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Ghosts from the Past: Associations Between Adversity and College Women's Perceptions of Risk in Potential Dating Partners

DISSERTATION

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for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Social Ecology

by

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DEDICATION

I will always have hope that we can live in a world that is free from violence against women.

This dissertation is dedicated to the survivors who have profoundly impacted my life, as well as the advocates, counselors, and activists who work tirelessly to seek justice and support survivors. May this research play a role in advancing the ongoing efforts to create a safer and more compassionate world for all.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Ghosts from the Past: Associations Between Adversity and College Women's Perceptions of Risk in Potential Dating Partners

by

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Professor Jessica Borelli, Chair

Intimate partner violence (IPV) poses a significant risk for women, particularly during their college years. Women who have previously experienced adversity (in the form of child maltreatment, IPV, or attachment insecurity) are at greater risk revictimization in the form of IPV, yet the reasons why this occurs are poorly understood. In this series of three studies, a person perception paradigm was used to explore how women perceive propensity for aggression and IPV perpetration risk in unknown men after viewing their de-identified dating profiles. Study 1 (N = 500) examined the role of personal history factors (IPV victimization history, child maltreatment exposure, attachment orientation) on women's perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk. Findings revealed that women reporting higher levels of IPV victimization and childhood maltreatment were more likely to rate men higher in aggression and IPV perpetration risk, as well as more accurately rate men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk level. In terms of attachment orientation, women reporting higher anxiety generally rated men higher in aggression, while women reporting higher avoidance demonstrated reduced accuracy in perceptions of aggression. Study 2 (N = 196) focused on the confidence women had in their judgments and the factors driving their perceptions of men's aggression and IPV perpetration

risk level. Despite confidence not being predictive of women's general ratings or accuracy, a thematic analysis revealed that women often used cues like emotional expression and attitude, as well as societal stereotypes and signs of traditional gender roles to assess aggression and IPV risk. In fact, these themes were positively correlated with women's general aggression ratings, such that women who identified more negative stereotypes or biases in the men, and who disliked how men expressed their emotions and characterized their personality, tended to rate men as more aggressive. Finally, Study 3 (N = 341) delved into the role of psychological processes—hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance—in shaping women's perceptions of men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk. Hypervigilance was significantly correlated with higher ratings and greater accuracy in perceiving aggression and IPV risk, even after controlling for trauma history. Romantic interest moderated the association between experiential avoidance and perceived aggression/IPV risk; such that women with higher experiential avoidance rated men as more aggressive/higher in IPV perpetration risk, but only when romantic interest was low. Importantly, across all three studies, women college students were able to consistently differentiate between men reporting low, moderate, and high levels of aggression, as well as between men reporting low and high IPV perpetration history after viewing their dating profiles. These findings highlight the need for tailored interventions and educational programs to help women better assess risk and promote safety in online dating contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV), a pattern of abusive behaviors encompassing physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression (including coercive tactics) by a current or former intimate partner,[1] is a public health crisis and human rights issue that affects approximately 10 million individuals in the United States each year (Breiding et al., 2015). The risk for IPV victimization is greatest among women between the ages of 18 to 24 years (Smith et al., 2018), a time when many enter college. Recent reports reveal that between 20 and 50% of female students will experience IPV during their college years (Scherer et al., 2016), an extremely concerning rate given that history of relationship abuse is associated with significant health, economic, and social challenges for victims (Breiding et al., 2015), as well as acts as a prominent risk factor for victimization by future partners (Kuijpers et al., 2012).

A topic of ongoing concern for clinicians and researchers alike is the tendency for survivors of IPV to form new romantic relationships with individuals who further victimize them (Capaldi et al., 2012), often despite their intentions to the contrary (Valdez et al., 2013). Known as the "cycle of violence," individuals who have experienced abuse in a previous relationship are 3 times more likely to be revictimized by a new partner (Ørke et al., 2018), with approximately 30 to 50% of IPV survivors reporting victimization by multiple romantic partners across their lifetime (Kuijpers et al., 2012; Ørke et al., 2018). IPV revictimization is theorized to occur through a number of intersecting pathways. Trauma-related symptoms from past abuse, for instance, may lead individuals to seek out dangerous situations or miss potential warning signs

[1] An intimate partner is a person with whom one shares a close personal relationship with, marked by emotional intimacy, frequent communication, and ongoing physical and/or sexual intimacy. Additionally, the individuals in this relationship often identify as a couple and have a deep understanding of each other's lives (Breiding et al., 2015).

signifying increased likelihood of abuse (Capaldi et al., 2012; Cattaneo & Goodman, 2005). Likewise, psychological processes associated with posttraumatic stress symptomatology (PTSS: e.g., hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) can disrupt how a person perceives others (Jungilligens et al., 2020; Tursi et al., 2022), potentially increasing their risk for victimization. Finally, insecure attachment style may lead individuals to engage with partners who reinforce negative beliefs about themselves or their worthiness of love (Dutton & White, 2012; Velotti et al., 2018). The heightened risk for revictimization highlights the need to understand the mechanisms associated with risk perception, or a person's ability to assess the likelihood of threat in a given situation (Slovic et al., 1982). This is particularly important in interpersonal relationships as accuracy in identifying risk from an intimate partner may lead to less victimization (Harding & Helweg-Larson, 2009), as well as a more informed understanding of what healthy relationship dynamics look like (Kuijpers et al., 2012).

Empirical research reveals that people tend to seek out partners they are romantically interested in, who are demographically similar to them, and who have similar attitudes, values, and personalities, while avoiding partners who are dissimilar and those who deviate from expected relationship norms (Miller, 2012). Deviations from one's expectations, often colloquially referred to as "red flags," can include violations of judgments on what is appropriate in romantic settings (e.g., being physically violent) or violations of one's personal preferences, which include both identifiable preferences (e.g., an unfavorable trait) and unidentifiable preferences (e.g., not getting the right feeling). "Red flag" behaviors, which are more commonly detected by women and lead to stronger negative emotional reactions in women (Jonason et al., 2020), can also include normalized and accepted behaviors, such as expressing jealousy

(Christopher et al., 2014). These warning signs may prelude abuse (Christopher et al., 2014) but go undetected.

Few studies, however, have examined people's ability to accurately identify such risks of abuse in others. Of those that have, the majority focus on accuracy of perceptions of risk within one's current partner. For instance, survivors of IPV can positively identify the threat of revictimization by their current romantic partner (Bennett Cattaneo & Goodman, 2003; Weisz et al., 2000), often picking up on behavioral cues and noticeable signs of tension (Bell et al., 2008; Bennett Cattaneo et al., 2007; Gondolf & Heckert, 2003). Similarly, women, more so than men, are able to identify risk for infidelity in their partners from observing their behavior and routines (Ein-Dor et al., 2015). In contrast, although people are generally accurate in their detection of their romantic partner's thoughts and feelings (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; LaBuda et al., 2020), they are less accurate in identifying hostile emotions (Overall et al., 2015) and destructive tendencies in romantic partners (Venaglia & Lemay, 2019), suggesting that negative traits may be less identifiable or less attended to.

While these studies highlight the role of behavioral observations, as well as how knowledge of a person you are observing can influence accuracy within known persons (Overall et al., 2015; Venaglia & Lemay, 2019), they fail to provide insight regarding how people perceive risk in *unknown* individuals. Understanding how risk perception plays out in the initial stage of partner selection is important because once a person with a history of IPV is involved in a relationship, it may be harder for them to extract themselves (Cravens et al., 2015). Further, there are aspects of meeting a person for the first time that make it unique – people must rely on their judgments in different ways than they do when they have known someone for a long time. For example, people with a history of abuse may demonstrate some level of hypervigilance (i.e.,

elevated arousal that results in constantly assessing one's surroundings for potential threats) in interpersonal interactions (Dalgleish et al., 2001), however, the cues/signals they attend to in these interactions will likely differ depending on how well they know the person they are interacting with—suggesting that being able to assess risk may be challenging for individuals when observing or meeting a person for the first time, as there are many different factors to attend to.

This highlights a significant gap in the literature and our understanding of how IPV victimization and revictimization by a new partner are related to risk perception, particularly during the partner selection stage. The process of detecting and responding to perceptions of risk is likely dynamic, unfolding over time in the context of a relationship, which many different opportunities for people to identify and respond to risk. However, the partner selection stage is arguably one of the most important of these moments, for it is a moment when a person decides to let a person into their life. If risk or red flags are identified at this juncture, it may be easier to set limits on the person's access to the self, as compared to later in the relationship, when the person may be more entrenched in aspects of the self's life (e.g., shared friendships, shared interests, etc.). These factors make understanding risk perception during this relationship selection phase an important task.

When contemplating risk perception in the context of partner selection, several questions come to mind. For instance, are people able to accurately detect risk for aggression (i.e., hostile attitudes directed at another person; Buss & Perry, 1992) or IPV perpetration risk (i.e., risk of harm from an intimate partner) upon their first encounter with a potential dating partner? Can they detect these characteristics from online interactions? Does their confidence in these perceptions affect their evaluations? And are people equally skilled at detecting propensity for

aggression and IPV perpetration, or does this vary as a function of personal history factors, such as their own interactions with aggression and violence, as well as their own experiences being cared for? Finally, do psychological processes associated with posttraumatic symptomatology impact their skill at detecting risk in this context? These are a few of the questions this dissertation sought to answer.

To examine these important questions, I utilized a framework from personality psychology (the person perception methodology; Gosling et al., 2002) that has previously provided valuable insight with regard to the information individuals glean from first impressions, as well as the extent to which individual differences among perceivers affects the accuracy of their impressions (Borelli et al., 2019). I chose to capitalize on this paradigm to investigate whether college women, who are at heightened risk for IPV victimization (Breiding et al., 2015), can reliably detect men's propensity for aggression or IPV perpetration risk in romantic relationships after viewing their de-identified online dating profiles, as well as whether their personal history factors, confidence in their judgements, and psychological processes were associated with these tendencies.

Accuracy in Person Perception

An important metric within person perception research involves assessing the degree of accuracy displayed in naïve observers' views of their target's (the person they are evaluating) traits, as well as the factors that enhance and limit their accuracy. One common way to operationalize observer accuracy in person perception research is to use self-other agreement (Bernieri et al., 1994; Borelli et al., 2019; Borkenau et al., 2009; Starzyk et al., 2006), which refers to the degree of matching between the naïve observer and the observees' perceptions of the observees' traits (e.g., naïve observers' perceptions of a woman's ongoing attachment to a

current partner compared to that woman's self-perceptions of their ongoing attachment to a current partner) and then computed through the use of discrepancy scores. Discrepancy scores are calculated using the difference between the two ratings to determine whether the observer overestimated or underestimated their rating of the unknown person (Bernieri et al., 1994; Cohen et al., 2013). The accuracy of naïve observers' ratings are thought to be influenced by various factors, including contextual factors, which can include the quality and quantity of the information presented to them, the visibility of traits, and the characteristics of the individual being observed (Biesanz et al., 2007; Funder, 2018; Funder et al., 1995). In terms of dating and risk management, overestimating traits in potential partners is more valuable than the possible risks from underestimating them.

The following sections provide an overview of the preliminary findings from my pilot study of this paradigm (i.e., examining female college students' perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk in men after viewing men's de-identified dating profile) and why additional research is needed in this area. I then explain how I chose to extend on this pilot study by further investigating specific personal history factors, including IPV victimization, child maltreatment (CM) exposure, and attachment orientation, as well as how they relate to women's ability to accurately identify men with a propensity for aggression/IPV perpetration (Study 1). I then explain how women's level of confidence in their judgments of these men may impact their perceptions of potential dating partners, thereby affecting their ability to identify risk, as well as highlight the need to understand what women are drawing on when making these judgments (Study 2). Finally, I discuss how psychological processes related to posttraumatic stress symptomatology (PTSS), including hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance,

may affect perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk in potential dating partners, as well as how romantic interest may moderate these associations (Study 3).

Preliminary Work

The person perception methodology is a robust experimental paradigm derived from personality psychology (Gosling et al., 2002).) that involves examining the mechanisms by which naïve observers (individuals who have received no training in person perception) form impressions of others based on limited information (Gosling et al., 2002). The premise of this paradigm is that people can detect information about unknown others through exposure to minimal amounts of information, provided these sources of information provide valuable insight into the individual's characteristics. Drawing on a Brunswikian lens (1956), this methodology emphasizes the connection between objective behaviors and actions exhibited by one person to the emotions and cognitions perceived by others. Specifically, this paradigm posits that naïve observers are able to detect individual characteristics and differences in others by examining the *behavioral residue* of these qualities; for instance, a dirty office could indicate a lack of conscientiousness about a person. A naive observer who perceives this dirty office could then form an impression of the occupant of the office as a person who is not conscientious or inconsiderate. This detection process is theorized to operate outside of a person's conscious awareness yet influence consciously accessible perceptions of others (Gosling et al., 2002). In theory, we are constantly in a state of forming perceptions of others based on the behavioral residue they leave behind – we build up mental models of people based on the information we glean from these percepts. Indeed, past research has revealed that naive observers can form reliable impressions of other people's internal states and personality traits based on limited information, including the content of an individual's social media posts (Linkov et al., 2014), the

appearance of an office or bedroom (Gosling et al., 2002), and how one speaks about their romantic partners (Borelli et al., 2018; 2019).

In romantic relationships people often inadvertently act as naive observers— relying on the immediate judgments they render about another person's values, state of mind, and intentions as a way to determine if they are romantically interested in the person or not. Although few studies have utilized the person perception methodology when studying romantic relationships, the literature suggests that naïve observers can accurately assess participants' strength of attachment (Borelli et al., 2018), which refers to the emotional ties people form throughout their lives to specific people from whom one seeks safety and support from (Bowlby, 1973). Interestingly, accuracy in these ratings of attachment strength was *not* associated with the naive observer's own attachment orientation---although greater attachment avoidance was associated with *less confidence* in one's ratings (Borelli et al., 2019). This suggests that attachment history, and personal history factors in general, may influence a person's perception and interpretation of behavioral residue, however, additional research is needed to extend this finding**.**

In my pilot study of this paradigm, the study procedures involved unknown male targets (N = 9) creating de-identified dating profiles and reporting on their aggression and IPV perpetration history. Female naïve observers (i.e., lay individuals, N = 453 college students) were then asked to evaluate these profiles and rate the men on a number of traits, including propensity for aggression/IPV perpetration risk—relying on what they gleaned from the profiles to form their opinion, while also reporting on their own romantic relationship history and demographics. Using the male targets' own ratings as the index scores, female observers were able to accurately discriminate risk between unknown male target's aggression level at high, medium, and low levels but only able to discriminate risk between unknown men's IPV perpetration risk at high

and low levels (Russo & Borelli, 2023). These promising findings suggest that propensity for aggression, at least as self-reported by the male targets, may be fairly detectable even from online dating profiles, whereas propensity for IPV perpetration may be more difficult to detect at lower levels. After completing this study, I concluded that additional research is needed to identify what specific profile characteristics are indicative of aggression and IPV perpetration risk, as well as what observer characteristics affect this risk perception process. Accomplishing this goal necessitated recruiting more men participants (targets) to create more profiles that could be used in subsequent studies, including a study focused on elucidating the aspects of the profiles that are used in percept-formation.

Accordingly, a secondary aim of this pilot study was to explore whether IPV victimization history and/or attachment orientation predicted female observer's ratings of men's aggression/IPV perpetration risk level after viewing their dating profiles. In contrast to our hypothesis, our results revealed that IPV victimization history was not associated with any observer ratings – females who reported more IPV victimization did not rate profiles as being more or less aggressive or more or less at risk of IPV perpetration. Likewise, females reporting more IPV victimization did not over- or underestimate aggression or IPV perpetration risk relative to females reporting less IPV victimization history (Russo & Borelli, 2023). These non-significant results, while unexpected, may be due to some survivors having blunted sensitivity to targets' threatening or abusive characteristics while others have heightened sensitivity to the same cues, resulting in no association between IPV and women's ratings of aggression and IPV perpetration risk. For instance, some people with PTSS exhibit dissociation (i.e., a disconnection or separation between a person's thoughts, feelings, and experiences that can result in feelings of detachment, numbness, or a loss of reality; Carlson et al., 2012) or experiential avoidance (i.e.,

the tendency to avoid distressing stimuli as a way to cope and protect oneself from the difficulties the stressor presents; Zamir et al., 2018), which can lead to an inability, whether consciously or unconsciously, to recognize early signs of danger. Alternatively, survivors who exhibit symptoms of hypervigilance (Hebenstreit et al., 2009), may be hyper-attuned to potential warning signs and threats of danger, resulting in people being overly sensitive to potential risk and unable to feel physically or emotionally safe. Ultimately, each of these pathways may have contributed to the non-significant results and call for additional research examining how these trauma-related psychological processes may affect women's perceptions of unknown men's propensity for aggression and IPV perpetration risk.

In contrast to the non-significant results with IPV victimization history, females' attachment orientation was associated with women's magnitude and accuracy in predicting men's aggression. Specifically, females higher in attachment avoidance and lower in attachment anxiety perceived men to be less aggressive, whereas females higher in attachment anxiety and lower in attachment avoidance were more likely to accurately overestimate men's level of aggression.

When it came to predicting men's IPV perpetration risk, however, neither IPV victimization history nor attachment orientation predicted female observers' rating, suggesting that IPV perpetration risk may be more challenging to perceive among unknown individuals, particularly from a dating profile. Ultimately, these exploratory findings highlight the need for further examination of how personal history factors relate to women's perceptions of unknown men's IPV perpetration risk. For instance, CM exposure, which refers to a range of child maltreatment experiences, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect during childhood (Legano et al., 2009), has been shown to have a distinct impact on a person's

emotion recognition and regulation processes (Pollak et al., 2000; Powers et al., 2015), which can impact how a person perceives others. Specifically, individuals who have experienced CM may exhibit deficits in recognizing and regulating negative emotions (Dvir et al., 2014; Pollak & Sinha, 2005), leading to a tendency to perceive others as more hostile or aggressive (Margolin & Gordis, 2004). Examining the differences between the impacts of CM exposure and IPV victimization on perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk is important because it highlights the significance of addressing types of trauma separately. Furthermore, while there may be some overlap in the impacts of these experiences, these are fundamentally different experiences, and as such, require different approaches to treatment and prevention. By investigating these questions, this dissertation aims to contribute to the field's understanding of how individuals interact with new people and potential dating partners, as well as how their initial evaluations of others may influence these interactions.

Personal History as a Predictor of Partner Selection, Studied Through Person Perception

Intimate Partner Violence Victimization

Although our knowledge regarding perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk is limited, it stands to reason that individual differences in personal characteristics impact accuracy in the perception of others' characteristics. Put simply, the way individuals perceive others' attributes may be influenced by their own unique characteristics, including their personal history (Hehman et al., 2017). IPV victimization history, as previously discussed, is thought to influence naïve observers' perceptions of unknown individual's propensity for aggression and IPV perpetration risk by affecting how a person identifies, perceives, and responds to signs of danger or threat in others. Individuals with a history of IPV victimization report more distorted and harmful relationship views, including rationalization and minimization of abuse (Cravens et al.,

2015), as well as demonstrate a desensitization to inappropriate relationship signals (e.g., controlling behaviors) that may otherwise appear problematic for someone with no history of relationship abuse (Valdez et al., 2013). These altered expectations may lead survivors of IPV to miss (or misassign) warning signs of abuse/danger that could impair their ability to accurately identify risk of threat in potential romantic partners. Survivors may also be less likely to respond or react to signs of threat due to the normalization of violence in their lives and the belief that such violence and danger exists in all contexts (Cravens et al., 2015). This type of reasoning may lead a person to ignore lesser signs of threat, such as tone or disposition, and only respond to high levels of danger, such as physical aggression, resulting in an underestimation of potential risk in dating scenarios. This may partially explain why individuals who have previously experienced IPV victimization are at a heightened risk for revictimization by a new partner (Kuijpers et al., 2012) and underscores the need for additional research to examine the direct effect of IPV victimization history on perceptions of risk in potential dating partners.

Additionally, people who have experienced IPV may develop psychopathological symptoms at full-blown or subclinical levels that can result in them processing social information differently, thereby affecting perceptions of others. For instance, some people develop PTSS and experience a profile of symptoms that involves more experiential avoidance or dissociation whereas others exhibit a profile that involves more hypervigilance (Andrewes & Jenkins, 2019). Experiential avoidance and dissociation can prevent victims of abuse from detecting warning signs of abuse by making them miss the signs as they are presented (Zamir et al., 2018a). In contrast, hypervigilance could make victims hyper-attuned to potential warning signs. Ultimately, each of these pathways may lead to a failure to discriminate true risk, resulting in lower accuracy (in both directions, under- and over-estimating) in naive observers'

perceptions of unknown others' aggression and IPV perpetration risk potential. Past research on the influence of IPV victimization on perceptions of unknown others is limited to my pilot study, wherein victimization was not associated with rating tendencies or accuracy (Russo & Borelli, 2023), however, by parsing the variance between different psychological processes associated with PTSS we may reveal how trauma and interpersonal victimization affects perceptions of unknown others. Moreover, by examining both the direct effects of IPV victimization history on perceptions of men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk level (study 1), as well as the influence of various PTSS symptoms on these perceptions (study 3), I aim to gain illuminate the ways in which past experiences of trauma may influence an individual's attitudes and behaviors related to partner selection and risk perception in unknown men.

Child Maltreatment Exposure

Child maltreatment (CM) exposure, which refers to a range of CM experiences, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect during childhood (Legano et al., 2009), may also significantly impact how an individual judge's others (Capaldo & Perrella, 2018). Social cognitive theory (Dubow et al., 2009) suggests that one's perceptions and beliefs about the world are shaped by their early experiences, including exposure to abuse or trauma. For instance, Fraiberg and colleagues (1975) used the metaphor of "ghosts in the nursery" to explain how parents, by unconsciously reenacting episodes of helplessness and fear from their own early relationships with their caregivers, perpetuate the cycle of child abuse across generations. When a child is exposed to abuse, they may develop distorted beliefs and perceptions about others that are influenced by their traumatic experiences (Dubow et al., 2009). For instance, a child who has been physically abused by a parent may come to believe that all adults are violent and cannot be trusted. This belief may generalize to other people in their

environment, such as strangers or friends, and lead to difficulty forming positive relationships or trusting others (Valle & Silovsky, 2002). Past research has revealed that children with a history of abuse are more likely to interpret neutral or ambiguous social cues as hostile or aggressive (Pollak, et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2016), as well as perceive others as more abusive or harmful (Capaldo & Perrella, 2018). These perceptions may be due to the fact that individuals who have been abused have had negative experiences with adults and caregivers, leading them to view others with suspicion and mistrust (Pollak et al., 2000). These distortions, however, may not be accurate or reliable in moments of actual danger (Kendall-Tackett, 2002), resulting in a diminished ability for survivors of CM to identify true risk.

Furthermore, individuals exposed to CM may have learned that violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflicts or assert power and control over others (Valle & Silovsky, 2002). This may impact a person's ability to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy behaviors in partners (Ardizzi et al., 2015), leading them to enter into abusive relationships or misinterpret warning signs of abuse (Li et al., 2019). CM exposure may also contribute to a child's development of a negative self-concept wherein they internalize the abuse as being their fault or proof of their failure, leading them to conclude that they deserve such "punishment" or that they are unable to stop it (Myers et al., 2002). Such feelings may hinder a person's confidence in being able to stand up for themselves or remove themselves from potentially dangerous situations (Capaldo & Perrella, 2018), as well as distort what a person views as acceptable or unacceptable in relationships (Myers et al., 2002). For instance, adults exposed to CM tend to have lower self-esteem (Kendall-Tackett, 2002) and therefore may be more likely to accept abusive behavior from their partners due to negative beliefs about their self-worth. Taken together, it reasons that individuals with CM exposure history may be unable to discriminate true risk, resulting in a

general overestimation of risk, and therefore, lower accuracy (under-estimating) in naive observers' perceptions of unknown others' aggression and IPV perpetration risk level. Investigating these associations and how CM exposure influences college women's perception of potential romantic partners can contribute to the literature's understanding of why childhood abuse increases risk for IPV victimization across the lifespan (Capaldi et al., 2012; Li et al., 2019), as well as has implications for intervention and prevention measures. For example, if we know that individuals who have experienced CM are less accurate in identifying aggression or IPV perpetration risk in a romantic relationship, we can develop educational programs aimed at promoting healthy relationship norms and addressing the underlying trauma that may contribute to these perceptions.

