin dating may be the most effective means of preventing violence in relationships.
Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

References


**Bios**

**Poco D. Kernsmith**, MSW, PhD is an associate professor in the School of Social Work at Wayne State University. Her primary research area is gender differences in family, relationship and sexual violence. This research includes policy and practice approaches to prevention and intervention. Her current projects include the role of technology abuse and coercion in teen dating relationships and policy and practice related to re-entry of low risk sex offenders.

**Richard M. Tolman**, PhD is a Professor at the University of Michigan, School of Social Work. Dr. Tolman’s work focuses on the effectiveness of interventions designed to change violent and abusive behavior, and the impact of violence on the physical, psychological and economic well-being of victims. His current projects include research on prevention of abuse during pregnancy, positive fatherhood and involvement of men and boys as allies to end men’s violence against women. He is currently co-Director of the Global Research Program on Mobilizing Men for Violence Prevention, a collaborative project between the University of Michigan and the University of Minnesota.