Attachment Orientation

Attachment is also thought to have a significant influence on how observers perceive others (Borelli et al., 2018, 2019; Feeney et al., 1994; Overall et al., 2015; Simpson et al., 1999). Attachment theory purports that, in early relationships, individuals form perceptions of the other person as either a source of support or instability based on their responsiveness during times of distress (Bowlby, 1973). These expectations then inform which emotions and cognitions a person utilizes as they navigate all close relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) and are referred to as an individual's *attachment orientation* (Bowlby, 1973; Waters et al., 2009). Individual differences in attachment orientation, characterized by low to high levels of anxiety and low to high levels of avoidance (with low levels of both indicative of security), is informed by one's attachment history (Hazen & Shaver, 1987), and is reflective of a person's beliefs and expectations about themselves and those around them (Hazen & Shaver, 1987). People with more secure orientations tend to have a positive view of themselves and others, a

willingness to rely on others for support, and the ability to form healthy and stable relationships (Moore & Leung, 2002), while people higher in attachment anxiety are characterized by a negative view of themselves, a fear of rejection, and a preoccupation with the availability and responsiveness of their attachment figures (Brennan et al., 1998; Moore & Leung, 2002). Comparatively, those higher in attachment avoidance tend to have negative views of others, a fear of interpersonal dependence, and prefer a lack of emotional closeness in relationships (Moore & Leung, 2002). Attachment insecurity can arise as a consequence of abuse or independently as a result of inconsistent or inadequate (but non-abusive) caregiving during childhood (Doyle & Cicchetti, 2017). In either case, individuals with attachment insecurity may struggle with forming and maintaining healthy relationships, experience difficulty with trust and intimacy, and exhibit behaviors such as detachment or suspiciousness in relationships (Moore & Leung, 2002).

These orientations not only inform how an individual interacts with others, but also act as an internal model from which people interpret attachment-relevant information and content (Borelli et al., 2019). This includes the perceptions people have when they interact with new people, illustrating its particular relevance for person perception. For instance, people may project their own attachment orientation onto those they do not know (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013), leading to more insecure individuals interpreting unknown people's behavior as similarly insecure in an attempt to make sense of their behaviors. In terms of perceiving risk, this may lead a more anxiously attached person to perceive others' behaviors as threatening or potentially harmful, even in situations where there is little objective evidence to support this perception (Schachner et al., 2005; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Anxious attachment may also lead individuals to be more sensitive to social cues and nonverbal communication, making them more

attuned to potential signs of danger or discomfort in social situations (Schachner et al., 2005). Alternatively, an avoidantly attached person may fail to attend to stimuli that evokes attachment-related thoughts and feelings (Tucker & Anders, 1999), such as romantic language or calls for connection, due to a discomfort with intimacy and closeness. This can lead them to perceive strangers as less threatening or dangerous than they actually are (Russo & Borelli, 2023; Schachner et al., 2005).

Past research on the association of attachment orientation with perceptions of *unknown* individuals is limited to two studies and the findings thus far are mixed. Borelli and colleagues (2019), for example, failed to find a significant association between naive observer's attachment and their perception of unknown others' attachment to their former partner after reading their relationship narratives, while our pilot study (Russo & Borelli, 2023) found that attachment orientation predicted the magnitude of participants' ratings of male aggression after viewing unknown men's de-identified dating profiles: Specifically, females higher in attachment avoidance and lower in attachment anxiety perceived males to be less aggressive. Additionally, participants' attachment orientation was associated with their accuracy of identifying aggression, such that females higher in attachment anxiety and lower in avoidance were found to overestimate males' aggression. These significant findings align with person perception research of known targets, which has consistently found associations between attachment orientation and observer accuracy (Borelli et al., 2016; Feeney et al., 1994; Overall et al., 2015), however, additional research is needed to elucidate whether attachment orientation is associated with observer accuracy of rating *unknown* individuals, as well as how attachment orientation affects observers' general rating tendencies of unknown men's propensity for aggression or IPV perpetration risk. Such information has relevance for romantic relationship research as it has the

potential to provide vital insight into how initial perceptions of others influence interpersonal interactions.

The Role of Confidence in One's Perceptions of Others

The level of confidence an observer has in their ratings of a person's traits may also play a critical role in detecting risk for aggression and IPV perpetration in potential dating partners. Within the realm of person perception research, confidence refers to the degree to which naive observers trust their perceptions of the person's attributes they are observing (Swann & Gill, 1997). While past research has found that confidence is not associated with accuracy (Swann & Gill, 1997; Waggoner et al., 2009), observer confidence may influence behavior because the more confident one is in their judgments then the more likely they may be to act as if their judgements are true. In other words, observer confidence may predict if and when thoughts turn into action (Pieters & Verplanken, 1995; Rahney et al., 2015). Let's consider the role of confidence in influencing woman's partner choice in the presence of perceived risk. In one scenario, an observer who lacks confidence in their perception of a potential dating partner may be more likely to ignore warning signs of danger or rationalize risk, potentially putting themselves in harm's way. On the other hand, an observer who is highly confident in their perception of a potential dating partner as aggressive may be more likely to take precautions to protect themselves and avoid future interactions with that person. In fact, greater confidence in one's perceptions is associated with more competent behavior (Fry et al., 2015). Thus, confidence in one's perceptions of potential romantic partners is important to consider, as it may have substantial ramifications for the choices people make in interpersonal relationships.

Personal characteristics of the observer, as well as characteristics of the target, can also influence observer confidence (Swann & Grill, 1997; Waggoner et al., 2009). For instance,

greater familiarity with a target (Swann & Gill, 1997) and reduced control over the way in which information is received about a target (Waggoner et al., 2009) is associated with higher confidence in observers' perceptions of a target. In other words, having more familiarity with a person, as well as being presented with information about a person through indirect channels, such as gossip or rumors, may increase one's confidence in relying on their subjective experience to inform their perceptions of a person. Moreover, the observer's attachment orientation can impact their confidence, as people who report higher levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance also report more uncertainty in their perceptions of others' traits (Borelli et al., 2019; Niehuis et al., 2016). This may be due to anxiously and avoidantly attached individuals experiencing more uncertainty in their perceptions of others' traits due to heightened sensitivity to potential rejection or abandonment cues that may distort their confidence in their perceptions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Schachner et al., 2005). Individuals with high attachment anxiety, for example, may interpret ambiguous cues from others as signs of rejection (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013), which can lead to uncertainty in their perceptions of a person's traits. Similarly, individuals with high attachment avoidance may distance themselves emotionally from others and avoid intimacy (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013), thereby increasing the level of uncertainty in their perceptions of others.

Examining how observer confidence is related to observers' ratings of unknown men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk level is paramount to our efforts in preventing IPV. By investigating the underlying psychological mechanisms that drive these perceptions, we can develop targeted interventions that address the root causes of biased judgments and improve overall societal attitudes towards IPV victimization. No study, however, has examined these relationships. In this dissertation, I argued that lower confidence in one's perceptions of

unknown men would be associated with over-estimating aggression and IPV perpetration risk level, as well as reduced accuracy in identifying aggression and IPV perpetration risk. This is theorized because lower confidence may lead observers to rely more on stereotypes and heuristics rather than carefully evaluating specific behavioral cues, which could result in exaggerated perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk. Additionally, reduced confidence may hinder observers' ability to discern subtle differences in behavior or contextual factors that could mitigate risk, leading to less accurate risk assessments overall.

PTSS as a Predictor of Person Perception: A Focus on Specific Psychological Processes

Psychological processes may also impact accuracy and rating trends, as the way individuals perceive others' attributes can be influenced by underlying mental mechanisms that give rise to specific behaviors and/or thoughts (Kruglanski, 1989). Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), for instance, refers to a mental health disorder that can develop after witnessing or experiencing a traumatic event (e.g., interpersonal violence, natural disaster, severe accident, combat) and is estimated to affect between 6 to 9% of the general population (Kessler et al., 2005; Stein et al., 1997). PTSD is characterized by the presence of distinct psychological responses, including hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance, that are utilized by survivors to cope in the aftermath of trauma (Dutton et al., 2006). Hypervigilance refers to a state of heightened arousal and sensitivity to potential threats (Dalgleish et al., 2001), whereas dissociation involves a detachment from oneself and surroundings, often as a way of coping with overwhelming emotions or memories (Carlson et al., 2009). Experiential avoidance, on the other hand, involves an attempt to avoid or suppress uncomfortable emotions and experiences associated with the trauma (Zamir et al., 2018a). These psychological processes may serve as adaptive responses to trauma exposure in the short term, but in the long term, they can contribute

to the development and maintenance of PTSS symptoms (Orcutt et al., 2020), as well as impact how a person perceives the world and those around them (Jungilligens et al., 2020; Tursi et al., 2022).

Hypervigilance

Hypervigilance, a state of heightened alertness and sensitivity to potential threats that may arise in the environment (Dalgleish et al., 2001), is a common psychological response by individuals who have gone through traumatic events. According to the cognitive model of PTSD (Hayes et al., 2012), hypervigilance is a result of an individual's efforts to constantly monitor their environment for potential danger to prevent further harm. This results in a heightened level of arousal and stress that leads a person to view their environment as threatening even in seemingly safe situations (Dunmore et al., 2001). Hypervigilance is thought to result in a general sense of unease, a feeling of constantly being on guard, and a tendency to avoid situations or activities that may trigger memories of the traumatic event (Dutton et al., 2006). This hyperarousal state can lead to an overestimation of threat and misperceptions of social information (Dunmore et al., 2001). For instance, individuals reporting hypervigilance, relative to controls, are more likely to identify ambiguous signals as threatening (Hayes et al., 2012), identify negative emotions in others more quickly (Leber et al., 2009), and allocate more processing resources towards socially threatening stimuli (Swick & Ashley, 2017). This overestimation of threat can be debilitating and negatively impact an individual's daily functioning and ability to form close relationships (Dalgleish et al., 2001).

Evidence suggests that individuals reporting more hypervigilance will demonstrate a general tendency to overestimate perceptions of unknown men’s aggression and IPV perpetration risk potential, as well as decreased accuracy in observers’ perceptions of unknown men’s

aggression and IPV risk perpetration potential. Understanding the relationship between hypervigilance and observers' tendencies in rating unknown men's propensity for aggression or IPV perpetration risk is paramount to our understanding of how trauma-related responses impact threat perception in low-stakes interpersonal situations (i.e., non-face-to-face interaction) that have high potential for future threat (i.e., dating situations). Unpacking this relationship has the potential to inform intervention avenues that address revictimization and retraumatization risk.

Dissociation

Another psychological process that may affect accuracy and rating trends is dissociation. Dissociation is a psychological process that involves a disconnection or separation between a person's thoughts, feelings, and experiences that can result in feelings of detachment, numbness, or a loss of reality (Carlson et al., 2012). Dissociation can be a normal response to a traumatic event, as well as associated with several mental health disorders, including PTSD (Nijenhuis & Van der Hart, 2011). Dissociation can range from normal dissociative states such as daydreaming to more maladaptive responses, including detachment or numbing, to the most severe case of dissociative identity disorder (Spitzer et al., 2006). These symptoms of dissociation are thought to be a short-term adaptive response that serves to assist individuals in handling traumatic experiences by keeping trauma-related thoughts, feelings, and circumstances outside of one's conscious awareness (Carlson et al., 2012; Nijenhuis & Van der Hart, 2011). Ultimately, however, in the long-run, dissociation is thought to be maladaptive: it is associated with impairments in cognitive and emotional functioning, including attention, memory, and decision-making difficulties (Fonagy & Target, 1995), and persistent dissociation can interfere with one's ability to process and integrate traumatic experiences, leading to chronic psychological distress and increased risk for mental health disorders (Dillon et al., 2014). A

review of the relationship between trauma and dissociation reveals that although most dissociative symptoms increase following trauma exposure and then decline over time, for some people they can persist for years to come (Carlson et al., 2012). Survivors of IPV and CM, for example, report more dissociative symptoms compared to individuals with no such history (Webermann et al., 2014). These types of trauma are thought to have a profound and prolonged impact on symptomatology due to their repeated nature (Webermann et al., 2014). In other words, exposure to frequent episodes of trauma or violence can cause the brain to repeatedly activate the dissociative response as a way to cope with the ongoing stress and trauma. Over time, this repeated dissociation can lead to more frequent and longer episodes of dissociation, which can impair a person's sense of reality and how they perceive others (Tschoeke et al., 2019).

One of the key ways in which dissociation impacts perceptions of unknown individuals is thought to be through a reduction in social awareness (Aderibigbe et al., 2001; Jungilligens et al., 2020). When an individual is dissociated, they are less likely to attend to social cues, such as facial expressions or body language, that might normally assist a person in forming an impression. This depersonalization can lead to an altered perception of others, as they may feel that they are observing interactions or social information from a disconnected perspective, rather than fully experiencing them (Aderibigbe et al., 2001). This can make it difficult for a person to form meaningful relationships, as a dissociating individual may misinterpret another person's actions in a way that makes them seem unpredictable or untrustworthy due to feelings of anxiety, confusion, or a misunderstanding (Jungilligens et al., 2020; Spitzer et al., 2006). In fact, a growing body of literature has identified a link between dissociation and several perceptual changes (Özdemir et al., 2015), including decreased attention to social information (Spitzer et al.,

2006), increased avoidance of social cues (Oathes & Ray, 2009), and reduced sensitivity to emotional stimuli (Carlson et al., 2012). Additionally, individuals who experience dissociation are less accurate in identifying nonverbal cues from others (Passardi et al., 2018), and identifying the emotions of others (Lebois et al., 2020), demonstrating a relationship between dissociation and accurate perceptions of others. No study, however, has examined how dissociation is related to perceptions of unknown men's potential threat level, although it reasons that an impaired view of others and decreased contextual awareness may negatively impact a person's ability to accurately identify risk or respond to any signs of danger. Furthermore, as dissociation can interfere with an individual's ability to remember and recall past experiences, including instances of aggression or violence, it may be difficult for individuals to recognize patterns of behavior that may be indicative of risk (Carlson et al., 2012). This, along with a tendency to avoid social information from others (Aderibigbe et al., 2001), may lead dissociating individuals to underestimate risk in unknown men, thereby resulting in lower accuracy in their perceptions of unknown men's aggression and IPV risk perpetration potential. Understanding this relationship has the potential to inform prevention and intervention efforts to reduce risk of harm to those experiencing dissociation, specifically risk for IPV revictimization. By identifying the factors that contribute to underestimation of risk, we can develop targeted interventions aimed at improving risk assessment skills, enhancing social cue interpretation, and increasing self-awareness, all of which may reduce risk for revictimization.

Experiential Avoidance

Finally, experiential avoidance, or the act of avoiding, escaping, or suppressing thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, and behaviors that are associated with psychological distress (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007), may also impact perceptions of judgments of unknown individuals'

aggression and IPV perpetration risk level. Thought to arise as a psychological response to difficult experiences or emotions associated with trauma, experiential avoidance includes both an unwillingness to interact with aversive private experiences (e.g., bodily sensations, emotions, thoughts, memories, and behavioral predispositions), and a tendency to alter the aversive experiences or the events that elicit them (Hayes et al., 1996). This can include thought suppression, or the tendency to suppress unwanted thoughts by distracting oneself and worrying (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007), emotional suppression, which involves the avoidance of affective responses (including physiological, subjective, and behavioral responses), and avoidance coping, or the tendency to use behavioral strategies to avoid stressful situations (e.g., turning to work or other activities; Penley et al., 2002). While these strategies may provide temporary relief, they often lead to more long-term problems by interfering with the processing of memories and emotions, as well as perpetuating negative patterns of behavior (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007)----all of which can lead to a paradoxical increase in the occurrence of unwanted thoughts and avoidant actions (Clark et al., 1991; Gold & Wegner, 1995), even in contexts where less complex strategies would be more effective (Hayes & Wilson, 2003).

When it comes to perceptions of others, past research suggests that individuals who use experiential avoidance as a coping strategy are more likely to engage in negative social comparison (Mahaffey et al. 2013), and to perceive others as more critical and threatening (Tursi et al., 2022). This is thought to occur because individuals high in experiential avoidance often feel that they cannot control or manage their internal experiences, leading to feelings of insecurity and vulnerability in relation to others (Tursi et al., 2022). Hayes and colleagues (2004), for example, found that participants who reported higher levels of experiential avoidance also reported higher levels of perceived social threat and were more likely to engage in

aggressive behavior in response to social evaluation. These findings indicate that experiential avoidance may impair perceptions of unknown others and their level of threat, although to my knowledge no study has examined experiential avoidance in relation to the threat posed by unknown men. Experiential avoidance has also been shown to hinder the regulation of negative emotions (Tull & Roemer, 2007) and reduce psychological flexibility (Kashdan et al., 2006), making it more difficult for individuals to adjust their perceptions of others in response to changing situations. As explained by Kashdan and colleagues (2008) "prolonged, inflexible non-acceptance of emotional responses can consume attention, vitality and other resources, leaving fewer resources to cope and thrive in everyday life" (p. 437). In other words, the cognitive toll experiential avoidance requires may make it so individuals are so preoccupied with avoiding distressing thoughts and feelings that they become less responsive to the actual environmental cues of the situation, thereby leading to less accuracy in their perceptions of others. These findings suggest that experiential avoidance may impair observers from discriminating true risk, resulting in a tendency to underestimate risk and lower accuracy in observers' perceptions of unknown others' aggression and IPV risk perpetration potential.

The Moderating Role of Romantic Interest in Relation to Psychological Processes and Observer Ratings

When it comes to understanding the relationship between psychological processes (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) and naive observer ratings of unknown men's propensity for aggression and IPV perpetration risk it is also important to consider how naive observers' level of romantic interest in the men they observe may modulate these associations. Romantic interest, a desire for closeness or intimacy with another person, is a powerful motivator that has been shown to significantly impact how individuals regulate their

emotions in social contexts (Fisher et al., 2002; Meier et al., 2023), as well as influence how individuals perceive others (Fisher et al., 2002). In particular, studies have found that romantically interested individuals tend to amplify positive emotions and suppress negative emotions in the presence of someone they are interested in (Meier et al., 2023), as well as perceive the person they are interested in more positively, regardless of their actual traits (Chang, 2019; Murray & Holmes, 1997). This is thought to occur because romantic interest is associated with elevated concentrations of central dopamine in a person's brain (i.e., activation of the reward center) that leads to heightened and targeted attention towards a person of interest (Fisher et al., 2002). This attention, however, is thought to be biased as individuals who report feelings of romantic attraction tend to focus their attention on the positive qualities of the person they are interested in and overlook or falsely appraise their negative traits (Chang, 2019; Murray & Holmes, 1997). Survivors of interpersonal IPV victimization, who commonly experience hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance (Iverson et al., 2013), for example, often report that attraction and love towards their partner affects how they perceive and interpret the violence in their relationships (Heron et al., 2022; Pocock et al., 2022), with more feelings of love often leading to increased rationalization of the abuse and excuses on behalf of their partner (Lelaurain et al., 2021).

Understanding whether romantic interest moderates the relationship between hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance and perceptions of risk is critical as it has the potential to advance our knowledge of the complex interplay between individual differences and romantic attraction and how it relates to victimization. Previous research has highlighted the relevance of these psychological processes in shaping romantic experiences and perceptions of others (Frowijn et al., 2022; Hayes et al., 2012; Özdemir et al., 2015; Tursi et al.,

2022), but less is known about how they may vary across individuals with different levels of romantic interest. For instance, the literature on romantic interest and hypervigilance, while sparse, suggests that oxytocin (i.e., a neurotransmitter associated with love) may act as a "safety signal" that reduces hypervigilance in individuals with borderline personality disorder (Servan et al., 2018). This is theorized to occur because experiencing romantic interest in another person may decrease negative emotions associated with hypervigilance, perhaps due to a buffering effect wherein the effects of romantic interest (e.g., excitement, heightened interest, euphoria, exhilaration; Fisher et al., 2010) override the negative emotions associated with heightened arousal (Servan et al., 2018), thereby impacting how a person perceives others. Although no study has examined this paradigm, past research reveals that individuals in early stages of romantic love show increased activity in brain regions associated with positive emotions and reduced activity in regions associated with negative emotions when viewing pictures of their romantic partners (Bartels & Zeki, 2004), suggesting that romantic interest may interact with psychological processes to lead individuals to perceive others more positively. Additional research is needed to fully understand the relationship between romantic interest and hypervigilance, particularly in individuals with a history of trauma, and how it affects their perceptions of potential dating partners.

Dissociation and experiential avoidance have similarly rarely been examined in relation to romantic interest, with most studies instead focusing on how these processes impact established relationships (Cloitre & Rosenberg, 2016; Zamir et al., 2018b). These findings reveal that dissociation and experiential avoidance are related to more maladaptive relationship habits, including environmental unawareness and poor information processing (Cloitre & Rosenberg, 2016). However, in initial romantic interactions, romantic partner selection theories suggest that

romantic interest may override negative manifestations of dissociation and experiential avoidance (e.g., distrustfulness, distress, or fear of rejection) by motivating individuals to focus on the positive aspects of a potential partner to avoid missed romantic opportunities (Buss, 2000; Joel et al., 2019; Kindelberger & Tsao, 2014). This may be because individuals in the initial stages of a romantic relationship are often more motivated to seek out positive experiences and avoid negative ones (Fisher et al., 2002), and may therefore be less likely to engage in dissociation or experiential avoidance when romantically interested in someone. However, it is important to note that while romantic interest may initially override these negative processes, individuals must address and work through these processes in order to build and maintain healthy, satisfying relationships in the long run. By exploring the role of romantic interest in mitigating the negative effects of these processes, this dissertation aimed to extend our understanding of the complexities of romantic attraction and partner selection. Specifically, I examine how hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance experiences predict perceptions of risk in unknown men, as well as how level of romantic interest in the men may moderate these relationships. As a note, I could also be predicting romantic interest based on these same psychological processes, however that is outside the scope of the current project.

I argue that romantic interest will interact with hypervigilance, dissociation and experiential avoidance to buffer against negative manifestations of these processes in social situations to make individuals more motivated and willing to engage in interpersonal interactions with individuals they are interested in (Joel et al., 2019). This motivation, in turn, will affect how individuals perceive their romantic targets. For instance, when a person feels romantically attracted to someone, they may be more likely to interpret that person's behavior in a positive light, even when there are potential threats or negative cues present (Fisher et al., 2002). Higher

levels of romantic interest may also influence one's sense of emotional closeness and intimacy with a person, counteracting feelings of disconnection or detachment associated with dissociation and experiential avoidance (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007; Nijenhuis & Van der Hart, 2011), and in turn making a person perceive potential romantic partners differently. Qualitative data from IPV survivors provide insight into this potential process, revealing that early infatuation with romantic partners affects mental health in ways that leads them to view romantic partners with 'rose-colored glasses' at the beginning of relationships (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2013). Furthermore, IPV survivors frequently share anecdotes of red-flag behaviors that were noticeable during the beginning of their relationships (e.g., being controlling) and how they ignored or "tuned them out" at the time due to strong romantic feelings (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2013). This pattern demonstrates how romantic interest may interact with hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance to decrease the level of risk a person perceives in a potential romantic partner. Discerning this relationship is critical to our understanding of romantic partner selection and how psychological processes related to PTSS affect the partner evaluation process.

Understanding whether romantic interest moderates the relationship between psychological processes and *accuracy* in perceptions of potential romantic partners is another important question and one this dissertation aimed to answer. Drawing on partner selection theories (Buss, 2000; Joel et al., 2019; Kindelberger & Tsao, 2014), I theorized that the relationship between experiences of hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance and accuracy of perceptions of others may be moderated by the presence of romantic interest. Specifically, I argue that romantic interest may have a negative interaction with these psychological processes, resulting in decreased accuracy of perceptions of potential romantic

partners' propensity for aggression or IPV perpetration (under-estimating). Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that individuals who possess a greater level of romantic interest towards a potential partner perceive them more positively (Chang, 2019; Murray & Holmes, 1997). This interest may then serve as a buffer against negative manifestations of hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance, thereby enabling individuals to engage with their romantic interest more fully and potentially altering their evaluations of that person (Joel et al., 2019). However, this may also lead individuals to reframe concerning information in a more positive light to further their relatioinship (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010). By shedding light on the factors that influence accuracy of individuals' perceptions of potential romantic partners, this model can inform the development of interventions aimed at helping individuals overcome psychological barriers to romantic engagement, as well as inform our understanding of whether individuals can accurately identify risk for aggression and IPV perpetration in potential dating partners.

As such, this dissertation aims to disentangle the relationships between personal history factors, psychological processes, rating accuracy, rating confidence, and romantic interest on perceptions of risk in potential dating partners. In Study 1, I investigate how personal history factors (IPV victimization history, child maltreatment exposure, attachment orientation) influence observers' perceptions of targets' propensity for aggression and IPV perpetration risk, both in terms of overall magnitude of their ratings and in terms of their accuracy in identifying aggressive/risky targets. Study 2 focused on identifying which aspects of the target profile draw the observer's attention when rating aggression and IPV perpetration risk, as well as whether the observer's confidence in their perceptions influenced observer rating tendencies. Finally, in Study 3 I explored whether individual differences in various psychological processes associated

with posttraumatic stress symptomatology (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) influenced observer ratings, as well as whether their romantic interest in the men in the dating profiles moderated the associations between these psychological processes and rating tendencies. Together, this information has broad relevance for our understanding of romantic partner selection and can contribute to clinical interventions and prevention efforts aimed at reducing IPV victimization and revictimization.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Pre-Study Procedures: Developing the Men's De-Identified Dating Profiles

Each study utilized men's de-identified dating profiles for female observers to rate. Eligibility for participation as a male target included being over 18 years of age, identifying as male, identifying as heterosexual, currently being in a romantic relationship or previously being in a romantic relationship, and being able to read and write in English. A total of $N = 30$ profiles were used for the three studies, with the majority of profiles ($n = 21$) being created by men in college, and the remaining profiles ($n = 9$) created by men outside of college to better reflect the dating experiences of college women. Past relationship history was required for men due to this study operationalizing IPV perpetration risk as men's level of relationship abuse perpetration history. Men who met eligibility criteria were recruited from the online social science subject pool at a 4-year research university and through social media (e.g., Instagram, Twitter) to complete an online survey and activity.

The survey included questions regarding their own experiences (e.g., aggression, trauma history) and their romantic relationship history. The activity centered on creating a de-identified (i.e., fake name, non-identifiable meme/photo) dating profile that is formatted to mirror the questions and style of popular dating sites (e.g., Tinder, Hinge). Specifically, men were asked to create their own responses to the following pre-set prompts: *About me* (e.g., "I am reserved at first but warm up quickly #dating #naughtyandnice"); *Dating me is like…* (e.g., "the best thing that's ever happened to you"); *Relationship pet peeves* (e.g., "neediness"); *Perfect first date?* (e.g., "all the first ones are bad ones, just wait"); *Typical Saturday* (e.g., "chill at home, video games, grocery shopping"); *I'll brag about you to my friend if…* (e.g., "you have a great body or simply be yourself to the best degree"); *I'll fall for you if* (e.g., "you keep looking at me when I

speak to someone else"); *I geek out over* (e.g., "movies/tv shows"); *Life goal* (e.g., "to provide financial security to my parents"); *Friends would describe me as* (e.g., "funny, intelligent, risk taker"). Men were also asked to select a picture from a list of pre-selected images from popular culture (e.g., a meme, a character from TV/Film, sports team logo, nature photo, etc.) to serve as their profile image. These procedures are selected as a way for the men to personalize the profiles and choose images that would reflect the type of person they are trying to present (e.g., a friendly and likable character to demonstrate that they are a friendly and likable guy, a tough or macho character to demonstrate that they are tough and macho), similar to how dating profiles work in real life. This image/icon selection procedure was selected to keep the profiles de-identifiable. Men were also informed that the dating profiles would be utilized to test different profile layout formats and were encouraged to answer as honestly as possible to all dating profile prompts to ensure accuracy. Finally, men reported on whether they use dating profiles in their personal life and the accuracy of the profile they created. Men's aggression was assessed using the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ; Buss & Perry, 1992), a 29-item measure that assesses various forms of aggression, including physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility (e.g., "*if I have to resort to violence to protect my rights I will*"), on a 4-point scale from 0 (*extremely uncharacteristic*) to 4 (*extremely characteristic*). The scale is scored as the sum of responses on each item across the entire scale, with higher scores reflecting strong self-reported aggression. This measure has high validity and reliability in past studies with adults (Harris, 1997). Aggression scores were later standardized as men used the BPAQ to assess aggression, while women observers used a rating scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (very) to assess aggression level, which was also standardized before comparison.

Similarly, IPV perpetration risk was assessed using the perpetration scale from the Conflict Tactics Scale 2 Short Form (CTS2S; Straus & Douglas, 2004). This self-report scale assesses history of physical abuse perpetration (e.g., "*I punched or kicked or beat-up my partner*"), psychological abuse perpetration (e.g., "*I insulted or swore or shouted or yelled at my partner*"), sexual abuse perpetration (e.g., "*I insisted on sex when my partner did not want to or insisted on sex without a condom (but did not use physical force)*"), and injury to a partner (e.g., "*my partner went to see a doctor (M.D.) or needed to see a doctor because of a fight with me*"). The recommended scoring method for this scale is to dichotomize the data as either present (coded as 1) or not present (coded as 0) and then scored continuously from 0 to 4 (Straus & Douglas, 2004). To conduct analyses, we computed mean scores for each profile's IPV perpetration rating, resulting in a total profile score for each target's level of IPV perpetration risk. As with aggression, these scores were later standardized as men used the CTS2S to assess IPV perpetration risk (0 to 4) and women observers used a rating scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (very) to assess IPV perpetration risk, before comparison.

On average, the men who created dating profiles (N = 74) reported being 22.53 years of age (SD = 3.78), with an overall mean aggression score of 57.45 (SD = 26.75), and a mean IPV perpetration score of 0.98 (SD = 1.23). In an effort to identify various levels of aggression and IPV perpetration for women participants to rate, we identified relevant profiles (based on their reported perpetration history and aggression scores) and placed them in three relevant categories on the measures of interest: low, moderate, or high aggression/IPV perpetration. N = 10 profiles met the criteria for low aggression and low IPV perpetration (operationalized as no history of abuse perpetration and low aggression scores, Mlow = 46.41, SD = 21.24), n = 10 profiles met the criteria for moderate aggression and moderate IPV perpetration (operationalized as some

abuse perpetration history [2 out of 4 forms] and moderate aggression scores, *M*mod = 76.90, *SD* = 9.22), and *n* = 10 profiles met the criteria for high aggression and high IPV perpetration (operationalized as history of all four forms of abuse perpetration–physical, emotional, sexual, and injury–and high aggression scores, *M*high = 112.50, *SD* = 14.43), resulting in a sample of 30 dating profiles. In study procedures, a subset of *n* = 9 profiles would be randomly assigned to participants from the broader total pool of 30 (3 low risk, 3 moderate risk, 3 high risk).

On average, the 30 men in the selected profiles reported a mean age of 22.85 years old (*SD* = 3.54), an overall mean aggression score of 79.73 (*SD* = 31.65), a mean IPV perpetration score of 2.00 (*SD* = 2.00) and reported having been in 3.06 total relationships (*SD* = 1.55). Most men self-described as Asian (43.3%) or Latino (30%) (with 13.3% white, 6.7% multiracial, and 6.7% African American making out the rest of the sample) and 90% of men reported a preference for dating one person at a time compared to multiple people at once. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics on men who created profiles (*N* = 74), as well as the men whose profiles were selected for the study (*n* = 30). T-tests revealed there were no significant differences between the men whose profiles were selected for the study and the larger sample of men on the number of past relationships, age, or dating style. Additionally, the men's reported race/ethnicity breakdown were similar for women participants (see Table 2), and race/ethnicity was not disclosed on the men's dating profiles.

Comparison of Women's Ratings Across Men's Profiles

Given that participants viewed only a subset of profiles (9 out of 30) in each of the 3 studies, there was a need to determine whether significant variability existed within the observers' ratings of each risk group (low, moderate, high). In other words, were there

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics of Men who Created De-Identified Profiles.

Measures	Total (*N* = 74) M (SD) / %	Targets (*n* = 30) M (SD) / %
Age	22.53 (3.78)	22.85 (3.54)
Number of Relationships	4.09 (2.15)	3.06 (1.55)
Asian	40.54%	43.33%
Latino	29.73%	30.00%
White	16.21%	13.30%
African American	4.05%	6.67%
Multi-racial	8.11%	6.67%
Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian	1.35%	0.00%
Aggression	57.45 (26.75)	79.73 (31.65)
IPV Perpetration History	0.98 (1.23)	2.00 (2.00)

Note: Aggression = men's total score of aggression assessed via the BPAQ (higher scores signify, higher self-reported aggression); IPV Perpetration History = men's self-reported perpetration history (scored continuously from 0 to 4) assessed via the CTS2.

discrepancies in the mean ratings among profiles in the same risk category in Study 1, Study 2, or Study 3? Analyses of variance revealed that across both aggression and IPV perpetration risk ratings, there were significant differences among the mean ratings within low, moderate, and high profiles in each study. However, post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's test showed that the significant differences were limited to a few specific comparisons. For instance, the mean rating for Profile L3 (low profile 3) was significantly lower compared to Profile L4 ($p = 0.01$) in Study 1, suggesting that these two profiles within the low risk category were perceived to have slightly different levels of aggression/dangerousness despite being categorized as low risk. Notably, most other comparisons within the low-risk category did not show significant differences, indicating general consistency among the majority of the profiles. Similar patterns were observed in the moderate and high risk profile groups. For example, Profile M2 (moderate profile 2) was rated significantly higher than Profile M7 ($p = 0.03$) in Study 2, yet the majority of other comparisons within this category were not significant. In study 3, Profile H6 (high profile 6) had significantly higher ratings than Profile H2 ($p = 0.02$), yet most of the other comparisons within this category did not yield significant results, indicating a relative consistency among most profiles. Out of a total of 30 profiles evaluated on aggression and IPV perpetration risk, we identified differences in 8 profiles. The differences were small in magnitude.

Overall, these findings suggest that while the majority of profiles within each risk category were rated consistently in terms of perceived aggression and IPV perpetration risk, there are outliers that contribute to differences within each group. Despite this observed variability within the risk categories, examining these categories remains valuable for several reasons. While some profiles in each category showed significant differences, focusing on the broader trends within these categories helps to create a more comprehensive understanding of

how dating profiles are perceived. This is key for gaining insight into the overall perception of risk in dating contexts. By analyzing general trends within low, moderate, and high-risk categories, we can identify common patterns that guide how we understand perceived aggression and danger. This, in turn, helps in framing broader narratives about dating behaviors and safety considerations. Additionally, each of the studies employed counterbalanced orders to present the dating profiles. Analyses revealed no significant differences in outcomes based on the order of presentation across all 3 studies.

STUDY 1 METHODS

Examining the Influence of Personal History Factors on Perceptions of Unknown Men's Aggression and IPV Perpetration Risk

Study 1 aimed to replicate and extend my pilot study (Russo & Borelli, 2023) by examining how individual personal history factors influence naive observers' perceptions of targets' propensity for aggression and IPV perpetration risk, both in terms of the magnitude of their ratings and their accuracy in identifying aggressive/risky targets. To accomplish this, I exposed a new sample of female observers (N = 500) to evaluate men's (N = 30) de-identified dating profiles and investigated whether their personal history factors (IPV victimization history, CM exposure, attachment orientation) influenced rating trends. As with my pilot study, I explored how IPV victimization history and attachment orientation predicted rating trends. Additionally, I examined the relationship between CM exposure and women's ratings of unknown men's propensity for aggression and IPV perpetration risk, aiming to elucidate whether this personal history factor may influence how individuals perceive potential romantic partners.

Hypotheses

First, I predicted that across the sample as a whole, women observers would accurately rate the profiles of high aggression men and men with high levels of IPV perpetration history as more aggressive/dangerous compared to the profiles of men with moderate or low levels of aggression (**H1a**) and IPV perpetration history (**H1b**). In other words, I predicted that women participants would be able to distinguish between men who self-report low, moderate, or high aggression/IPV perpetration history. Specifically, I predicted that women's ratings of high aggression targets would be significantly higher than those of moderate aggression targets, which would be significantly higher than those of low aggression targets. Further, I predicted that observers' ratings of high IPV perpetration risk targets would be significantly higher than those

of moderate IPV perpetration risk targets, which would be significantly higher than those of low IPV perpetration risk targets.

I then examined the associations between women participants' personal history factors (IPV victimization history, CM exposure, attachment orientation) and their rating styles. For IPV victimization history, although there were no significant findings in my pilot study, I maintain the hypothesis of a linear relationship between observer IPV victimization history and perceptions of men's aggression (H2a) and IPV perpetration risk level (H2b), such that higher IPV victimization history will be associated with rating men higher on aggression and IPV perpetration risk. This hypothesis is rooted in the premise that individuals with higher IPV victimization history may demonstrate heightened vigilance towards aggression and IPV perpetration in others, reflecting their own traumatic experiences (Cravens et al., 2015; Valdez et al., 2013), while those with lower IPV victimization history may exhibit a more nuanced understanding of these constructs. Consequently, further investigation into this linear relationship was warranted, with consideration given to the potential for curvilinear dynamics if initial analyses did not yield significant results. This approach was selected to provide a rigorous examination of the complex interplay between IPV victimization history and perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk, offering valuable insights for IPV prevention and intervention strategies.

In terms of CM exposure, drawing on past research delineating that exposure to abuse during childhood can negatively disrupt how a person perceives interpersonal information and their ability to identify healthy relationship dynamics (Pollak et al., 2000), I predicted that CM exposure would be associated with overestimating men's aggression (**H3a**) and IPV perpetration risk level (**H3b**). Lastly, drawing on my pilot study's results (Russo & Borelli, 2023), I predicted

that higher attachment anxiety would be associated with overestimating men's aggression (**H4a**) and men's IPV perpetration risk (**H4b**), while higher attachment avoidance would be associated with underestimating men's aggression (**H5a**) and IPV perpetration risk (**H5b**).

Finally, I investigated whether personal history factors (IPV victimization history, CM exposure, attachment orientation) were associated with participants' *accuracy* in rating of aggression (calculated using the men's own ratings of their aggression as a reference point) and IPV perpetration risk (calculated using the men's own abuse perpetration history as the reference point). As with above, I once again examined the associations between IPV victimization history and rating accuracy in estimating men's propensity for aggression (**H6a**) and IPV perpetration risk (**H6b**) using a linear regression model, arguing that more IPV victimization would be associated with reduced accuracy. Similarly, for CM exposure, I argue that higher CM exposure will be associated with reduced accuracy in estimating men's propensity for aggression (**H7a**) and IPV perpetration risk (**H7b**) in unknown partners. In terms of attachment orientation, drawing on my pilot study's findings, I predicted that attachment anxiety would be associated with increased accuracy in identifying unknown men's aggression (**H8a**) and IPV perpetration risk (**H8b**) level, whereas attachment avoidance would be associated with decreased accuracy in identifying unknown men's aggression (**H9a**) and IPV perpetration risk (**H9b**).

Participants

Women undergraduate students were recruited from the online social science subject pool (SONA) at UC Irvine, as well as through flyers on 4-year college campuses, to participate in a study about romantic relationships. Eligibility included being 18 years of age or older, identifying as a woman, identifying as heterosexual, currently being in a romantic relationship or previously being in a romantic relationship, and being able to read and write in English. A total

of $N = 563$ women started the study procedures. After reviewing the data, $n = 29$ participants were removed for not completing the rating activity or providing demographic data (i.e., they opened the survey and quit), and $n = 34$ participants were removed for completing the survey in under 15 minutes, indicating that they were not providing accurate data as the average time to complete the survey was 47 minutes. This is similar to the procedures in my pilot study were $n = 54$ participants were removed for the same reasons. As such, the resultant sample for analyses consisted of $N = 500$ women. On average, women participants had a mean age of 20.51 years ($SD = 2.38$), reported having been in 1.81 relationships ($SD = 0.88$), and most (98%) participants reported a preference for dating one person at a time. Similar to my pilot study, nearly half (43.8%) of participants identified themselves as Asian, followed by 28.2% as Latina, 18.4% as white, 4% as African American, 3% as multiracial, and 2.6% as Middle Eastern. Most of the sample (65%) reported not using online dating sites. See Table 2 for a breakdown of participant demographics across the four studies (i.e., 1 pilot study, 3 studies in this dissertation). As a note, a Chi-square test for independence was conducted to evaluate the differences in racial composition among participants across the four distinct studies. The Chi-square analysis yielded a $\chi^2(9) = 12.24$, with a significance level of $p = 0.213$, suggesting that the differences in racial composition across the studies were not statistically significant. The examination of the contingency table revealed relatively proportional distributions of racial groups across my pilot study and the three dissertation studies, indicating no strong evidence of unequal representation of racial categories within these studies.

Procedures

All measures and procedures were approved by the University Institutional Review Board (HS#2456). Those who met eligibility criteria and provided consent completed an online

Table 2.

Comparison of Women Participants' Demographic Information Across My Pilot Study and 3 Dissertation Studies

	Pilot Study (*N* = 453)	**Study 1** (*N* = 500)	**Study 2** (*N* = 196)	**Study 3** (*N* = 341)
	M (SD) / %	M (SD) / %	M (SD) / %	M (SD) / %
Age	21.87 (2.77)	20.51 (2.38)	21.09 (4.36)	20.74 (3.80)
Number of Relationships	3.04 (1.09)	1.81 (0.88)	1.99 (0.92)	1.75 (0.89)
Asian	49.4%	43.8%	44.4%	45.5%
Latina	29.0%	28.2%	26.0%	27.9%
White	12.0%	18.4%	15.8%	11.7%
African American	6.0%	4.0%	3.6%	1.5%
Multiracial	-	3.0%	5.6%	10.2%
Middle Eastern	2.0%	2.6%	3.6%	3.2%
Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian	0.6%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%

Note: In the pilot study participants were not able to select multiple race categories.

activity, followed by a survey about their personal experiences (e.g., IPV victimization history, CM exposure history, attachment orientation, demographics). As part of the activity, each woman observer was assigned to view 9 of the 30 de-identified dating profiles (randomized and order counterbalanced to ensure there are no order effects) and asked to rate each person's profile on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very) on various traits related to romantic relationships, including aggression and dangerousness (our term for IPV perpetration risk). Viewing and rating 9 profiles was deemed to be feasible within the pilot study (Russo & Borelli, 2023), with all study procedures lasting approximately 40 minutes.

During the activity participants were instructed to form an impression of the individual from the dating profile and then rate them accordingly on the following traits: financially responsible (distractor), romantic (distractor), lazy (distractor), funny (distractor), aggressive, extraverted (distractor), successful (distractor), attractive (distractor), and dangerous. This rating procedure—having women observers rate the unknown men on their aggression and dangerousness levels on a scale from 1 to 7—was employed due to concerns that observers would be able to identify the aims of the study if they completed the same measures on aggression and IPV perpetration (e.g., BPAQ, CTS2S) in reference to each man in each dating profile. Furthermore, it would have been too time intensive to have observers complete additional distractor surveys in an attempt to obscure the purpose of the activity. All procedures were completed online via Qualtrics.

Measures

Aggression rating. As discussed above, and in replication of our pilot study procedures, women observers were instructed to form an impression of the individual based on their de-

identified dating profile and then rate them on a number of characteristics, including aggression, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (very).

IPV perpetration risk rating. As with aggression, women observers were instructed to form an impression of the individual based on their de-identified dating profile and then rate their level of dangerousness (proxy for IPV perpetration risk) on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (very).

IPV victimization history. Women observers' IPV victimization history was assessed using the victimization scale from the CTS-2S (Straus & Douglas, 2004). This self-report scale assesses history of physical abuse victimization (e.g., "*my partner pushed, shoved, or slapped me*"), psychological abuse victimization (e.g., "*my partner insulted or swore or shouted or yelled at me*"), sexual abuse victimization (e.g., "*my partner used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make me have sex*"), and injury by a partner (e.g., "*I had a sprain, bruise, or small cut, or felt pain the next day because of a fight with my partner*"). The scoring method for this scale is to dichotomize the data as either present (coded as 1) or not present (coded as 0) and then scored continuously from 0 to 4 for each form of abuse (Straus & Douglas, 2004).

CM exposure. Women observers completed the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire - Short Form (CTQ-SF; Bernstein & Fink, 1998), a widely used retrospective screening tool for childhood maltreatment in adults that consists of 28-items measuring childhood maltreatment (total), including five subscales of five items each, i.e., Emotional Abuse, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Emotional Neglect, and Physical Neglect. All items are constructed as statements beginning with the phrase 'When I was growing up…' and scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (never true) to 5 (very often true). Total maltreatment score is summed and ranges from 5 to 25, with higher scores indicating more maltreatment.

Attachment orientation. Women observers completed the Experiences in Close Relationships—Relationship Structure Scale (ECR-RS; Fraley et al., 2011), a reliable and valid 9-item measure of adult attachment orientation as it pertains to romantic relationships (Fraley et al., 2011). Participants were asked to focus on their current/most recent committed romantic relationship. The measure uses a 7-point Likert-type scale (strongly disagree [1] to strongly agree [7]) to measure attachment avoidance (e.g., ‘‘*I prefer not to be too close to my romantic partners;*”) and anxiety (e.g., ‘‘*I worry a lot about my relationships*”). Cronbach’s alpha for anxiety was 0.81. Cronbach’s alpha for avoidance was 0.73.

Data Preparation Plan

Levels of aggression/IPV perpetration risk. To assess whether participants accurately rated more aggressive profiles and profiles of men with higher IPV perpetration as significantly more aggressive/dangerous compared to less aggressive profiles and profiles of men with less IPV perpetration history (**Hypothesis 1**), I created mean ratings for aggression and IPV perpetration by profile level of aggression/IPV perpetration history (low, moderate, high) to compare against one another using analyses of variance.

Discrepancy/accuracy score computation. In order to evaluate participant accuracy in ratings of men’s aggression and IPV perpetration risk (**Hypotheses 6 - 9**), I created directional discrepancy scores by taking the difference between each participant’s standardized rating of the man’s aggression/IPV perpetration risk level and the man’s standardized self-rating of aggression/IPV perpetration (Dimler et al., 2017). I completed this procedure for all of the profiles rated by the participants, and then computed a mean score of all these differences. Negative values signify that, on average, the participant overestimated the profile creator’s aggression/IPV perpetration risk (relative to the man’s own rating), while positive values

indicate that the participants underestimated the profile creator's aggression/IPV perpetration risk (relative to the man's own rating).

Data Analytic Plan

To test study hypotheses, I conducted analyses of variance (**Hypothesis 1**) and hierarchical linear regressions (**Hypotheses 2 - 9**) via SPSS Statistics for Macs, Version 26.0. In hierarchical linear regressions I controlled for participant age, number of relationships, and race (using dichotomized race variables), as past research has illustrated that these factors are associated with IPV victimization and may influence how participants perceive the dating profiles (Cho, 2011; Halpern et al., 2009).

Specifically, for **Hypothesis 1**, analyses of variance tests were utilized to compare level of aggression/IPV perpetration risk ratings against one another to elucidate whether observers are able to accurately identify men with high levels of self-reported aggression/IPV perpetration history as more aggressive/dangerous than men with moderate levels of aggression/IPV perpetration history, as well as whether men with moderate aggression/IPV perpetration history are rated as more aggressive/dangerous than men with low levels of aggression/IPV perpetration history. For hypotheses examining how women's personal history factors (IPV victimization history, CM exposure, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance) were related to their general rating tendencies, observers' mean aggression/IPV perpetration risk rating of the dating profiles was entered as the dependent variable of the regression and observer personal history factors were entered in the second step of the regression (**Hypotheses 2-5**). Finally, when examining women's personal history factors (IPV victimization history, CM exposure, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance) as a predictor of rating accuracy, personal history factors were entered in

the second step of the regression, while participants' mean discrepancy rating was the dependent variable (**Hypotheses 6-9**).

STUDY 1 RESULTS

Experiences of IPV victimization in this sample were similar to the national average for college women (Cho et al., 2020). Specifically, over half (51.4%; *n* = 267) of the women reported IPV victimization history (with 65.8% of participants reporting a single form of victimization, 20.6% of participants reporting two forms of abuse, 3.9% of participants reporting three forms of abuse, and 9.7% of participants reporting all four forms of abuse. The most endorsed form of IPV was psychological abuse (47.2%), followed by sexual abuse (22.2%), then physical abuse (14.7%) and finally, experiencing an injury as a result of abuse (7%). Participants who self-identified as white reported the highest percentage of IPV victimization (56.5%; *n* = 52), followed by African American women (55%; *n* = 11), Latina women (53.2%; *n* = 75), and Asian American women (54.5%; *n* = 104). Most women (77.6%; *n* = 388) also reported CM exposure, with 100% of the women reporting emotional neglect, 83% reporting physical neglect, 75% reporting emotional abuse, 62.4% reporting physical abuse, and 26.5% reporting sexual abuse. Table 3 provides descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among key study variables.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1a: *Do women participants as a whole rate highly aggressive profiles as more aggressive than moderate or low aggressive male profiles?* Analyses of variance revealed that, on average, there was a significant difference between how women rated low, moderate, and high aggression profiles [$F(2,1497) = 74.05$, $p < 0.001$]. A Tukey post hoc test revealed that the women rated the high aggression profiles as significantly more aggressive than the moderate aggression profiles ($p < 0.001$), and moderate aggression profiles as significantly more aggressive than low aggression profiles ($p < 0.001$). In other words, participants were able to

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations for Women Participants' Key Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Mean (SD)	20.51(2.38)	1.81(0.88)	0.81(1.04)	43.04(15.88)	4.27(1.15)	2.72(1.11)	2.24(1.00)	1.72(0.67)	2.28(1.00)	0.04(0.68)
Min, Max	18, 36	1.00, 5.00	0.00, 4.00	25.00, 110.00	1.00, 7.00	0.00, 6.00	0.00, 7.00	-	0.00, 7.00	-
1. Age	-									
2. Number of Relationships	**0.17****	-								
3. IPV Victimization History	0.07	**0.15****	-							
4. Child Maltreatment Exposure	0.08	**0.24****	**0.19****	-						
5. Attachment Anxiety	**-0.12****	0.07	**0.14****	**0.26****	-					
6. Attachment Avoidance	-0.06	-0.04	0.07	**0.18****	**0.22****	-				
7. General Aggression Rating	-0.06	0.08	**0.13****	**0.23****	**0.14****	**0.12****	-			
8. Aggression Accuracy[1]	0.05	**-0.09***	**-0.14****	**-0.24****	**-0.12****	**-0.13****	**-0.98****	-		
9. General IPV Perpetration Rating	-0.08	**0.13****	**0.17****	**0.26****	**0.12****	**0.11***	**0.87****	**-0.86****	-	
10. IPV Perpetration Risk Accuracy[1]	0.07	**-0.14****	**-0.16****	**-0.27****	**-0.12****	**-0.12****	**-0.85****	**0.86****	**-0.98****	-

[1]Negative values signify high accuracy

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *SD* Standard deviation; *Min* Minimum score on variable; *Max* Maximum score on variable.

accurately differentiate between men's propensity for aggression at low, moderate, and high levels after viewing their dating profile.

Hypothesis 1b: *Do women participants as a whole rate men's profiles with high IPV perpetration history as more dangerous than men's profiles with moderate and low IPV perpetration history?* Analyses of variance revealed that, on average, there was a significant difference between how women rated profiles with low, moderate, and high IPV perpetration history [$F(2,1497) = 39.29$, $p < 0.001$]. A Tukey post hoc test showed that the women rated the high IPV perpetration history profiles as significantly more dangerous than the moderate IPV perpetration history profiles ($p < 0.001$), and low IPV perpetration history profiles ($p < 0.001$); the ratings between moderate and low IPV perpetration profiles were not significantly different ($p = 0.16$). In other words, women were able to accurately differentiate between high IPV perpetration risk profiles and moderate/low profiles but were not able to distinguish between moderate and low IPV perpetration risk profiles.

Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, 5a: *Do women who report more IPV victimization, CM exposure, and higher attachment anxiety generally rate men's aggression higher, while women with higher attachment avoidance generally rate men's aggression lower?* After controlling for participant age, race, and number of relationships, $R^2 = 0.03$, $p = 0.02$, the step containing participant personal history factors (IPV victimization history, CM exposure, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance) was significantly associated with women's ratings of men's aggression, $\Delta R^2 = 0.07$, $p < 0.001$. However, only IPV victimization history ($b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = 0.048$), CM exposure ($b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < 0.001$), and attachment anxiety ($b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = 0.047$) were significantly associated with participants' ratings of men's aggression, with those reporting higher IPV victimization history, CM exposure, and attachment anxiety rating men as

more aggressive. Participants' attachment avoidance (b = 0.07, SE = 0.04, p = 0.11) was not associated with participants' ratings of men's aggression. Additionally, number of romantic relationships (b = 0.11, SE = 05, p = 0.04) and racially identifying as white (b = 0.52, SE = 0.22, p = 0.02) were associated with women generally rating men higher in aggression. See Table 4 for regressions examining participant characteristics in predicting men's aggression based on their dating profiles.

Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, 5b: *Do women who report more IPV victimization, CM exposure, and higher attachment anxiety generally rate men's IPV perpetration risk higher, while women with higher attachment avoidance generally rate men's IPV perpetration risk lower?* After controlling for participant age, race, and number of relationships, R^2 = 0.03, p = 0.01, the step containing participant personal history factors (IPV victimization history, CM exposure, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance) was significantly associated with women's ratings of men's IPV perpetration risk, ΔR^2 = 0.08, p < 0.001. However, diverging from my predictions, only IPV victimization (b = 0.12, SE = 0.04, p = 0.001) and CM exposure (b = 0.01, SE = 0.01, p < 0.001) were significantly associated with participants' ratings of men's IPV perpetration, with those reporting more IPV victimization history and CM exposure rating men as higher risk for IPV perpetration. Participants' attachment anxiety (b = 0.01, SE = 0.04, p = 0.78) and attachment avoidance (b = 0.06, SE = 0.04, p = 0.15) were not associated with participants' ratings of men's IPV perpetration risk. Additionally, age (b = -0.05, SE = 0.02, p = 0.02) and number of relationships (b = 0.17, SE = 0.05, p = 0.001) were significantly associated with women's general rating of men's IPV perpetration risk, such that younger women generally rated men lower on IPV perpetration risk, while a higher number of relationships correlated with higher

IPV perpetration risk ratings. See Table 4 for regressions examining participant characteristics in predicting men's IPV perpetration risk based on their dating profiles.

Hypotheses 6, 7, 8, 9a: *Are women who report more IPV victimization, CM exposure, and higher attachment avoidance less accurate in rating men's aggression, while women higher in attachment anxiety are more accurate in rating men's aggression?* After controlling for participant age, race, and number of relationships, $R^2 = 0.03$, $p = 0.01$, the step containing personal history factors (IPV victimization, CM exposure, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance) was significantly associated with women's ratings of men's aggression, $\Delta R^2 = 0.07$, $p < 0.001$. Aligning with my predictions, IPV victimization ($b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = 0.04$) and CM exposure ($b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < 0.001$), were associated with greater participant accuracy in rating men's aggression, while attachment avoidance ($b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = 0.049$) was associated with less accuracy by underestimating men's aggression. However, contrary to my prediction, attachment anxiety ($b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = 0.56$) was not significantly associated with accuracy. Additionally, women who had been in more romantic relationships ($b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = 0.02$) and those who racially identified as white ($b = -0.33$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = 0.02$) were more accurate with their rating of men's aggression. See Table 5 for the regression examining women's personal history factors in predicting accuracy in rating men's aggression.

Hypotheses 6, 7, 8, 9b: *Are women who report more IPV victimization, CM exposure, and higher attachment avoidance less accurate in rating men's IPV perpetration risk, while women higher in attachment anxiety are more accurate in rating men's IPV perpetration risk?* After controlling for participant age, race, and number of relationships, $R^2 = 0.04$, $p = 0.001$, the step containing the personal history factors (IPV victimization, CM exposure, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance) was significantly associated with women's ratings of men's IPV

perpetration risk, $\Delta R^2 = 0.08$, $p < 0.001$. Aligning with my predictions, IPV victimization (b = -0.07, SE = 0.03, p = 0.01) and CM exposure (b = -0.01, SE = 0.00, $p < 0.001$) were significantly associated with increased participant accuracy in rating men's aggression. Contrary to my prediction, attachment anxiety (b = 0.00, SE = 0.03, p = 0.91) and attachment avoidance (b = =0.05, SE = 0.03, p = 0.09) were not. Additionally, age (b = 0.03, SE = 0.01, p = .03) and number of romantic relationships (b = -0.12, SE = 0.04, $p < .001$) were significantly associated with women's accuracy in rating men's IPV perpetration risk, with younger women and those with fewer romantic relationships tending to provide less accurate assessments. See Table 5 for the regression examining women's personal history factors in predicting accuracy in rating men's IPV perpetration risk level.

Table 4.

Regressions Examining Women's Personal History Factors (IPV Victimization History, CM Exposure, Attachment Orientation) in Predicting Aggression and IPV Perpetration Risk Ratings.

	Aggression			IPV Perpetration Risk		
	b/ΔR^2	*SE*	95% CI	*b*/ΔR^2	*SE*	95% CI
Step 1 ΔR^2	0.03*			0.03*		
Age	-0.03	0.02	[-0.07, 0.01]	**-0.05***	0.02	[-0.08, -0.01]
Num of Rel	**0.11***	0.05	[0.00, 0.21]	**0.17****	0.05	[0.07, 0.27]
Asian	0.31	0.20	[-0.09, 0.71]	0.15	0.20	[-0.25, 0.55]
Latina	0.20	0.21	[-0.21, 0.61]	0.08	0.21	[-0.32, 0.49]
White	**0.52***	0.22	[0.10, 0.95]	0.24	0.22	[-0.19, 0.66]
African American	0.12	0.29	[-0.45, 0.70]	-0.04	0.29	[-0.61, 0.53]
Step 2 ΔR^2	0.7**			0.08**		
IPV victimization	**0.08***	0.04	[0.00, 0.17]	**0.12****	0.04	[0.03, 0.20]
CM Exposure	**0.01****	0.01	[0.01, 0.02]	**0.01****	0.01	[0.01, 0.02]
Attach Anx	**0.06***	0.04	[0.02, 0.17]	0.01	0.04	[-0.07, 0.09]
Attach Avoid	0.06	0.05	[-0.04, 0.12]	0.06	0.04	[-0.02, 0.14]

* p<.05, ** p<.01; Age = Participant age; Num of Rel = Number of romantic relationships; IPV Victimization = intimate partner violence victimization history assessed via the CTS2S (continuous variable from 0 to 4 for victimization by form of abuse); CM Exposure = child maltreatment exposure (assessed via the CTQ); Attach Anx = Participant attachment anxiety score (assessed via the ECR-RS); Attach Avoid = Participant attachment avoidance score (assessed via the ECR-RS).

Table 5.

Regressions Examining Women's Personal History Factors (IPV Victimization History, CM Exposure, Attachment Orientation) in Predicting Accuracy in their Ratings of Men's Aggression and IPV Perpetration Risk.

	Aggression Accuracy			IPV Perpetration Risk Accuracy		
	b/ΔR^2	*SE*	95% CI	*b*/ΔR^2	*SE*	95% CI
Step 1 ΔR^2	0.03*			0.04*		
Age	0.02	0.01	[-0.01, 0.04]	**0.03***	0.01	[0.00, 0.05]
Num of Rel	**-0.08***	0.03	[-0.15, -0.01]	**-0.12****	0.04	[-0.19, -0.05]
Asian	-0.18	0.13	[-0.45, 0.08]	-0.11	0.14	[-0.38, 0.16]
Latina	-0.08	0.14	[-0.36, 0.19]	-0.06	0.14	[-0.33, 0.22]
White	**-0.33***	0.14	[-0.61, -0.04]	-0.18	0.15	[-0.47, 0.11]
African American	-0.03	0.19	[-0.41, 0.35]	0.06	0.20	[-0.33, 0.45]
Step 2 ΔR^2	0.07**			0.08**		
IPV victimization	**-0.06***	0.03	[-0.11, 0.00]	**-0.07***	0.03	[-0.13, -0.02]
CM Exposure	**-0.01****	0.01	[-0.01, 0.00]	**-0.01****	0.01	[-0.01, -0.01]
Attach Anx	-0.02	0.03	[-0.07, 0.04]	-0.01	0.03	[-0.06, 0.05]
Attach Avoid	**0.05***	0.03	[-0.01, 0.09]	-0.05	0.03	[-0.10, 0.01]

* p<.05, ** p<.01; Age = Participant age; Num of Rel = Number of romantic relationships; IPV Victimization = intimate partner violence victimization history assessed via the CTS2S (continuous variable from 0 to 4 for victimization by form of abuse); CM Exposure = child maltreatment exposure (assessed via the CTQ); Attach Anx = Participant attachment anxiety score (assessed via the ECR-RS); Attach Avoid = Participant attachment avoidance score (assessed via the ECR-RS).

STUDY 1 DISCUSSION

Women college students face a heightened risk of experiencing IPV during their college years (Smith et al., 2018), with the potential for revictimization elevated throughout their lifespan (Kuijpers et al., 2012). Recognizing these heightened vulnerabilities, it becomes imperative to investigate how women navigate interactions with potential dating partners and the judgements they take into consideration. This line of inquiry not only illuminates their decision-making processes but also informs strategies aimed at preventing and addressing IPV within this demographic. Employing a rigorously controlled experimental paradigm, this large-sample study (N = 500) examined the degree to which women form accurate impressions of men's propensity for aggression or IPV perpetration risk, as well as whether personal history factors, including IPV victimization history, CM exposure, and attachment orientation, predict their rating tendencies and accuracy in these perceptions.

Women's Ability to Identify Aggression & IPV Perpetration Risk in Unknown Men

Findings revealed that, on average, college women possess a remarkable ability to discern nuanced gradations of aggression in potential dating partners, ranging from low to moderate to high levels. However, when it comes to women's proficiency in distinguishing between men's IPV perpetration risk level, they were only able to do so between high and low risk individuals. These results, which align with my pilot study (Russo & Borelli, 2023), underscore the importance of considering subtle cues beyond overt behaviors when assessing romantic partners, particularly in the realm of online dating where indicators of IPV perpetration risk may not be readily apparent. Additionally, it is important to consider how societal norms and expectations regarding gender roles and relationships may influence how women perceive and interpret potential indicators of risk. For instance, the normalization of certain behaviors within romantic

relationships, such as possessiveness or jealousy (Christopher et al., 2014), and the pressure to prioritize certain traits in romantic partners, such as masculinity or dominance (Sakaluk et al., 2014), may cloud women's judgment and lead them to overlook warning signs of IPV. These complexities highlight the importance of comprehensive education and awareness-raising initiatives to empower women to recognize and respond to potential signs of IPV perpetration risk effectively. Furthermore, interventions aimed at promoting healthy relationship dynamics should focus not only on overt behaviors but also on addressing underlying attitudes and beliefs that may contribute to the perpetuation of IPV.

Personal History Factors Predicting General Aggression & IPV Perpetration Ratings

Next, I examined whether women's personal history factors (IPV victimization history, CM exposure, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance) predicted the overall magnitude of their ratings of men's aggression/IPV perpetration risk. Regarding aggression, results revealed that IPV victimization history was significantly associated with the magnitude of women's aggression rating, such that women with more history of IPV victimization (51.4% of our sample) tended to rate men as more aggressive compared to those without such experiences. This finding diverges from my pilot study (Russo & Borelli, 2023), which failed to find a significant relationship between IPV victimization and aggression rating magnitude, however, it is consistent with theoretical frameworks. Specifically, social learning (Bandura & Walters, 1977) frameworks posit that individuals who experience IPV victimization may exhibit an elevated sensitivity towards behaviors that are indicative of aggression or violence (Valdez et al., 2013). This heightened sensitivity likely arises from the profound impact of their own traumatic experiences and sensitizes them to interpret ambiguous or subtle cues and behaviors as manifestations of aggression (Cravens et al., 2015). In other words, individuals with a history of

IPV victimization may exhibit a predisposition to view men through a lens of increased aggression, driven by the enduring effects of their trauma history. While this may seem protective, it could have the opposite effect if individuals with IPV victimization history perceive all potential dating partners as more aggressive than they actually are. This heightened sensitivity may lead to increased hypervigilance and mistrust, as individuals may interpret even minor behaviors as indicators of potential aggression and constantly be on guard for signs of danger or harm (Andrewes & Jenkins, 2019), leading to relationship difficulties. Moreover, this hypersensitivity to aggression may contribute to a cycle of re-victimization, as the tendency to perceive aggression where it may not exist can lead a person to misinterpret or overlook warning signs of abusive behavior (Andrewes & Jenkins, 2019), making them more vulnerable to entering or remaining in harmful relationships. Recognizing and addressing the impact of IPV victimization on perceptions of aggression is crucial for supporting survivors in forming and maintaining healthy, fulfilling relationships.

In addition to IPV victimization history, CM exposure emerged as another significant factor impacting women's perceptions of men's aggression, with women who reported higher CM exposure rating men as more aggressive than those reporting less CM exposure. This is theorized to occur due to the profound and lasting impact of CM experiences, which may lead individuals to develop generalized beliefs about the world and others based on their traumatic experiences. For instance, children who have experienced physical abuse may come to perceive all adults as inherently violent and untrustworthy, leading to difficulties in forming positive relationships (Valle & Silovsky, 2002). On the other hand, children who experienced neglect may develop a heightened sense of vulnerability and a lack of self-worth (Renner & Slack, 2006), which may contribute to their perception of men as more aggressive or domineering in relationships. This

tendency to perceive men as more aggressive may be a particular risk factor in the dating landscape, as individuals who hold these generalized beliefs may be more likely to overlook warning signs of abusive behavior, attributing them to typical male characteristics rather than recognizing them as potential indicators of violence or control (Sakaluk et al., 2014). This highlights the need for comprehensive education and intervention strategies aimed at challenging and reframing these ingrained perceptions. By fostering a greater awareness of the impact of CM on adult beliefs and behaviors, as well as promoting healthy relationship dynamics and red flag recognition, efforts can be made to mitigate the risk of individuals viewing all potential partners as equally aggressive.

Attachment anxiety was also significantly associated with the magnitude of women's aggression ratings, with women who reported higher attachment anxiety generally rating men as more aggressive. Consistent with my pilot study (Russo & Borelli, 2023), this finding supports the notion that individuals reporting more attachment anxiety perceive threat as more immediate and others as more threatening (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). Importantly, the implications of this association extend beyond mere perception, particularly within the context of dating and risk management, as individuals with higher attachment anxiety may be more inclined to perceive potential partners as threatening or aggressive, potentially influencing their decision-making in relationships (Schachner et al., 2005). Despite the initial appeal of heightened vigilance towards perceived threats, this tendency to view others as aggressive may ultimately lead to challenges in the long run. For instance, anxiously attached individuals may find it difficult to discern genuine signs of abuse or problematic behavior in their partners, as their heightened perception of threat may cloud their judgment. Consequently, individuals may be more prone to staying in relationships even when there are clear indicators of abuse or dysfunction because of their desire

for closeness and intimacy (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013), thereby exacerbating potential risks to their well-being. Therefore, while the immediate perception of threat associated with attachment anxiety may seem beneficial, it likely complicates decision-making processes and may increase vulnerability to harmful relationships over time.

Certain demographic features were also predictive of women's general aggression ratings, with those reporting more romantic relationships and self-identifying as white generally rating men higher on aggression. In terms of romantic relationship history, theory suggests that individuals with more romantic partners will likely encounter a wider range of behaviors and personalities, including instances of aggression, in their dating experiences (Johnson et al., 2015). This increased exposure could potentially influence their perceptions of aggression in others. However, it is important to note that the relationship between relationship history and aggression ratings may be complex and multifaceted. Factors such as the quality of past relationships, the duration of those relationships, and individual differences in perception and interpretation of aggressive behavior may also play a role. For white women, research illustrates that people tend to rely on stereotypes and preconceived notions when forming judgments about others, especially in the absence of personal information (Christopher et al., 2015; Miller, 2012). When evaluating men in the context of dating profiles, where only limited information is available, white women may inadvertently rely on these stereotypes more than other racial groups to assess perceived levels of aggression, thereby rating men higher. Future research is needed to replicate these findings and determine whether these demographic features influence the perception of aggression in unknown men.

In contrast to these significant associations, attachment avoidance was not predictive of women's magnitude in perceiving men's propensity for aggression, diverging from my pilot

study (Russo & Borelli, 2023). Perhaps attachment avoidance did not emerge as a significant predictor due to its distinct relational dynamics compared to attachment anxiety: While attachment anxiety is characterized by heightened vigilance and sensitivity to perceived threats, attachment avoidance involves a tendency to distance oneself from intimate relationships and emotional vulnerability (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). Individuals high in attachment avoidance may prioritize self-reliance and independence, which could attenuate their inclination to perceive others as inherently aggressive or threatening. Additionally, attachment avoidance may manifest in a tendency to minimize or dismiss relationship concerns, which could influence how individuals appraise potential partners' aggression risk (Schachner et al., 2005). However, the lack of predictive power for attachment avoidance in this context, and the mixed findings with my pilot study, warrants further exploration to elucidate its nuanced effects on perceptions of aggression within dating dynamics. Understanding the interplay between attachment avoidance and perceptions of aggression could provide valuable insights into how different attachment styles shape individuals' risk assessments in intimate relationships. Further research in this area is essential for developing targeted interventions that address the diverse relational needs and vulnerabilities associated with varying attachment orientations.

In terms of personal history factors influencing the magnitude of women's rating of men's IPV perpetration risk, only IPV victimization history and CM exposure, as well as younger age and more reported romantic relationships, were significantly associated with rating men higher in IPV perpetration risk. Contrary to the results from my pilot study (Russo & Borelli, 2023), which did not establish a clear link between IPV victimization history and women's perceptions of men's IPV perpetration risk, this study provides evidence that victimization history may contribute to an individual's assessment of perceived risk in others.

From a theoretical standpoint, this link is thought to stem from individuals who have experienced IPV victimization displaying increased sensitivity to potential signs of danger or violence (Cattaneo, 2007). However, this sensitivity may become overly generalized when a person extrapolates unrelated behaviors or cues as indicative of a predisposition for abusive behavior (Cattaneo, 2007). For instance, an individual whose abusive partner happened to be a baseball player may subsequently perceive all athletes to be prone to abusive behavior. This tendency poses significant challenges because it can lead to unwarranted suspicions or biases towards individuals who share certain characteristics or backgrounds, perpetuating stigma and hindering the ability to identify actual threat. Additional research is needed to delve deeper into the underlying mechanisms of why individuals with IPV victimization history may exhibit heightened sensitivity towards perceived risk. Specifically, further investigation should aim to elucidate whether this heightened sensitivity stems from adaptive survival mechanisms or cognitive biases. Exploring how contextual factors, such as the severity and duration of past IPV victimization experiences, intersect with individual differences in risk perception would provide a more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon.

Similarly, higher reported CM exposure was found to be predictive of women generally rating men higher in IPV perpetration risk. This may be due to individuals who have experienced CM carrying enduring beliefs and schemas about interpersonal relationships, including heightened perceptions of threat and danger (Renner & Slack, 2006). These perceptions may influence how they interpret and assess the behavior of potential partners, leading to an overestimation of IPV perpetration risk. Additionally, CM survivors may struggle with trust issues and difficulty forming secure attachments, which can further amplify their tendency to perceive others as threatening or aggressive (Pollak, et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2016). As a result,

individuals with a history of CM may be more inclined to interpret ambiguous or neutral behaviors as indicative of IPV perpetration, contributing to elevated risk appraisals, albeit not necessarily accurate ones. Additional research is needed to replicate this finding and further explore potential underlying mechanisms. For instance, future studies should delve into the mediating role of cognitive processes, such as attentional biases, in shaping perceptions of IPV perpetration risk among CM survivors.

Conversely, neither attachment anxiety nor avoidance were associated with women's general perceptions of men's IPV perpetration risk. This aligns with my pilot study (Russo & Borelli, 2023), and may signify that attachment orientation does not impact people's perceptions of others IPV perpetration risk, at least not in this dose or with such limited information. It is also possible that other factors, such as experiences of IPV victimization or CM, may play a more prominent role in shaping these risk appraisals, affecting the strength of these relationships. Alternatively, the absence of a significant relationship may indicate that attachment orientation operates differently in the context of perceiving IPV perpetration risk compared to other relational domains. Further research is warranted to elucidate the nuanced interplay between attachment orientation and perceptions of IPV perpetration risk, including exploring potential moderators or mediators that may influence this relationship. Understanding the complex array of factors that contribute to individuals' perceptions of IPV perpetration risk is crucial for developing targeted interventions aimed at reducing victimization.

Personal History Factors Predicting Accuracy in Aggression & IPV Perpetration Ratings

Finally, I examined whether personal history factors (IPV victimization history, CM exposure, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance) were associated with women's *accuracy* in rating men's aggression/IPV perpetration risk. This prediction was partially supported.

Specifically, for both aggression and IPV perpetration risk, higher IPV victimization history and CM exposure were associated with more accuracy, as these women were more likely to *overestimate* men's aggression/IPV perpetration risk. For attachment, however, attachment avoidance was only associated with decreased accuracy in perceptions of aggression, as these women tended to *underestimate* men's aggression. This pattern aligns with theory and demonstrates how individuals with a history of IPV victimization or CM may develop cognitive schemas and interpretive frameworks colored by their traumatic experiences (Dubow et al., 2009). This may result in a heightened sensitivity to potential threat cues and a tendency to interpret ambiguous behaviors as indicative of aggression (Pollak et al., 2000). It is important to recognize, however, that this increased accuracy does not necessarily mean less victimization, as heightened perceptions of threat can contribute to increased fear, anxiety, and stress within the relationship, potentially fostering an environment that is tense and unsafe (Becker et al., 2010). In terms of decision-making, individuals may act on perceived threats rather than objective evidence, potentially leading to preemptive defensive actions or avoidance strategies that may not be warranted. This tendency also risks creating a self-fulfilling prophecy, where expectations of violence influence behaviors that inadvertently contribute to its realization (Cattaneo, 2007). Over time, the cycle of violence may be perpetuated, reinforcing negative relationship patterns and dynamics. This suggests that interventions should focus on enhancing individuals' ability to accurately assess risk while also providing support and resources to address the underlying trauma and maladaptive coping mechanisms associated with IPV victimization and CM exposure. Psychoeducation aimed at helping individuals understand the influence of their personal history on risk perception may empower them to make informed decisions and develop healthier relationship dynamics.

Conversely, individuals high in attachment avoidance, characterized by a reluctance to rely on others and a preference for emotional distance (Campbell & Stanton, 2019), may be less accurate in their estimations and underestimate aggression due to a tendency to seek out distance in romantic relationships (Tucker & Anders, 1999), which may result in a limited ability to accurately assess level of aggression in potential partners. Congruent with my pilot study findings (Russo & Borelli, 2023), these effects reveal that attachment avoidance is linked to underestimating aggression, which, when taken together, may signify a relationship between avoidant attachment and deficiencies in a person's ability to accurately detect other individuals' interpersonal characteristics. This may be particularly true in the context of aggression, where the tendency to downplay or overlook signs of potential harm can leave individuals vulnerable to victimization. Thus, while individuals high in attachment avoidance may strive to maintain emotional distance as a means of self-protection (Moore & Leung, 2002), this strategy may inadvertently impair their ability to recognize and respond effectively to interpersonal threats, including those related to aggression within intimate relationships. Together, these findings underscore the need for tailored assessment tools and interventions that consider individuals' attachment orientations, as well as their victimization history, to provide comprehensive support and resources for those at risk of victimization or revictimization. By addressing deficiencies in individuals' ability to detect and respond to interpersonal threats, interventions can work towards fostering healthier relationship dynamics and reducing the prevalence of IPV.

Women's number of romantic relationships and self-identifying as white were also predictive of more accurate assessments of men's aggression, while number of romantic relationships were predictive of more accurate assessments of IPV perpetration risk. These patterns may occur due the accumulation of relational experiences and social dynamics

influencing perception. Women who have had more romantic relationships might have developed a greater sensitivity to cues of aggression or risk factors for IPV perpetration through their varied experiences. Additionally, self-identifying as white may reflect certain cultural or societal norms that shape perceptions of aggression and IPV, potentially leading to more accurate assessments based on cultural context or exposure. For instance, women who self-identify as white may have been exposed to media portrayals or societal narratives that emphasize certain behaviors associated with aggression or IPV within their cultural context. This exposure could lead to a heightened awareness and understanding of these issues, thereby facilitating more accurate assessments when observing similar behaviors in men. Furthermore, the diversity of romantic relationships could provide a broader understanding of relational dynamics, enhancing the ability to recognize signs of aggression or IPV perpetration risk (Christopher et al., 2014; Esqueda & Harrison, 2005). These patterns suggest that personal experiences and cultural factors play significant roles in shaping individuals' perceptions and assessments of interpersonal behaviors.

Strengths and Limitations

This study provides additional evidence that college women can accurately identify men's propensity for aggression or IPV perpetration risk based on viewing de-identified dating profiles, as well as elucidates personal history factors that may be associated with general and accurate perceptions of men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk. These findings have broad relevance for our understanding of dating interactions, particularly our understanding of the selection of abusive partners. Our participant sample was large and ethnically diverse, and the number of men's profiles being rated was increased from 9 to 30 from my pilot study, increasing the validity of the findings.

Limitations include the fact that our analyses were cross-sectional and comprising of only heterosexual women, limiting the generalizability of these findings to men/non-binary individuals and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. These findings may also not generalize to women in domestic violence shelters, who likely experience more severe levels of IPV compared to the women in our sample (Thomas et al., 2015). Finally, in order to mask the purpose of the investigation (and reduce participant reactivity), aggression and IPV perpetration risk were assessed via different measures for women observers and men targets, which required standardization of scores for comparison rather than the utilization of raw scores. We also assessed accuracy through self-other discrepancies, a method commonly utilized in this field for its interpretative value (Bernieri et al., 1994; Cohen et al., 2013); However, this approach has limitations, as self-ratings may be influenced by biases, potentially resulting in an underestimation of the actual effects. Future research should aim to replicate these findings in diverse populations, including individuals of various sexual orientations and gender identities, as well as those with different relationship dynamics, such as individuals in same-sex relationships or non-binary individuals. Longitudinal studies would also provide valuable insights into the stability and predictive validity of women's perceptions of men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk over time.

Overall, this study significantly advances the literature by illustrating that college women possess an inherent ability to detect variations in men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk through subtle cues, emphasizing the influence of personal history factors, such as IPV victimization and childhood maltreatment on their judgment accuracy. It highlights the nuanced effects of attachment styles and the potential biases introduced by previous romantic involvements and racial identity on perception accuracy. These insights underscore the critical

need for targeted education and intervention strategies that address these varied influences on women's risk assessment in romantic contexts, aiming to better equip them to identify and respond to IPV risks effectively.

STUDY 2 METHODS

Individual Differences and their Influence on Female Observers' Perceptions of Unknown Men's Propensity for Aggression and IPV Perpetration Risk

Study 2 focused on identifying which aspects of the men's profiles influence women observer's ratings of aggression and IPV perpetration risk, as well as how observer confidence in their perceptions influence their ratings of men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk. To accomplish this, a new, non-overlapping sample of women observers (N = 196) evaluated men's de-identified dating profiles (N = 30) and completed a stream-of-consciousness task (Borelli et al., 2013) discussing their process of rating men on aggression and dangerousness (IPV perpetration risk).

Hypotheses

In terms of hypotheses, I once again predicted that across the sample as a whole, women observers would be able to accurately rate the profiles of high aggression men and men with high levels of IPV perpetration history as more aggressive/dangerous compared to the profiles of men with moderate or low levels of aggression (**H1a**) and IPV perpetration history (**H1b**). In other words, I predicted that female observers will be able to distinguish between men who self-report low, moderate, or high aggression/IPV perpetration history, and that their ratings of these men's aggression/IPV perpetration risk level will be sorted similarly to the level of aggression/IPV perpetration history self-reported by these men. Specifically, I predict that observers' ratings of high aggression targets will be significantly higher than those of moderate aggression targets, which will be significantly higher than those of low aggression targets. Further, I predicted that observers' ratings of high IPV risk targets will be significantly higher than those of moderate IPV risk targets, which will be significantly higher than those of low IPV risk targets.

Next, I examined the associations between observer confidence and general rating tendencies. Here I predicted that lower confidence in one's perceptions of unknown men will be associated with over-estimating aggression (**H2a**) and IPV perpetration risk level (**H2b**), as well as reduced accuracy in identifying aggression (**H3a**) and IPV perpetration risk (**H3b**) in unknown men.

Finally, I employed an inductive thematic analysis approach (Glaser & Holton, 2005) to identify what women observers paid attention to or relied upon when making their rating decisions about men's propensity for aggression and IPV perpetration risk, as well as to determine what themes are associated with underestimating or overestimating men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk level. To accomplish this, women observers completed a stream of consciousness task after the rating activity where they spoke uninterrupted for 2 minutes about their process of rating men on aggression and IPV perpetration risk.

Participants

As with Study 1, women undergraduate students were recruited from the online social science subject pool (SONA) at UC Irvine, as well as through flyers on 4-year college campuses, to participate in a study about romantic relationships. Eligibility included being 18 years of age or older, identifying as a woman, identifying as heterosexual, currently being in a romantic relationship or previously being in a romantic relationship, and being able to read and write in English. A total of $N = 232$ women started the study procedures. After reviewing the data, $n = 26$ participants were removed for not completing the rating activity or providing demographic data (i.e., they opened the survey and quit), and $n = 10$ participants were removed for completing the survey in under 15 minutes, indicating that they were not providing accurate data as the average time to complete the survey was 38 minutes. As such, the resultant sample for analyses consisted

of *N* = 196 women. On average, women participants had a mean age of 21.09 years (SD = 4.36), reported having been in 1.99 relationships (SD = 0.92), and most (98.5%) participants reported a preference for dating one person at a time. Nearly half (44.4%) of participants self-identified as Asian, followed by 26% as Latina, 15.8% as white, 3.6% as African American, 5.6% as multiracial, 3.6% as Middle Eastern, and 1% as Pacific Islander or Native to Hawaii. Most of the sample (70%) reported not using online dating sites. See Table 2 for demographic breakdowns across my pilot study and the 3 dissertation studies.

Procedures

All measures and procedures were approved by the University Institutional Review Board (HS #2456). Women who met eligibility criteria and provided consent completed an online activity, followed by a survey about their personal experiences (e.g., demographics, dating history) and a short stream of consciousness task about the activity. As part of the activity, each women observer was assigned to view 9 of the 30 de-identified dating profiles (randomized and order counterbalanced to ensure there are no order effects) and asked to rate each man's profile on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very) on various traits related to romantic relationships, including aggression and dangerousness (our term for IPV perpetration risk). Participants were instructed to form an impression of the individual based on the dating profile and then rate them accordingly on the following traits: financially responsible (distractor), romantic (distractor), lazy (distractor), funny, (distractor) aggressive, extraverted (distractor), successful (distractor), attractive (distractor), and dangerous. This rating procedure—having female observers rate the unknown men on their aggression and dangerousness levels on a scale from 1 to 7—was employed due to concerns that observers would be able to identify the aims of the study if they complete the same measures on aggression and IPV perpetration (e.g., BPAQ, CTS2S) in

reference to each man in each dating profile, and it would be too time intensive to have observers complete additional distractor surveys in an attempt to obscure the purpose of the activity. Within the activity, and directly following the ratings of traits, women observers also rated their confidence in their perceptions of each man on a scale from 1 to 7. Finally, following the rating activity, observers were asked to complete a short stream-of-consciousness task that involved speaking about why they rated the man in the profiles on aggression and dangerousness for 2 minutes. All procedures were completed online via Qualtrics.

Measures

Aggression rating. Women observers were asked to form an impression of the man based on their de-identified dating profile and then rate them on a number of characteristics, including aggression, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (very). A standardized score was utilized to represent observers' perception of men's aggression.

IPV perpetration risk rating. As with aggression, women observers were instructed to form an impression of the individual based on their de-identified dating profile and then rate their level of dangerousness (proxy for IPV perpetration risk) on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (very). A standardized score was utilized to represent observers' perception of men's IPV perpetration risk.

Observer confidence. After viewing each dating profile and rating their perceptions of the man's aggression and IPV perpetration risk, observers were asked to indicate to what extent this statement described them on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree: *I am confident that my ratings accurately captured this man's personality traits and characteristics.* This scale was used in a prior study of person perception (Borelli et al., 2019).

Stream of Consciousness Task. Following the rating activity, women observers were asked to complete a stream-of-consciousness task about their rating procedures and asked to explain their rating process for 2 of the 9 randomly assigned traits. However, unknown to them, all observers were asked to discuss their rating process of men's aggression and dangerousness level. All responses were recorded via Qualtrics and later transcribed for thematic analysis. The prompt instructions were written as followed:

> *"Thank you for rating the dating profiles. We are now interested in what made you rate the profiles the way you did. For the next 2 minutes, please discuss what went into your rating decisions for the following randomly assigned traits:*
>
> *Aggressive*
>
> *Dangerous*
>
> *Please discuss in detail your experience when viewing the dating profile and what information went into your rating for each of the selected categories. Please discuss your thoughts, feelings, instincts, and what information you drew upon to come to your decision. There are no right or wrong answers, so please say whatever comes to mind. Your job is to talk continuously about your rating of the 2 selected traits for the man in the profile for 2 minutes."*

Data Preparation Plan

Levels of aggression/IPV perpetration risk. To assess whether participants accurately rated more aggressive profiles and profiles of men with higher IPV perpetration as significantly more aggressive/dangerous compared to less aggressive profiles and profiles of men with less IPV perpetration history (**Hypothesis 1**), I created mean ratings for aggression and IPV

perpetration by profile level of aggression/IPV perpetration (low, moderate, high) to compare against one another using analyses of variance tests.

Discrepancy/accuracy score computation. To evaluate participant accuracy in ratings of men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk (**Hypothesis 3**), I created directional discrepancy scores by taking the difference between each participant's standardized rating of the man's aggression/IPV perpetration risk level and the man's standardized self-rating of aggression/IPV perpetration (Dimler et al., 2017). I completed this procedure for all of the profiles rated by the participants, and then computed a mean score of these differences. Negative values signify that, on average, the participant overestimated the profile creator's aggression/IPV perpetration risk (relative to the man's own rating), while positive values indicate that the participants underestimated the profile creator's aggression/IPV perpetration risk (relative to the man's own rating).

Qualitative themes derived from the stream-of-consciousness task. To examine what thoughts and considerations participants considered when rating men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk levels (**Research Question 1**), I used an inductive thematic analysis approach akin to Glaser's (2005) Grounded Theory. This process involves deriving marginal codes (i.e., identifying reasons women observers rated the men the way they did on aggression and IPV perpetration risk) from a subsample of the stream of consciousness transcripts (n = 30) and then sorting the marginal codes into initial themes after becoming familiar with the data. These themes were then reviewed and refined before being defined and organized into a codebook. Two independent coders (i.e., research assistants) then used the codebook to dichotomously rate each observer's stream-of-consciousness transcript on the 7 identified themes (Not present = 0, Present = 1): Subjectivity and Interpretation, Association with Societal Stereotypes, Emotional

Expression and Attitude, Political Ideology, Feelings of Unease, Association with Past Experiences, and Avoidance of Negative Ratings (discussed further in the results section). Interrater reliability between coders was strong (ICC = .87)

Throughout the thematic analysis process, it was essential to acknowledge that while termed "inductive," this approach is not purely data driven; rather, it is influenced by the subjective biases of the individual creating the themes/codebook and those completing the coding (Guest & MacQueen, 2011). To mitigate the impact of such biases, several strategies were employed throughout the coding process. First, each person (two research assistants and I) maintained detailed journals, documenting our expectations, assumptions, and reflections on the data. This journaling process served as a crucial mechanism for fostering reflexivity, enabling us to remain cognizant of any biases or preconceptions that may influence our interpretation of the data. By regularly revisiting and scrutinizing our journal entries, we sought to mitigate the impact of these biases and cultivate a more nuanced understanding of the data. We also adopted a team approach to address any discordant codes by having meetings to discuss and deliberate on divergent interpretations of codes and reconcile discrepancies. These discussions provided valuable opportunities for critical reflection and refinement of our coding process, ensuring consistency and coherence in the analytical approach.

Data Analytic Plan

To test study hypotheses, I conducted analyses of variance (**Hypothesis 1**) and hierarchical linear regressions (**Hypotheses 2 - 5**) via SPSS Statistics for Macs, Version 26.0. In step 1 of the hierarchical linear regressions I controlled for participant age, number of relationships, and race (using dichotomized race variables), as past research has illustrated that these factors are associated with IPV victimization and may influence how participants perceive the dating profiles (Cho, 2011; Halpern et al., 2009).

For Hypothesis 1, analyses of variance tests were utilized to compare level of aggression/IPV perpetration risk ratings against one another to elucidate whether female observers rated men with high levels of self-reported aggression/IPV perpetration history as more aggressive/dangerous than men with moderate levels of aggression/IPV perpetration history, as well as whether men with moderate aggression/IPV perpetration history were rated as more aggressive/dangerous than men with low levels of aggression/IPV perpetration history.

For hypotheses examining how observer confidence (**Hypothesis 2**) related to general rating tendencies, observers' mean aggression/IPV perpetration risk rating of the dating profiles was entered as the dependent variable of the regression and observer confidence was entered in step 2 of the regression. Next, when examining observer confidence (**Hypothesis 3**) as a predictor of rating accuracy, observer confidence was entered in step 2 of the regression, while participants' mean discrepancy rating was entered as the dependent variable.

Finally, for Research Question 1, bivariate correlations were employed to explore potential associations among general rating tendencies (magnitude) and accuracy, and the 7 qualitative themes identified through inducive thematic analysis of women's rating process. This analysis was chosen as it fits with the exploratory nature of the research question seeking to uncover potential associations among general rating tendencies, accuracy, and qualitative theme. Additionally, due to a smaller sample size (N = 196), I chose not to attempt regression analyses with seven qualitative themes as predictors because it could result in statistical issues, including overfitting and unreliable parameter estimates. As such, employing correlation analysis provided a more prudent approach to explore potential associations among variables in the context of the study's constraints.

STUDY 2 RESULTS

Over half (57.1%; n = 112) of the women in the sample reported IPV victimization history (with 66.1% of participants reporting a single form of victimization, 17.9% of participants reporting two forms of abuse, 6.3% of participants reporting three forms of abuse, and 9.8% of participants reporting all four forms of abuse. The most commonly endorsed form of IPV was psychological abuse (55.6%), followed by physical abuse (18.9%), followed by sexual abuse (16.8%) and finally, experiencing an injury as a result of abuse (8.7%). In terms of women's confidence in their ratings of men's traits, women reported an average confidence of 4.73 (SD = 1.30) out of 7, suggesting that women exhibited moderate confidence in their assessments of men's traits. Descriptive statistics and correlations among key study variables were explored (See Table 6).

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1a: *Do women participants as a whole rate highly aggressive profiles as more aggressive than moderate or low aggressive male profiles?* Analyses of variance revealed that, on average, there was a significant difference between how women rated low, moderate, and high aggression profiles [$F(2,585) = 27.29$, $p = 0.001$]. A Tukey post hoc test revealed that the women rated the high aggression profiles as significantly more aggressive than the moderate aggression profiles ($p < 0.001$), and moderate aggression profiles as significantly more aggressive than low aggression profiles ($p < 0.001$). In other words, participants were able to accurately differentiate between men's propensity for aggression at low, moderate, and high levels after viewing their dating profile.

Table 6.

Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations for Women Participants' Key Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Mean (SD) / %	21.09(4.36)	1.99(0.92)	4.73(1.30)	16.80%	50.80%	76.00%	9.50%	22.30%	15.10%	12.40%	2.08(0.88)	1.72(0.63)	2.10(0.88)	0.04(0.63)
Min, Max	18, 35	1.00,5.00	1.00,7.00	0.00,1.00	0.00,1.00	0.00,1.00	0.00,1.00	0.00,1.00	0.00,1.00	0.00,1.00	1.00,7.00	-	1.00,7.00	-
1. Age	-													
2. Number of Relationships	**0.39****	-												
3. Confidence in Ratings	**-0.15***	0.02	-											
4. Subjectivity & Interpretation Code	-0.04	0.10	-0.13	-										
5. Assoc. w/ Social Stereotypes Code	-0.01	0.07	0.00	**-0.28****	-									
6. Emotional Exp. & Attitude Code	0.08	-0.04	0.09	**-0.20****	0.13	-								
7. Political Ideology Code	-0.05	-0.04	-0.01	-0.15	0.13	0.09	-							
8. Feelings of Unease Code	-0.06	0.01	0.07	-0.10	-0.01	008	0.06	-						
9. Assoc. w/ Past Experiences Code	0.05	0.07	-0.11	-0.11	0.04	-0.06	0.13	0.11	-					
10. Avoid. of Negative Ratings Code	-0.13	-0.06	0.04	**0.16***	**-0.25****	**-0.44****	-0.06	0.00	-0.11	-				
11 General Aggression Rating	**0.16***	-0.01	0.09	**-0.16***	**0.27****	**0.16***	0.13	0.02	0.08	**-0.32****	-			
12. Accuracy in Aggression Rating[1]	-0.13	0.04	-0.08	0.14	**-0.22****	-0.13	-0.12	0.01	-0.09	**0.32****	**-0.97****	-		
13. General IPV Perpetration Rating	**0.20****	0.09	0.04	-0.10	0.13	0.13	0.03	0.07	0.08	**-0.30****	**0.82****	**-0.81****	-	
14. Accuracy IPV Perpetration Rating[1]	**-0.19****	-0.07	-0.03	0.09	-0.09	-0.10	-0.04	-0.05	-0.07	**0.28****	**0.81****	**0.83****	**-0.98****	-

[1]Negative values signify high accuracy

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *SD* Standard deviation; *Min* Minimum score on variable; *Max* Maximum score on variable.

Hypothesis 1b: *Do women participants as a whole rate men's profiles with high IPV perpetration history as more dangerous than men's profiles with moderate and low IPV perpetration history?* Analyses of variance revealed that, on average, there was a significant difference between how women rated profiles with low, moderate, and high IPV perpetration history [$F(2,585) = 10.95$, $p = 0.001$]. A Tukey post hoc test showed that the women rated the high IPV perpetration history profiles as significantly more dangerous than the moderate IPV perpetration history profiles ($p = 0.02$), and low IPV perpetration history profiles ($p = 0.001$); the ratings between moderate and low IPV perpetration profiles were not significantly different ($p = 0.14$). In other words, women were able to accurately differentiate between high IPV perpetration risk profiles and moderate/low profiles but were not able to distinguish between moderate and low IPV perpetration risk profiles.

Hypothesis 2a: *Are women participants with less confidence in their perception of men's characteristics more likely to over-estimate men's aggression?* After controlling for women's age, race, and number of relationships, $R^2 = 0.99$, $p = 0.02$, the step containing women's confidence in their perceptions of men's characteristics was not significantly associated with women's general ratings of men's aggression, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $b = 0.09$, $p = 0.07$. See Table 7 for the regression examining women's rating confidence in predicting their general ratings of men's aggression.

Hypothesis 2b: *Are women participants with less confidence in their perception of men's characteristics more likely to over-estimate men's IPV perpetration risk?* After controlling for women's age, race, and number of relationships, $R^2 = 0.08$, $p = .08$, the step containing women's confidence in their perceptions of men's characteristics was found to not be significantly associated with their general ratings of men's IPV perpetration risk, $\Delta R^2 = 0.00$, $b = 0.05$, $p =$

Table 7.

Regression Examining Participant Rating Confidence in Predicting their General Ratings of Men's Aggression and IPV Perpetration Risk.

	Aggression			IPV Perpetration Risk		
	b/ΔR^2	*SE*	95% CI	*b*/ΔR^2	*SE*	95% CI
Step 1 ΔR^2	0.10*			0.06		
Age	0.03	0.02	[-0.01, 0.06]	0.03	0.02	[0.00, 0.06]
Num of Rel	-0.05	0.08	[-0.20, 0.10]	0.04	0.08	[-0.11, 0.19]
Asian	0.16	0.21	[-0.27, 0.58]	0.22	0.22	[-0.20, 0.65]
Latina	-0.20	0.43	[-0.64, 0.25]	0.11	0.23	[-0.34, 0.55]
White	0.28	0.22	[-0.12, 0.88]	0.46	0.25	[-0.04, 0.96]
African American	0.10	0.37	[-0.62, 0.83]	-0.01	0.37	[-0.74, 0.72]
Step 2 ΔR^2	0.02			0.01		
Confidence in Ratings	0.09	0.05	[-0.03, 0.19]	0.05	0.05	[-0.05, 0.14]

Note: * $p<.05$, Age = Participant age; Num of Rel = Number of romantic relationships; Confidence in Ratings = Participant mean rating confidence.

0.34. See Table 7 for the regression examining women's rating confidence in predicting their general ratings of men's IPV perpetration risk.

Hypothesis 3a: *Are women participants with less confidence in their perception of men's characteristics less accurate in their ratings of men's aggression?* After controlling for women's age, race, and number of relationships, $R^2 = 0.94$, $p = 0.03$, the step containing women's confidence in their perceptions of men's characteristics was found to not be significantly associated with accuracy of ratings men's aggression level, $\Delta R^2 = 01.$, $p = 0.10$. See Table 8 for the regression examining participant confidence in predicting accuracy in rating men's aggression.

Hypothesis 3b: *Are women participants with less confidence in their perception of men's characteristics less accurate in their ratings of men's IPV perpetration risk?* After controlling for women's age, race, and number of relationships, $R^2 = 0.09$, $p = 0.06$, the step containing women's confidence in their perceptions of men's characteristics was once again found to not be significantly associated with accuracy of ratings men's IPV perpetration risk, $\Delta R^2 = .00$, $p = 0.43$. See Table 8 for the regression examining participant confidence in predicting accuracy in rating men's IPV perpetration risk level.

Research Question

Research Question 1: *What information did women participants rely on when rating men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk level?* The inductive thematic analysis process revealed 7 themes that capture the various explanations participants shared for why they rated men as more/less aggressive and dangerous. Although I initially planned to analyze these themes separately, most participants spoke about the themes in tandem or did not specify which trait they were referring to when discussing various reasons for their rating tendencies during the

Table 8.

Regressions Examining Participant Rating Confidence in Predicting Accuracy in Rating Men's Aggression and IPV Perpetration Risk.

	Aggression Accuracy			IPV Perpetration Risk Accuracy		
	b/ΔR^2	*SE*	95% CI	*b*/ΔR^2	*SE*	95% CI
Step 1 ΔR^2	0.06			0.06		
Age	-0.02	0.01	[-0.04, 0.00]	-0.02	0.01	[-0.05, 0.00]
Num of Rel	0.06	0.05	[-0.04, 0.17]	-0.01	0.05	[-0.12, 0.09]
Asian	-0.10	0.15	[-0.40, 0.21]	-0.13	0.15	[-0.44, 0.17]
Latina	0.13	0.16	[-0.19, 0.45]	-0.04	0.16	[-0.35, 0.28]
White	-0.20	0.18	[-0.56, 0.16]	-0.26	0.18	[-0.61, 0.10]
African American	-0.04	0.27	[-0.56, 0.16]	0.09	0.26	[-0.43, 0.61]
Step 2 ΔR^2	0.02			0.01		
Confidence in Ratings	-0.06	0.04	[-0.13, 0.01]	-0.03	0.04	[-0.10, 0.04]

Note: Age = Participant age; Num of Rel = Number of romantic relationships; Confidence in Ratings = Participant mean rating confidence.

stream-of-consciousness task. As such, the coders rated each transcript on the various themes in relation to both aggression and dangerousness.

The identified themes include *Subjectivity and Interpretation*, which captured how some participants spent much of their time in the stream-of-consciousness task talking about the difficulty in assigning ratings to men because it was based off of their subjective interpretations of the provided information (unbeknownst to them this was the intended purpose of the activity); The *Association with Societal Stereotypes* code captures how participants interpreted certain information on profiles as stereotypical of more aggressive or violent individuals (e.g., liking to party, drink alcohol, work out, play sports, etc.), and how this influenced their ratings. This code also captures information that was interpreted as support for more traditional and stereotypical relationship dynamics, particularly those regarding gender roles, misogyny, and other cultural expectations that place more responsibility on women than men in romantic relationships; *Emotional Expression and Attitude* refers to how participants paid close attention to the language and structure of sentences that was used to express men's desires and answer the prompts, with those illustrating more adversarial language, signs of narcissism, entitlement, or defensiveness coming across as more aggressive and dangerous; *Political Ideology* was also identified as a common reason why participants rated men as more aggressive or dangerous, with women sharing that profiles of men who expressed more conservative views (anti-LGBTQIA+ rights) and affiliations (e.g., Republican) were perceived as less accepting and tolerant; *Feelings of Unease* captures how women rated profiles that elicited gut-feelings of unease or discomfort as more aggressive and dangerous, even when there was no concrete reason for such negative feelings; the *Associations with Past Experiences* code refers to women sharing that their personal experiences, including past romantic relationships, influenced how they perceived the men in the

dating profiles and their propensity for aggression or violence. Specifically, references to hobbies or behaviors reminiscent of negative experiences led to higher ratings; Finally, the *Avoidance of Negative Ratings* code captures how some women shared that they were hesitant to rate men higher on aggression or dangerousness if there were no clear indicators of these traits, and instead chose to focus on more positive indicators of behavior or personality. See Table 9 for an overview of these themes as well as examples for each code.

The most commonly endorsed reason that women mentioned for rating men higher on aggression and dangerousness was *Emotional Expression and Attitude* (76%), followed by *Association with Societal Stereotypes* (50.8%), *Feelings of Unease* (22.3%), *Subjectivity and Interpretation* (16.8%), *Associations with Past Experiences* (15.1%), and finally *Political Ideology* (9.5%). In addition, 12.5% of the women shared that they avoided assigning higher ratings of aggression and dangerousness (i.e., *Avoidance of Negative Ratings*) because they felt there were no clear indicators of these traits on the profile and they would prefer to not assign such a rating without evidence.

When looking at associations between these themes and women's general/accuracy rating of men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk, bivariate correlations revealed that women's general aggression rating was negatively correlated with *Subjectivity and Interpretation* (r = -0.16, p = 0.03) and *Avoidance of Negative Ratings* (r = -0.32, $p < 0.001$). In other words, when women shared that they struggled to rate men's aggression level because such a rating was subjective or that they wanted to avoid negative ratings without a clear indicator of aggression, their general aggression rating was lower. On the other hand, *Associations with Societal Stereotypes* (r = 0.27, $p < 0.001$) and *Emotional Expression and Attitude* (r = 0.16, p = 0.03) were positively correlated with women's general aggression ratings, such that women who

identified more negative stereotypes or biases in the men, and who disliked how men expressed their emotions and characterized their personality on the profile, tended to generally rate men as

Table 9.

Themes Identified from Participants Stream-of-Consciousness Task About What Went into their Rating of Men's Aggression and Dangerousness.

Construct	Description	Example	% of Women Endorsing Theme
Subjectivity and Interpretation	Participants shared that it was difficult to assign ratings to these characteristics as the presented information is open to subjective interpretation.	"*It was hard…I mostly guessed based on my perspective on how I view and interpret things…no concrete reason.*"	16.8%
Association with Societal Stereotypes	Participants reflected on the men's societal stereotypes and biases they displayed, particularly regarding gender roles, misogyny, and cultural expectations. Profiles that aligned with negative stereotypical behaviors (e.g., partying, working out) or attitudes (e.g., anti-feminist) were often rated higher.	"*I rated certain profiles based on what they were saying, for example someone said that they want a woman who takes care of them or they like to drink all the time with their boys, so I rated them more aggressive and dangerous.*"	50.8%
Emotional Expression and Attitude	Participants shared that they considered how individuals expressed their emotions, particularly through choice of language, and the way they conveyed their attitude, such as signs of narcissism, entitlement, or defensiveness were noted as red flags for aggressiveness or dangerousness.	"*When I rated 'aggressive' and 'dangerous', I considered whether the person came off as narcissistic, defensive, or even abusive…like wanting someone who only focus on them.*"	76.0%
Political Ideology	Participants shared that political ideology played a significant role in their evaluations, with profiles expressing more conservative views often receiving higher ratings for aggressiveness or dangerousness. Certain political statements or affiliations (e.g., Republican) were perceived as indicative of potential aggression or toxicity.	"*I found myself rating higher numbers when anything red leaning was mentioned. When guns or thinking women were less equal was brought up, I deemed the person to be more dangerous and aggressive.*"	9.5%
Feelings of Unease	Participants shared that profiles that elicited feelings of unease or discomfort were often labeled as aggressive or dangerous. They highlighted specific content or a general negative feeling about the profile.	"*There wasn't a lot to base aggressiveness and dangerousness off of rather if they sound creepy or gave me the ick I would mark them as aggressive and dangerous*"	22.3%
Association with Past Experiences	Participants shared that their personal experiences, including past relationships encounters, influenced their perceptions of aggressiveness and dangerousness in profiles. References to hobbies or behaviors reminiscent of negative experiences led to higher ratings.	"*If they reminded me of an ex, especially since that ex sexually assaulted me, I feel like that influenced my ratings because what they said reminded me of someone who was very violent and abusive.*"	15.1%
Avoidance of Negative Ratings	Some participants preferred to avoid assigning high ratings for aggressiveness or dangerousness, especially in the absence of clear indicators. They shared that they prioritized maintaining a positive or neutral tone in their assessments, particularly if profiles did not exhibit overtly concerning traits.	"*I did not rate anyone a high rating of dangerousness, I did not know them enough to consider them dangerous.*"	12.4%

Note: All quotations are transcribed verbatim from participants.

more aggressive. When it came to accuracy in rating aggression, women who rated men as more aggressive due to their *Association with Societal Stereotypes* were more likely to be accurate in their aggression rating (r = -0.22, $p < 0.001$), while those endorsing an *Avoidance of Negative Ratings* were less likely to be accurate in their aggression rating (r = 0.32, $p < 0.001$); [negative values signify more accuracy].

For general IPV perpetration risk ratings, only *Avoidance of Negative Ratings* was correlated with IPV perpetration risk ratings (r = 0.30, $p < 0.001$), such that when women refrain from rating men high on dangerousness without evidence of violence, that their ratings of IPV perpetration risk were generally lower. Similarly, Avoidance of Negative Ratings was also correlated with lower accuracy in rating IPV perpetration risk (r = 0.28, $p < 0.001$), illustrating that this tendency to avoid higher ratings is associated with decreased accuracy in assessing IPV perpetration risk.

STUDY 2 DISCUSSION

Grounded in the critical understanding that early identification and intervention are paramount in preventing IPV victimization and revictimization (Kuijpers et al., 2012), Study 2 delves deeper into this critical area by examining the specific aspects of men's profiles that shaped women observers' (N = 196) ratings of men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk, as well as the impact of observer confidence in predicting the magnitude and accuracy of these perceptions. The findings from this study have broad relevance for IPV prevention efforts, as insights can inform educational initiatives aimed at fostering healthy relationship behaviors and empowering individuals to recognize and respond effectively to signs of potential violence in romantic relationships.

Women's Ability to Identify Aggression & IPV Perpetration Risk in Unknown Men

Employing the same controlled paradigm as Study 1, findings revealed that once again, on average, women college students could detect subtle variations in aggression levels among potential dating partners across low, moderate, and high levels. However, their ability to discriminate between potential dating partners exhibiting low, moderate, or high IPV perpetration risk, was limited to low and high-risk individuals. Consistent with my other investigations, this suggests that women's perceptual acuity in gauging aggression levels among potential dating partners is relatively robust, enabling them to distinguish subtle nuances across a spectrum of aggressiveness. However, women's discernment becomes notably constrained when assessing the risk of IPV perpetration posed by these individuals. This may be due to the nuances of IPV perpetration risk being more challenging to detect solely through online interactions, particularly when dating profiles often highlight positive attributes and downplay negative aspects (Bacey-Giles & Haji, 2017), potentially obscuring indicators of IPV risk. Moreover,

women may feel hesitant to assign IPV risk in online interactions due to concerns about appearing distrustful or overly cautious without a clear indicator of abuse (Storer et al., 2021). Thus, while women demonstrate a keen ability to identify aggression levels, navigating the intricacies of IPV perpetration risk assessment in online dating contexts presents a significant challenge.

Confidence in Perceptions Predicting Aggression & IPV Perpetration Ratings

Next, I examined whether women's confidence in their perceptions of men's traits predicted the overall magnitude of their aggression and IPV perpetration ratings, as well as their accuracy. Contrary to my expectations, these predictions were unsupported: Women's rating confidence was not associated with their accuracy or magnitude in ratings men's aggression or IPV perpetration risk. Here, it is essential to consider the role of other factors that may influence women's perceptions, such as past experiences, cultural norms, and individual differences in cognitive processing, all of which may hold more predictive power than rating confidence. For instance, individuals who have experienced IPV victimization may exhibit heightened vigilance to potential signs of aggression in subsequent partners, regardless of their confidence in their perceptions. This heightened vigilance could stem from a combination of psychological factors, including anxiety and trauma responses, which may override any variations in confidence levels when assessing aggression and IPV perpetration risk (Jungilligens et al., 2020; Tursi et al., 2022). Societal and cultural expectations regarding gender roles and relationships may also play a significant role in shaping women's perceptions, influencing their interpretations of behavior and their willingness to attribute IPV risk to potential partners (Rollero & De Piccoli, 2020). For example, in cultures where gender-based violence is normalized or minimized, women may be

less likely to perceive certain behaviors as indicative of aggression or IPV risk, regardless of their confidence in their judgments.

Additionally, it is worth noting that women's confidence was assessed in relation to all traits, not just aggression or IPV perpetration risk, which may have affected the relationship between rating confidence and ratings of aggression and IPV perpetration risk; in other words, women may have reported higher or lower confidence in their ratings of aggression/IPV perpetration risk if we had specifically asked about their confidence in those traits rather than their overall confidence in the rating activity. Future studies should adopt more targeted measures of confidence, focusing specifically on perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk, as it could provide a clearer understanding of how confidence relates to these particular traits. Studies should also investigate how variations in context, such as face-to-face interactions versus online interactions, may influence the relationship between confidence and perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk. For instance, women may feel more confident in their assessments of aggression and IPV risk when interacting in person, where nonverbal cues and contextual information are more readily available, compared to online interactions where cues may be more limited and ambiguous (Bacey-Giles & Haji, 2017). Potential moderators, such as attachment styles, personality traits, and past experiences, should also be considered to uncover the nuanced dynamics underlying women's perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk. Understanding these factors in conjunction with confidence levels can offer valuable insights into the complexities of IPV prevention and intervention efforts. By refining our understanding of how confidence and other individual and situational factors intersect in shaping perceptions, we can develop more targeted approaches to promote healthy relationship dynamics.

Women's Reasons for Rating Men as Aggressive and higher in IPV Perpetration Risk

Finally, when exploring the reasons women rated men in the profiles as more aggressive or higher risk for IPV perpetration, thematic analysis revealed 7 themes as for why women rated the men the way they did. The most frequently reported reason for endorsing higher aggression or IPV perpetration risk was the *Emotional Expression and Attitude* (76% of participants) of the men in the profiles and how they came across to the women. Women shared that they drew upon the men's language choice and how they described their likes and dislikes, as well as their perception of the man's personality to inform their judgments. For instance, one woman shared that "*when I was doing my ratings, I really looked into what these people's personalities said about them…Like the people that seem to have more like "look at me" vibes. I definitely feel that those people are more likely to commit domestic violence and people that view themselves as an alpha or all these really incel[2] terms, I…said were dangerous because to me that feels like very uncomfortable language and seems like somebody I would not want to date.*" Appearing to be defensive, entitled, or too self-involved were also identified indictors of a problematic attitude, and therefore increased aggression or IPV perpetration risk ratings: "*I find it more as a red flag when a guy thinks that they should be the one in complete control. They're the ones that are gonna be driving. They're the ones that are gonna be making the plans… That is a red flag to me because that seems very narcissistic. It seems also dangerous to me because if you were to, like, not meet those expectations because they feel like they're the ones that should be prioritized, then maybe they'll take it out on me physically.*" Identifying such men as more aggressive and

[2] The term "incel" is a portmanteau of "involuntary celibate," and refers to a subculture that consists primarily online of individuals (predominantly men) who define themselves largely by their inability to find a romantic or sexual partner despite desiring one. The incel community has been associated with a range of online forums and discussions, wherein members often express feelings of alienation, resentment, and misogyny (Hoffman et al., 2020).

dangerous aligns with theories of impression formation, which suggest that individuals rely heavily on linguistic and behavioral cues to infer personality traits and behavioral tendencies (Kunda & Thagard, 1996). In the context of online dating, where information is often limited and impressions are formed based on textual content and visual representations, it makes sense that individuals rely on cues to gauge the compatibility and safety of potential partners (Smith & Semin, 2004). Within this sample, *Emotional Expression and Attitude* was positively correlated with general aggression ratings, suggesting that women are sensitive to cues related to emotional expression and attitude when evaluating potential partners, and they may perceive these cues as indicative of overall aggression levels.

The next most frequently reported reason for rating men higher in aggression and IPV perpetration risk was men's *Association with Societal Stereotypes*. Roughly half (50.8%) of the women mentioned rating men higher on these traits when they displayed characteristics that are stereotyped as more aggressive or abusive, including partying, drinking alcohol, or playing sports. As one woman put it: "*I just based my ratings off of the stereotype that they provided in their biography and based off of my personal experiences knowing certain people that fall within that stereotype. I notice that guys who are a little more misogynistic and take on the jock role tend(s) to be more aggressive and dangerous just because…it shows that they don't value women and they don't really value their safety or their feelings as much in the one profile that like talked about wanting to get to know someone's favorite movie.*" Similarly, signs of misogyny, biased viewpoints, and endorsing more traditional gender roles were commonly identified as reasons women rated certain men higher in aggression or IPV perpetration risk: "*I was looking at people who were describing their ideal mate as someone who would serve them. You know, someone who was nice and respected them and cared about essentially how they, this partner, would*

benefit this man. Um, I find that maybe men with more outdated sort of traditional ideas of what a woman should be…tend to be a little bit more aggressive and dangerous in nature because they think that's what a typical head of house kind of male figure should be… it comes off as very alpha male and eh bad." These findings underscore the profound influence societal stereotypes and cultural norms have on individuals' perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk. In this study, *Associations with Societal Stereotypes* was positively correlated with general aggression ratings and aggression accuracy, suggesting that women's reliance on stereotypes to pick up on men's aggressive tendencies may be beneficial. However, there is also the concern that by aligning their judgments with prevailing stereotypes, women may inadvertently perpetuate and reinforce societal expectations regarding gendered behavior and contribute to the normalization of aggression and abusive tendencies among certain men (Stewart et al., 2021). Moreover, the identification of misogyny and adherence to traditional gender roles as markers of increased aggression and danger underscores the intersectionality of gender, power, and privilege in influencing perceptions of interpersonal behavior (Rollero & De Piccoli, 2020). For instance, men who espouse patriarchal ideologies and endorse rigid gender norms may exhibit a propensity for controlling and coercive behaviors, rooted in beliefs of entitlement and superiority (Reidy et al., 2014). Thus, women's attribution of aggression and IPV perpetration risk to men exhibiting such attitudes reflects a recognition of the systemic inequalities and power differentials that underpin IPV (Rollero & De Piccoli, 2020). However, it is imperative to recognize the limitations of relying solely on stereotype-based assessments, as women may overlook individuals who do not conform to traditional gender norms or exhibit aggression through less overt means (e.g., emotional manipulation).

When it came to making rating decisions, nearly a quarter (22.3%) of the women's judgements were informed by *Feelings of Unease*, which refers to the process of rating men whose profiles elicited feelings of discomfort or an initial negative reaction as more aggressive or risky. As one woman shared, "*I think I've built up, like most women have, some type of gut feeling or instinct, instinct to like, keep their guard up around certain men, and it's become easier to notice certain signs that can be considered red flags. That can show if a man poses a threat to you or not. I definitely considered that [when rating].*" Although not correlated with aggression or IPV perpetration risk ratings/accuracy, this tendency for women to discern subtle cues and non-verbal signals that evoke feelings of discomfort or apprehension highlights the adaptive nature of human cognition, wherein individuals draw upon their lived experiences and emotional responses to inform decision-making processes (Hickson & Khemka, 2014). This may be particularly useful for women, who are at elevated risk for victimization (Smith et al., 2018), as it allows them to navigate potentially risky situations and make informed judgments about potential partners (Smith & Semin, 2004). By tapping into these feelings of unease or instinctual reactions, women may be able to identify potential threats and protect themselves from harm in romantic relationships. Furthermore, this adaptive cognitive process underscores the importance of considering subjective experiences and emotional responses in understanding perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk. Future research should explore how women integrate both cognitive judgments and emotional responses when evaluating potential partners, as well as investigate strategies for enhancing the accuracy of these assessments.

The least frequently reported reasons for rating men higher in aggression and IPV perpetration risk were *Association with Past Experiences* (15.1%) and men's *Political Ideology* (9.5%), both of which present intriguing avenues for further exploration despite lacking direct

correlations with women's aggression or IPV perpetration risk ratings. *Association with Past experiences*, which captures the instances where women drew upon their personal history of abusive encounters or relationships to inform their perceptions of potential partners, illustrates the powerful influence of past trauma on present evaluations. As one woman explained, "*I rated men on aggressive and dangerous based on characteristics of things that the dating profiles were saying about things that are non-negotiable or like what they would fall for in a girl. And like some of them were just like…you have to give me attention or you have to listen to me or stuff like that, like, although it can seem innocent. I think that is an underlying thing, if it's like a you must do this for me, you must do that for me. It can become really dangerous and aggressive because the men that I've known, if they really demanded stuff from you, then they just kind of became really controlling and wanted to just basically have you for themselves which I don't think is safe or a good thing*." This suggests that individuals may be sensitized to certain cues or behaviors reminiscent of past abusive dynamics, and incorporate them into their assessments of potential partners, even when those cues appear subtle or benign on the surface. While not directly linked to women's aggression or IPV perpetration risk ratings in this study, the proportion of respondents who considered past experiences in their evaluations underscores the enduring impact of trauma on interpersonal perceptions.

Similarly, *Political Ideology* referred to the trend where women rated men with more conservative views as higher in aggression and IPV perpetration risk because they perceived conservative ideologies as potentially fostering traditional gender roles and power imbalances within relationships: "*The profiles I rated as high aggression normally they had really strong statements in their profile or they had beliefs that didn't align with mine and seemed kind of off-putting and made me feel more uncomfortable. And then if I thought someone was going to be*

dangerous, I guess, similarly if they had statements that were involving like, really conservative political beliefs. Um, that I think came off as someone who was going to be more dangerous or aggressive, I think overall." This suggests that, although men's *Political Ideology* was reported less frequently as a factor influencing aggression and IPV perpetration risk ratings, it provides valuable insights into how socio-political beliefs intersect with perceptions of interpersonal behavior. However, it is crucial to note that individual experiences and interpretations vary, and political ideology alone is not a definitive predictor of behavior (Feldman & Johnston, 2014).

The final two reasons women rated men as aggressive or dangerous capture the difficulty in making judgments about others from limited information. *Subjectivity and Interpretation,* for which 16.8% of women in the sample discussed, refers to how participants expressed concerns about the fairness and reliability of their judgments, recognizing the inherent limitations of relying on subjective interpretations. This struggle reflects a broader issue in social judgment and decision-making, where individuals must navigate uncertainty and ambiguity when forming impressions of others (Smith & Semin, 2004). In the context of online dating, participants grappled with deciphering the nuances of language, tone, and presentation to make judgements on risk, and often reverted to lower ratings: "*I don't think I rated any of the profiles too high on the traits of dangerous and aggressiveness, just because I don't think there was enough information for me to determine whether or not I think they would be dangerous or aggressive. But I think the highest rating I gave for aggressiveness or dangerous was three out of seven being the highest. And it was mostly because someone put that they really liked guns and I think it's a little strange to put on a dating profile, but even that is my opinions*." Unsurprisingly, *Subjectivity and Interpretation* was negatively correlated with women's general aggression rating, with those who expressed greater concerns about subjectivity tending to assign lower

aggression ratings overall. Despite the purpose of the activity being to gauge participants' perceptions based on limited information, the participants' apprehensions underscore the complexity of making accurate assessments in real-world scenarios. This highlights the importance of acknowledging the inherent subjectivity involved in such evaluations, as well as the need for caution when drawing conclusions based on incomplete information.

In the same vein, 12.5% of women shared that they avoided assigning high ratings of aggression and IPV perpetration risk because there were no clear indicators of abuse and they preferred to maintain a positive and neutral opinion. This *Avoidance of Negative Ratings* reflects a desire to err on the side of caution and avoid potentially harmful consequences of misjudgment. Participants shared that they were reluctant to label individuals as aggressive or potentially abusive without concrete evidence, recognizing the seriousness and potential ramifications of such accusations: "*I feel like not a lot of the options show their personality and they just said things that they think will look like cool. So the profile is one thing, but how you vibe with the person is another. And I couldn't really judge someone's personality on just what they put out there--how they try to make themselves out to me, so I kept things pretty low with the ratings*." (Participant 27684). As such, *Avoidance of Negative Ratings* was negatively correlated with women's general aggression and IPV perpetration risk ratings, as well as their accuracy. Specifically, women who expressed a reluctance to label men as aggressive or dangerous tended to assign lower ratings of aggression and IPV perpetration risk, and their assessments were found to be less accurate overall. This indicates that the tendency to avoid negative judgments resulted in underestimations of potential risk factors in online dating profiles. In real-world dating encounters this perspective may inadvertently contribute to the perpetuation of harmful dynamics. By prioritizing the maintenance of a positive and neutral opinion over potential

warning signs, individuals may overlook or downplay behaviors that could signal a risk of aggression or abuse (Cavallo et al., 2012). This reluctance to acknowledge red flags may increase vulnerability to abusive relationships, as it creates a barrier to recognizing and addressing concerning behavior early on. Moreover, this avoidance of negative ratings may perpetuate a culture of self-silencing and normalization around relationship aggression, wherein individuals may hesitate to speak out or seek help due to fears of being perceived as overly critical or judgmental (Storer et al., 2021). This can further exacerbate the isolation and powerlessness experienced by victims of abuse, reinforcing harmful dynamics and hindering efforts to promote healthy and respectful relationships. Taken together, these qualitative findings have significant implications for both research and practice. From a research perspective, understanding the nuanced factors influencing women's perceptions of risk can inform the development of more comprehensive assessment tools and intervention strategies aimed at preventing relationship aggression and IPV. Practically, recognizing the diverse range of cues and considerations that women take into account when evaluating potential partners underscores the importance of fostering open communication and promoting awareness of healthy relationship dynamics in intervention and prevention settings.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths of this study include being the first to examine how confidence in one's perceptions is related to perceptions of risk in potential dating partners. This lack of significant findings highlights the complexity of interpersonal judgment processes and underscores the need for further research in this area. This study also provides a comprehensive exploration of factors influencing women's perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk in potential partners, as well as uses a controlled research design similar to Studies 1 and 2, enabling direct comparisons

and strengthening the credibility of the results. This inclusion of qualitative data, albeit on only 30 men, provides valuable insights into the complex cognitive processes and considerations underlying women's judgments in online dating contexts and should be taken into consideration in future studies examining risk detection. Nevertheless, there are also several limitations to consider. First, the women in the sample are all college students, limiting the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Future research should aim to include more diverse samples to capture a wider range of perspectives and experiences to fully understand what considerations people take when assigning risk to unknown individuals. Additionally, we did not capture a control stream-of-consciousness task to compare against our aggression/IPV perpetration risk rating stream-of-consciousness task. This omission limits our ability to distinguish whether the narratives provided by participants were influenced by the specific context of evaluating dating profiles or if they reflect more general thought processes applicable across various contexts (e.g., talking about friends). Incorporating a control task in future studies would help clarify the extent to which the context influenced participants' thoughts and judgments. Our stream-of-consciousness task is also built on the premise that individuals can articulate the rationale behind their judgments of potential threats in dating scenarios. However, much decision-making, particularly about other people, is shaped by cognitive biases and mental shortcuts that function beyond immediate consciousness (Newell & Shanks, 2014), thereby limiting the accuracy and completeness of the self-reported justifications. Finally, the absence of a relationship between women’s confidence in their perceptions of men’s traits and overall rating magnitude/accuracy may be due to how confidence was measured. Specifically, confidence was assessed across all traits women reported on, rather than focusing solely on aggression and IPV perpetration risk. This broad approach to measuring confidence may have obscured the specific effects on

perceptions of aggression and IPV risk. Therefore, future studies may benefit from employing more targeted measures to better understand the relationship between confidence and these specific traits. While this study offers valuable insights into the factors shaping women's perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk, further research is needed to address its limitations and build upon these findings to inform more effective prevention and intervention efforts.

In conclusion, this study provides critical insights into women's abilities to perceive aggression and IPV perpetration risk in men, particularly within the context of online dating. Despite women demonstrating an ability to discern men’s aggression at various levels, their competence in identifying IPV perpetration risk appears constrained to high or low levels, particularly in online contexts where cues are limited and positive attributes are emphasized. Confidence in these perceptions was also not associated with accuracy, pointing towards an influence of external factors, such as cultural norms or past experiences, in shaping these perceptions. Additionally, the qualitative exploration of factors influencing perceptions or aggression and IPV perpetration risk revealed the critical role of how men portray their emotional expression in their dating profiles, the impact of societal stereotypes, and the reliance on innate feelings of unease, all of which intricately contributed to their evaluative processes. These findings underscore the need for enhanced education and tools to support women in making safer choices when engaging in online dating, as well as the importance of addressing societal stereotypes and cultural narratives that may cloud or distort perceptions of risk.

STUDY 3 METHODS

Examining the Psychological Processes that May Influence Female Observers' Perceptions of Unknown Men's Aggression and IPV Perpetration Risk

In the final study, I explored whether various psychological processes of the observer (i.e., hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) influence observers' appraisals of aggression/IPV perpetration risk in men, as well as if romantic interest in the men in the dating profiles moderates the relationship between psychological processes and rating trends. A new, non-overlapping sample of women observers (N = 341) were asked to evaluate men's de-identified dating profiles (N = 30).

Hypotheses

I once again predicted that, across the sample as a whole, women observers would be able to accurately rate the profiles of high aggression men and men with high levels IPV perpetration history as more aggressive/dangerous compared to the profiles of men with moderate or low levels of aggression (**H1a**) and IPV perpetration history (**H1b**). In other words, I predicted that female observers will be able to distinguish between men who self-report low, moderate, or high aggression/IPV perpetration history, and that their ratings of these men's aggression/IPV perpetration risk level will be sorted similarly to the level of aggression/IPV perpetration history self-reported by these men. Specifically, I predicted that observers' ratings of high aggression/IPV perpetration targets will be significantly higher than those of moderate aggression/IPV perpetration targets, which will be significantly higher than those of low aggression/IPV perpetration targets.

Next, I examined the associations between women participants' psychological processes (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) and their rating tendencies. Drawing on

literature suggesting that hypervigilance is associated with identifying ambiguous signals as threatening (Hayes et al., 2012), I predicted that more hypervigilance would be associated with overestimating aggression (**H2a**) and IPV risk perpetration potential (**H2b**) in perceptions of unknown men. On the other hand, dissociation may impair an individual's ability to perceive danger where it may actually exist (Nijenhuis & Van der Hart, 2011), resulting in a distorted perception of reality and a decreased sensitivity to feeling in danger (Tschoeke et al., 2019). As such, I predicted that dissociation may result in a general tendency to underestimate the level of aggression (**H3a**) and IPV perpetration risk (**H3b**) in unknown men. Similarly, evidence suggests that individuals who engage in experiential avoidance may have difficulty accurately perceiving and responding to environmental cues (e.g., signs of tension; Hayes et al., 1996), which can lead to a reduced ability to detect and respond to potential threats (Tursi et al., 2022). This can result in a tendency to underestimate risks and overlook warning signs, which can ultimately increase vulnerability to harm. As such, I argued that experiential avoidance would be associated with a general tendency to underestimate the level of aggression (**H4a**) and IPV perpetration risk (**H4b**) in unknown men.

Next, I explored whether participants' psychological processes (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) are associated with participants' *accuracy* in rating of men's aggression (calculated using the men's own ratings of their aggression as a reference point) and IPV perpetration risk (calculated using the men's own abuse perpetration history as the reference point). Drawing on limited research, I predicted that hypervigilance would be associated with decreased accuracy in women observers' perceptions of unknown men's aggression (**H5a**) and IPV perpetration risk level (**H5b**), as they may perceive risk in individuals where it does not exist (Dunmore et al., 2001). Similarly, I argued that dissociation will be

associated with decreased accuracy in naive observers' perceptions of unknown men's aggression (**H6a**) and IPV perpetration risk level (**H6b**), as an impaired view of others, as well as decreased contextual awareness, may negatively impact a person's ability to accurately predict risk, resulting in lower accuracy. Finally, I predicted that experiential avoidance would be associated with lower accuracy in perceptions of potential romantic partners propensity for aggression (**H7a**) and IPV perpetration risk (**H7b**), as individuals are likely to suppress or avoid unpleasant or distressing emotions and experiences, thereby affecting how they process social information. This may lead to a lack of attention and awareness towards important cues and red flags that signal potential abusive behavior, ultimately resulting in inaccurate assessments of a potential partner's risk for aggression and IPV perpetration.

Finally, I predicted that women's romantic interest in the men in the profiles will moderate the association between observer psychological processes (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) and rating tendencies (both in general and in terms of accuracy), such that the association between hypervigilance/dissociation/experiential avoidance and perceptions of unknown men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk level would decrease in the presence of more reported romantic interest. I hypothesize that this decrease reflects the buffering effect romantic interest has on the maladaptive psychological processes associated with PTSS (Fisher et al., 2002; Meier et al., 2023) and may result in increased attention and awareness of the person they are romantically interested in, thereby affecting their perceptions of that person. As this attention is biased towards positive information (Chang, 2019), it reasons that higher romantic interest may interact with psychological processes to underestimate aggression (**H8a**) and IPV perpetration risk (**H8b**) in unknown others, as well as result in reduced accuracy in perceptions of unknown men's aggression (**H9a**) and IPV perpetration risk (**H9b**).

Understanding the effects of biased attention towards positive information in the context of romantic relationships and interpersonal violence is important for developing effective interventions and prevention strategies aimed at reducing the risk of IPV and promoting healthy, safe relationships.

Participants

As with the previous two studies, women undergraduate students were recruited from the online social science subject pool (SONA) at UC Irvine, as well as through flyers on 4-year college campuses, to participate in a study about romantic relationships. Eligibility included being 18 years of age or older, identifying as a woman, identifying as heterosexual, currently being in a romantic relationship or previously being in a romantic relationship, and being able to read and write in English.

A total of $N = 405$ women started the study procedures. After reviewing the data, $n = 46$ participants were removed for not completing the rating activity or providing demographic data (i.e., they opened the survey and quit), and $n = 18$ participants were removed for completing the survey in under 15 minutes, indicating that they were not providing accurate data as the average time to complete the survey was 54 minutes. As such, the resultant sample for analyses consisted of $N = 341$ women. On average, women participants had a mean age of 20.74 years ($SD = 3.80$), reported having been in 1.75 relationships ($SD = 0.89$), and most (98.5%) participants reported a preference for dating one person at a time. Roughly half (45.5%) of participants self-identified as Asian, followed by 27.9% as Latina, 11.7% as white, 10.2% as multiracial, 3.2% as Middle Eastern, and 1.5% as African American. The majority of the sample (59%) reported not using online dating sites.

Procedures

All measures and procedures have been approved by the University Institutional Review Board (HS#2456). Those who meet eligibility criteria and provided consent completed an online activity and answered questionnaires about their personal experiences (e.g., hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance symptoms). First, each woman observer was assigned to view 9 of the 30 de-identified dating profiles (randomized and order counterbalanced to ensure there are no order effects) and asked to rate their romantic interest in the participant on a scale of 1 (not interested) to 7 (very interested). Then, as part of the activity, female observers were once again presented with the same dating profiles and asked to rate each person's profile on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very) on various traits related to romantic relationships, including aggression and dangerousness (our term for IPV perpetration risk). Participants were instructed to form an impression of the individual based on the dating profile and then rate them accordingly on the following traits: financially responsible (distractor), romantic (distractor), lazy (distractor), funny (distractor), aggressive, extraverted (distractor), successful (distractor), attractive (distractor), and dangerous. This rating procedure was employed due to our concerns that observers would be able to identify the aims of the study if they completed the same measures on aggression and IPV perpetration for each of the men in the dating profiles. All procedures were completed online via Qualtrics.

Measures

Aggression rating. As discussed above, women observers were instructed to form an impression of the individual based on their de-identified dating profile and then rate them on a number of characteristics, including aggression, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (very).

IPV perpetration risk rating. As with aggression, Women observers were instructed to form an impression of the individual based on their de-identified dating profile and then rate

their level of dangerousness (proxy for IPV perpetration risk) on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (very).

Romantic interest. Women observers were also instructed to report on their romantic interest in the individual based on their de-identified dating profile and then rate them on a scale of 1 (not interested) to 7 (very interested).

Hypervigilance. Women observers reported on their hypervigilance using the Hyperarousal Scale (H-Scale; Regestein et al., 1996), a 26-item self-report measure that assesses the degree of hyperactivation a person experiences in their daily life. Higher scores indicate higher reactivity/hypervigilance (e.g., "*I get rattled when a lot happens at once;* "*My mind is always going.*"). Questions were rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (Not at all) to 3 (Extremely). Past studies have utilized this scale to assess hypervigilance (Bruno et al., 2020). Cronbach's alpha was .72.

Dissociation. Women observers reported on their dissociative tendencies using the Brief Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES-B; Dalenberg & Carlson, 2010). This 8-item measure assesses the degree of dissociation a person experiences in their daily life (e.g., "*I feel as though I were looking at the world through a fog so that people and things seem far away or unclear*.") on a 5-point scale from 0 (Not at all) to 4 (More than once a day). Higher scores indicate more dissociation. Cronbach's alpha was .82.

Experiential avoidance. Women observers reported on their experiential avoidance tendencies using the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-2; Bond et al., 2011). This 7-item self-report measure assesses is a 7-item self-report measure designed to assess the degree to which individuals are willing to experience unwanted thoughts and feelings without attempting

to control or avoid them (e.g., "*I'm afraid of my feelings.*") on a 7-point scale from 1 (Never true) to 7 (Always true). Higher scores indicate less flexibility. Cronbach's alpha was .77.

Data Preparation Plan

Levels of aggression/IPV perpetration risk. To assess whether participants accurately rated more aggressive profiles/profiles of men with higher IPV perpetration as significantly more aggressive/dangerous compared to less aggressive profiles/profiles of men with less IPV perpetration history (**Hypothesis 1**), I created mean ratings for aggression and IPV perpetration by profile level of aggression/IPV perpetration (low, moderate, high) to compare against one another using analyses of variance tests.

Discrepancy/accuracy score computation. To evaluate participant accuracy in ratings of men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk (**Hypotheses 5 - 7, 10**), I created directional discrepancy scores by taking the difference between each participant's standardized rating of the man's aggression/IPV perpetration risk level and the man's standardized self-rating of aggression/IPV perpetration (Dimler et al., 2017). I completed this procedure for all profiles and then I computed a mean score of all these differences. Negative values signify that, on average, the participant overestimated the man's aggression/IPV perpetration risk (relative to the man's own rating), while positive values indicate that the participants underestimated the man's aggression/IPV perpetration risk (relative to the man's own rating).

Data Analytic Plan

To test study hypotheses, I conducted analyses of variance (Hypothesis 1) and hierarchical linear regressions (**Hypotheses 2 - 8**) via SPSS Statistics for Macs, Version 26.0. Hayes' PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2012) was used to probe the simple slopes from the moderation analyses. In all hierarchical linear regressions, I controlled for participant age,

number of relationships, and race (using dichotomized race variables), as past research has illustrated that these factors are associated with IPV victimization and may influence how participants perceive the dating profiles (Cho, 2011; Halpern et al., 2009). I also controlled for total trauma history as trauma exposure was significantly associated with all psychological processes (hypervigilance, $p < 0.001$; dissociation, $p < 0.001$; experiential avoidance, $p < 0.001$). I chose to control for total trauma here, rather than specific instances of IPV victimization or CM exposure, as participants did not report which specific traumatic event they had in mind when responding to measures of hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance. This ambiguity in the reference point could introduce variability and potential bias into the data. By controlling for total trauma, I was striving to standardize this variable, providing a more consistent baseline across all participants. This approach has the added benefit of reducing confounding factors associated with the varied nature of participants' traumatic experiences. Since trauma can take many forms and evoke a range of psychological responses, focusing on total trauma allows me to isolate the relationship between specific psychological processes and observers' appraisals of aggression/IPV risk. This also ensures that any significant findings in my study are less likely to be influenced by the unique characteristics of individual traumatic experiences, leading to more robust and reliable results. Future research should examine the direct impact of IPV victimization and CM exposure on psychological processes and how they are related to perceptions or aggression and IPV perpetration risk.

In terms of **Hypothesis 1**, analyses of variance tests were utilized to compare level of aggression/IPV perpetration risk ratings against one another to elucidate whether women observers rate men with high levels of self-reported aggression/IPV perpetration history as more aggressive/dangerous than men with moderate levels of aggression/IPV perpetration history, as

well as whether men with moderate aggression/IPV perpetration history are rated as more aggressive/dangerous than men with low levels of aggression/IPV perpetration history.

For hypotheses examining how psychological processes (**Hypotheses 2 - 4**) relate to general rating tendencies, observers' mean aggression/IPV perpetration risk rating of the dating profiles was entered as the dependent variable of the regression and observer hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance were entered in step 2 of the regression. When examining psychological processes (**Hypotheses 5 - 7**) as a predictor of rating accuracy, observer hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance were entered in step 2 of the regression, while participants' mean discrepancy rating was entered as the dependent variable.

Finally, moderation analyses were utilized to examine the interaction between psychological processes and romantic interest in predicting rating trends (**Hypotheses 8 - 9**), controlling for participant age, race (dichotomized race variables), and number of romantic relationships. PROCESS (Model 1) macro was used to probe the simple slopes of significant moderation analyses.

STUDY 3 RESULTS

Most (82%; n = 280) women in this sample reported exposure to some form of trauma. The most frequently reported experiences included death of a loved one (47.2%), living through a natural disaster (46.9%), serious injury (34.6%), growing up with IPV in the home (28.2%), IPV victimization (26.4%), unwanted sexual attention (26.1%), and being stalked (23.2%). In terms of romantic interest in the men in the profiles, the average rating was 2.58 (SD = 1.04) out of 7, indicating that the average level of romantic interest was relatively low. Additionally, there was no significant difference between how women rated their level of romantic interest in low, moderate, or high aggression/IPV perpetration risk profiles. See Table 10 for descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among key study variables.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1a: *Do women participants as a whole rate highly aggressive profiles as more aggressive than moderate or low aggressive male profiles?* Analyses of variance revealed that, on average, there was a significant difference between how women rated low, moderate, and high aggression profiles [$F(2,1020) = 50.48$, $p = 0.001$]. A Tukey post hoc test revealed that the women rated the high aggression profiles as significantly more aggressive than the moderate aggression profiles ($p < 0.001$), and moderate aggression profiles as significantly more aggressive than low aggression profiles ($p < 0.001$). In other words, participants were able to accurately differentiate between men's propensity for aggression at low, moderate, and high levels after viewing their dating profile.

Hypothesis 1b: *Do women participants as a whole rate men's profiles with high IPV perpetration history as higher risk than men's profiles with moderate and low IPV perpetration history?* Analyses of variance revealed that, on average, there was a significant difference

Table 10.

Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations for Women Participants' Key Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Mean (SD)	20.74(3.80)	1.75(0.89)	5.67(6.42)	41.25 (10.81)	8.33(6.36)	21.81(10.66)	2.58 (1.04)	2.18(0.91)	1.71(0.63)	2.21(0.91)	0.03(0.63)
Min, Max	18, 35	1.00, 5.00	0.00, 42.00	15.00, 78.00	0.00, 32.00	7.00, 49.00	0.00, 6.00	1.00, 7.00	-0.99, 2.62	1.00, 7.00	-2.41, 0.93
1. Age	-										
2. Number of Relationships	**0.27****	-									
3. Total Trauma History	**0.21****	**0.32****	-								
4. Hypervigilance	-0.06	0.02	**0.14****	-							
5. Dissociation	-0.04	**0.16****	**0.32****	**0.45****	-						
6. Experiential Avoidance	-0.04	0.11	**0.35****	**0.48****	**0.51****	-					
7. Romantic Interest	-0.05	-0.07	0.03	0.10	0.05	0.10	-				
8. General Aggression Rating	0.07	0.10	**0.20****	**0.16****	0.07	**0.13***	0.09	-			
9. Aggression Accuracy[1]	-0.09	**-0.11***	**-0.21****	**-0.14***	-0.03	**-0.12***	**-0.13***	**-0.95****	-		
10. General IPV Perpetration Rating	0.03	**0.14****	**0.15****	**0.16****	0.09	0.10	0.04	**0.81****	**-0.80****	-	
11. IPV Perpetration Risk Accuracy[1]	-0.04	**-0.14****	**-0.15****	**-0.16****	-0.07	-0.09	-0.08	**-0.80****	**0.81****	**-0.98****	-

[1]Negative values signify high accuracy

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *SD* Standard deviation; *Min* Minimum score on variable; *Max* Maximum score on variable.

between how women rated profiles with low, moderate, and high IPV perpetration history [$F(2,1020) = 45.79$, $p = 0.001$]. A Tukey post hoc test showed that the women rated the high IPV perpetration history profiles as significantly more dangerous than the moderate IPV perpetration history profiles ($p < 0.001$), and moderate IPV perpetration history profiles as significantly more dangerous than low IPV perpetration history profiles ($p = 0.001$). In other words, women participants were able to accurately differentiate between men's propensity for IPV perpetration risk at low, moderate, and high levels after viewing their dating profile.

Hypotheses 2, 3, 4a: *Do women who report more hypervigilance rate men's aggression higher, while women reporting higher dissociation and experiential avoidance tendencies generally rate men's aggression lower?* After controlling for participant age, race, number of romantic relationships, and total trauma history, $R^2 = 0.06$, $p = 0.004$, the step containing the main effects (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) was not significantly associated with women's ratings of men's aggression, $\Delta R^2 = 0.02$, $p = 0.12$. Only hypervigilance, as hypothesized, was significantly associated with women's ratings of men's aggression, $b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.03$, with those scoring higher on hypervigilance rating men as more aggressive. Contrary to our hypotheses, neither dissociation ($b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.45$), nor experiential avoidance ($b = 0.00$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.76$) were significantly associated with women's ratings of men's aggression. Additionally, total trauma history was significantly associated with women's general ratings of aggression, $b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < 0.001$, such that those reporting more trauma history rated men as more aggressive. See Table 11 for regressions examining women's psychological processes in predicting general aggression ratings.

Hypotheses 2, 3, 4b: *Do women who report more hypervigilance rate men's IPV perpetration risk higher, while women reporting higher dissociation and experiential avoidance*

tendencies generally rate men's IPV perpetration risk lower? After controlling for participant age, race, number of romantic relationships, and total trauma history, $R^2 = 0.05$, $p = 0.01$, the step containing the main effects (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) was not significantly associated with women's ratings of men's IPV perpetration risk level, $\Delta R^2 = 0.02$, $p = 0.12$. Only hypervigilance, as hypothesized, was significantly associated with women's ratings of men's IPV perpetration risk level, $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.03$, with those scoring higher on hypervigilance rating men as higher in IPV perpetration risk. Contrary to our hypotheses, neither dissociation ($b = 0.00$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.91$), nor experiential avoidance ($b = 0.00$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.91$) were significantly associated with women's ratings of men's IPV perpetration risk level. Additionally, total trauma history was significantly associated with women's general ratings of IPV perpetration risk, $b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.03$, such that those reporting more trauma history rated men as higher in IPV perpetration risk. See Table 11 for regressions examining women's psychological processes in predicting general IPV perpetration risk ratings.

Hypotheses 5, 6, 7a: *Are women who report more hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance tendencies less accurate in their rating of men's aggression?* After controlling for participant age, race, number of relationships, and total trauma history, $R^2 = 0.07$, $p < 0.001$, the step containing the main effects (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) was not significantly associated with women's ratings of men's aggression, $\Delta R^2 = 0.02$, $p = 0.15$. Only hypervigilance, as hypothesized, was significantly associated with women's increased accuracy in rating men's aggression, $b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.047$. Contrary to our hypotheses, neither dissociation ($b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.15$), nor experiential avoidance ($b = 0.00$, $SE = 0.00$, $p = 0.56$) were significantly associated with women's accuracy of ratings men's aggression. Additionally, total trauma history was significantly associated with women's

increased accuracy in rating men's aggression, b = -0.02, SE = 0.01, $p < 0.001$. See Table 12 for regressions examining women's psychological processes in predicting their accuracy in rating men's aggression.

Hypotheses 5, 6, 7b: *Are women who report more hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance tendencies less accurate in their rating of men's IPV perpetration risk?* After controlling for participant age, race, number of relationships, and total trauma history, R^2 = 0.05, p = 0.01, the step containing the main effects (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) was not significantly associated with women's accuracy of ratings men's IPV perpetration risk level, ΔR^2 = 0.02, p = 0.14. Only hypervigilance, as hypothesized, was significantly associated with women's increased accuracy in rating men's IPV perpetration risk level, b = -0.08, SE = 0.03, p = 0.03. Contrary to our hypotheses, neither dissociation (b = 0.03, SE = 0.06, p = 0.64), nor experiential avoidance (b = 0.01, SE = 0.04, p = 0.80) were significantly associated with women's accuracy in ratings men's IPV perpetration risk level. Once again, total trauma history was significantly associated with women's increased accuracy in ratings of men's IPV perpetration risk, b = -0.11, SE = 0.05, p = 0.03. See Table 12 for regressions examining women's psychological processes in predicting their accuracy in rating men's IPV perpetration risk.

Hypotheses 8a: *Does higher romantic interest in the men from the profiles moderate the association between participants' psychological processes (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) and their ratings of aggression, such that increased romantic interest leads to lower perceived aggression?* After controlling for participant age, race, number of relationships, and total trauma history, R^2 = 0.08, p = 0.001, the interaction between

Table 11.

Regressions Examining Women's Psychological Processes (Hypervigilance, Dissociation, Experiential Avoidance) in Predicting General Aggression and IPV Perpetration Risk Ratings.

	Aggression			IPV Perpetration Risk		
	b/ΔR^2	*SE*	95% CI	*b*/ΔR^2	*SE*	95% CI
Step 1 ΔR^2	0.06**			0.05**		
Age	0.01	0.01	[-0.02, 0.03]	-0.01	0.01	[-0.03, 0.02]
Num of Rel	0.01	0.06	[-0.11, 0.13]	0.10	0.06	[-0.02, 0.21]
Asian	0.22	0.15	[-0.07, 0.52]	0.26	0.15	[-0.03, 0.56]
Latina	-0.02	0.16	[-0.34, 0.29]	0.05	0.16	[-0.27, 0.37]
White	0.13	0.19	[-0.26, 0.51]	0.16	0.20	[-0.23, 0.54]
African American	-0.29	0.42	[-1.11, 0.54]	-0.51	0.42	[-1.34, 0.32]
Trauma History	**0.03****	0.01	[0.01, 0.05]	**0.02***	0.01	[0.00, 0.03]
Step 2 ΔR^2	0.02			0.02		
Hypervigilance	**0.01***	0.01	[0.00, 0.02]	**0.01***	0.01	[0.00, 0.02]
Dissociation	-0.01	0.01	[-0.03, 0.01]	-0.01	0.01	[-0.02, 0.02]
Exp. Avoidance	0.01	0.01	[-0.01, 0.01]	-0.01	0.01	[-0.01, 0.01]

* p<.05, ** p<.01; Age = Participant age; Num of Rel = Number of reported romantic relationships; Trauma History = Participant reported total trauma history (assessed via the TLEQ); Hypervigilance = Participant reported hypervigilance (assessed via the H-Scale); Dissociation = Participant reported dissociative tendencies (assessed via the DES-B); Experiential Avoidance = Participant reported experiential avoidance (assessed via the AAQ-2).

Table 12.

Regressions Examining Women's Psychological Processes (Hypervigilance, Dissociation, Experiential Avoidance) in Predicting their Accuracy in Rating Men's Aggression and IPV Perpetration Risk.

	Aggression Accuracy			IPV Perpetration Risk Accuracy		
	b/ΔR^2	*SE*	95% CI	*b*/ΔR^2	*SE*	95% CI
Step 1 ΔR^2	0.07**			0.05*		
Age	-0.01	0.01	[-0.02, 0.01]	0.03	0.08	[-0.14, 0.19]
Num of Rel	-0.01	0.04	[-0.09, 0.07]	-0.57	0.37	[-1.30, 0.16]
Asian	-0.14	0.10	[-0.35, 0.06]	-1.63	0.93	[-3.46, 0.20]
Latina	0.07	0.11	[-0.15, 0.29]	-0.18	0.99	[-2.15, 1.78]
White	-0.07	0.13	[-0.34, 0.19]	-0.85	1.21	[-3.23, 1.53]
African American	0.22	0.29	[-0.35, 0.79]	2.85	2.62	[-2.29, 8.00]
Trauma History	**-0.02****	0.01	[-0.03, -0.01]	**-0.11***	0.05	[-0.20, -0.01]
Step 2 ΔR^2	0.02			0.02		
Hypervigilance	**-0.01***	0.01	[-0.01, 0.00]	**-0.08***	0.03	[-0.14, -0.01]
Dissociation	0.01	0.01	[0.00, 0.02]	0.03	0.06	[-0.09, 0.15]
Exp. Avoidance	-0.01	0.01	[-0.01, 0.00]	0.01	0.04	[-0.06, 0.08]

* p<.05, ** p<.01; Age = Participant age; Num of Rel = Number of reported romantic relationships; Trauma History = Participant reported total trauma history (assessed via the TLEQ); Hypervigilance = Participant reported hypervigilance (assessed via the H-Scale); Dissociation = Participant reported dissociative tendencies (assessed via the DES-B); Experiential Avoidance = Participant reported experiential avoidance (assessed via the AAQ-2).

hypervigilance and romantic interest on women's perception of men's aggression was not significant (b = 0.00, SE = 0.01, p = 0.87).

In a similar model, after controlling for the same covariates, R^2 = 0.07, p = 0.004, the interaction between dissociation and romantic interest on women's perception of men's aggression was also not significant (b = -0.01, SE = 0.01, p = 0.11).

Finally, in a similar model controlling for the same covariates, R^2 = 0.09, p = .001, the interaction between experiential avoidance and romantic interest on women's perception of men's aggression was found to be significant (b = -0.01, SE = 0.01, p = 0.01). Simple slope tests revealed that the interaction effect was significant at low levels of romantic interest (b = 0.02, p = 0.02), but not at moderate (p = 0.22) or high levels (p = 0.46). Specifically, when women reported lower levels of romantic interest, higher levels of experiential avoidance were associated with greater perceived aggression in men. However, as romantic interest increased to moderate or high levels, this relationship weakened and became nonsignificant, suggesting that experiential avoidance may have a greater impact on women's perceptions of men's aggression when there is less romantic interest involved.

Hypotheses 8b: *Does higher romantic interest in the men from the profiles moderate the association between participants' psychological processes (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) and their ratings of IPV perpetration risk, such that increased romantic interest leads to lower perceived IPV perpetration risk?* After controlling for participant age, race, number of relationships, and total trauma history, R^2 = 0.07, p = 0.001, the interaction between hypervigilance and romantic interest on women's perception of men's IPV perpetration risk was not significant (b = 0.00, SE = 0.00, p = 0.80).

In a similar model, after controlling for the same covariates, $R^2 = 0.07$, $p = 0.01$, the interaction between dissociation and romantic interest on women's perception of men's IPV perpetration risk was also not significant ($b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.09$).

Finally, in a model controlling for the same covariates, $R^2 = 0.08$, $p = 0.001$, the interaction between experiential avoidance and romantic interest on women's perception of men's IPV perpetration risk was found to be significant ($b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.003$). Simple slope tests revealed that the interaction effect was significant at low levels of romantic interest ($b = 0.02$, $p = 0.01$), but not at moderate ($p = 0.23$) or high levels ($p = 0.25$). In other words, when women reported lower levels of romantic interest, higher levels of experiential avoidance were associated with greater perceived IPV perpetration risk in men, once again suggesting that experiential avoidance may have a greater impact on women's perceptions of men's aggression when romantic interest is less involved.

Hypotheses 9a: *Does higher romantic interest in the men from the profiles moderate the association between participants' psychological processes (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) and their accuracy in rating aggression, such that increased romantic interest leads to decreased accuracy?* After controlling for participant age, race, number of relationships, and total trauma history, $R^2 = 0.10$, $p < 0.001$, the interaction between hypervigilance and romantic interest on women's accuracy in rating men's aggression was not significant ($b = 0.00$, $SE = 0.00$, $p = 0.72$).

In another model, after controlling for the same covariates, $R^2 = 0.10$, $p < 0.001$, the interaction between dissociation and romantic interest on women's accuracy in ratings men's aggression was similarly not significant ($b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.13$).

Finally, in a model controlling for the same covariates, $R^2 = 0.11$, $p < 0.001$, the interaction between experiential avoidance and romantic interest on women's accuracy in ratings men's aggression was found to be significant ($b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.00$, $p = 0.02$). Specifically, at low levels of romantic interest, women's accuracy in rating men's aggression (i.e., overestimating aggression) increased with higher levels of experiential avoidance ($b = -0.02$, $p = 0.03$). However, this effect was not observed at moderate ($p = 0.32$) or high levels ($p = 0.36$) of romantic interest, further suggesting that experiential avoidance may only impact women's perceptions of men's aggression when romantic interest is low.

Hypotheses 9b: *Does higher romantic interest in the men from the profiles moderate the association between participants' psychological processes (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) and their accuracy in rating IPV perpetration risk, such that increased romantic interest leads to decreased accuracy?* After controlling for participant age, race, number of relationships, and total trauma history, $R^2 = 0.07$, $p < 0.001$, the interaction between hypervigilance and romantic interest on women's accuracy in rating men's IPV perpetration risk was not significant ($b = 0.00$, $SE = 0.00$, $p = 0.99$).

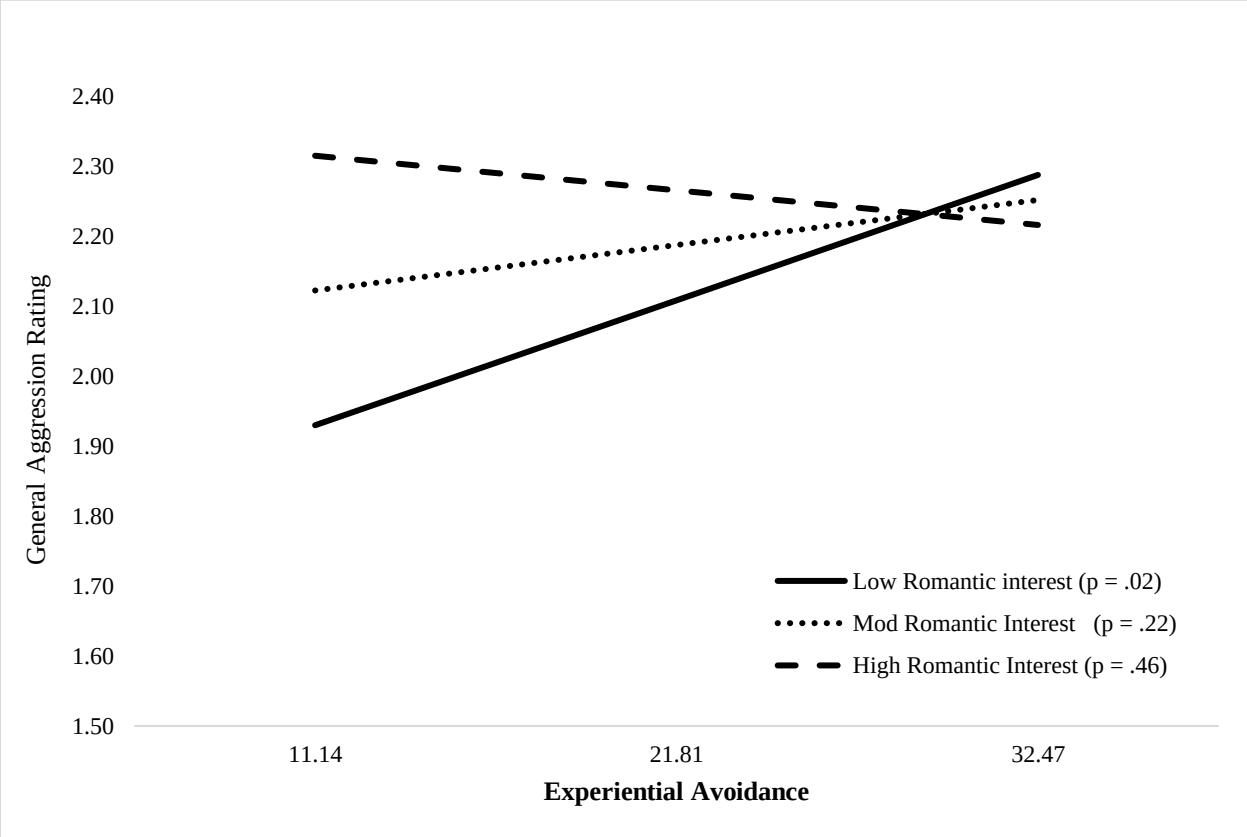
In another model, after controlling for the same covariates, $R^2 = 0.07$, $p = 0.001$, the interaction between dissociation and romantic interest on women's accuracy in rating men's IPV perpetration risk was also not significant ($b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = 0.09$).

Finally, in a model controlling for the same covariates, $R^2 = 0.09$, $p = 0.001$, the interaction between experiential avoidance and romantic interest on women's accuracy in rating men's IPV perpetration risk was found to be significant ($b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.00$, $p < 0.001$). Simple slope tests revealed that the interaction effect was only significant at low levels of romantic interest ($b = -0.01$, $p = 0.01$), and not at moderate ($p = 0.38$) or high levels ($p = 0.12$). In other

words, when women reported lower levels of romantic interest, higher levels of experiential avoidance were associated with increased accuracy in their perceptions of men's IPV perpetration risk.

Figure 1.

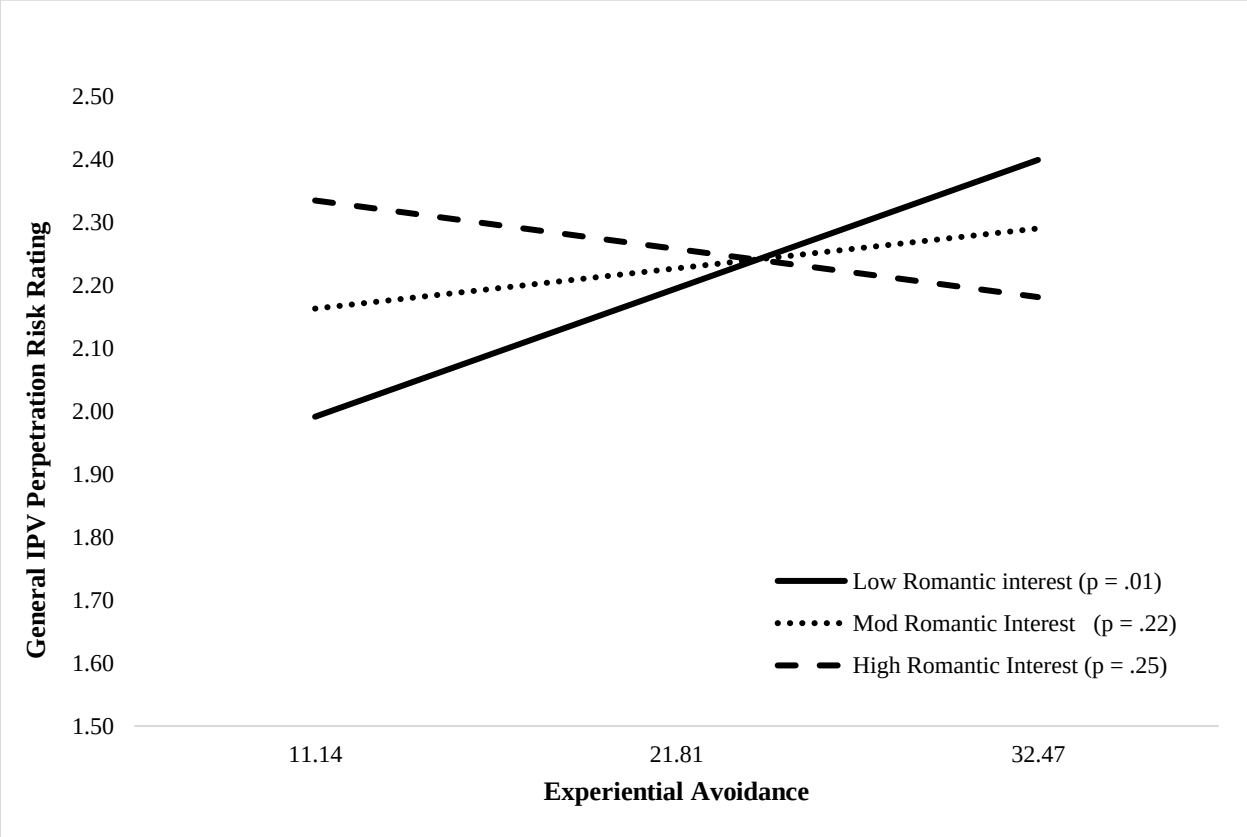
Interaction Between Romantic Interest and Experiential Avoidance in Predicting the Magnitude of Women's Ratings of Men's Aggression.



Note: Romantic interest = Women's level of romantic interest in the men in the profiles; Experiential Avoidance = Women's reported experiential avoidance via the DES-B; General Aggression Ratings = Women's mean aggression rating for men's profiles. Moderation analyses controlled for women's age, number of romantic relationships, race (dichotomized), and total trauma history.

Figure 2.

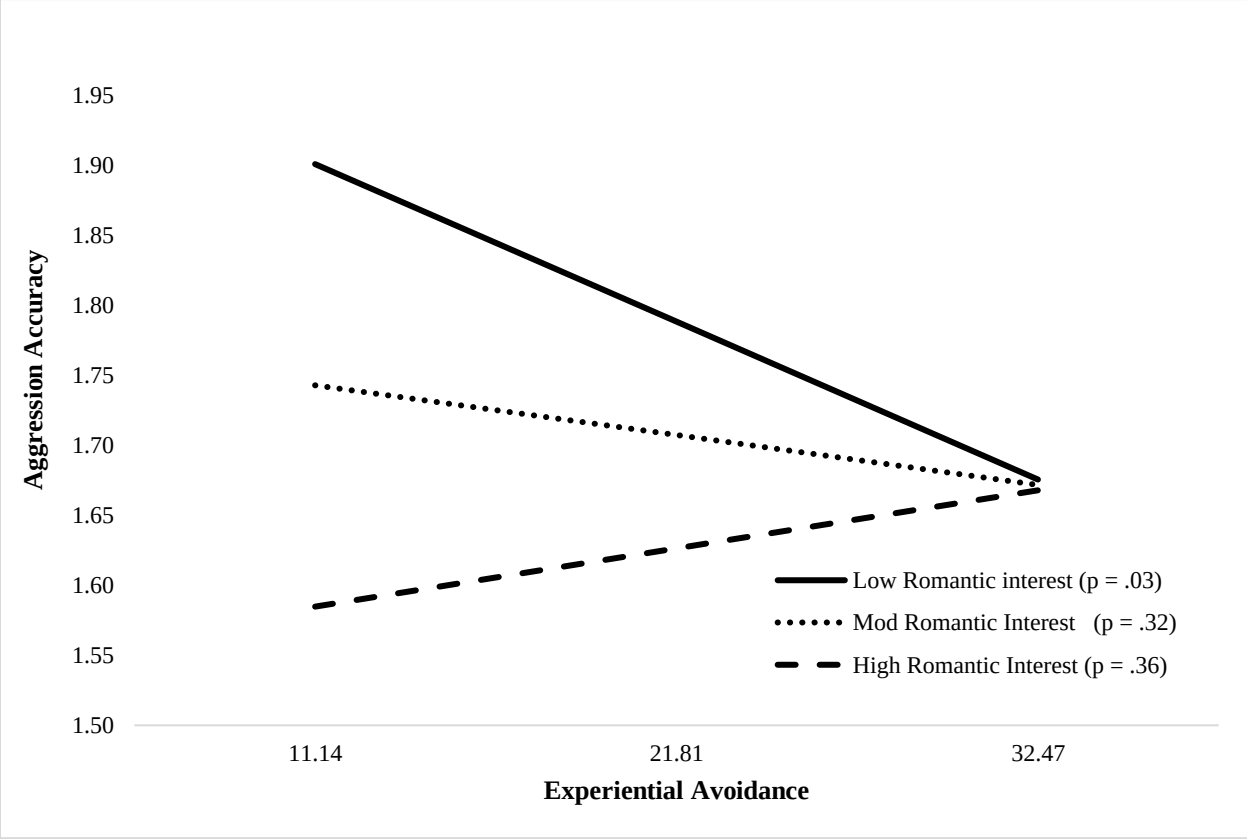
Interaction Between Romantic Interest and Experiential Avoidance in Predicting the Magnitude of Women's Ratings of Men's IPV Perpetration Risk.



Note: Romantic interest = Women's level of romantic interest in the men in the profiles; Experiential Avoidance = Women's reported experiential avoidance via the DES-B; General IPV Perpetration Risk Ratings = Women's mean IPV perpetration risk rating for men's profiles. Moderation analyses controlled for women's age, number of romantic relationships, race (dichotomized), and total trauma history.

Figure 3.

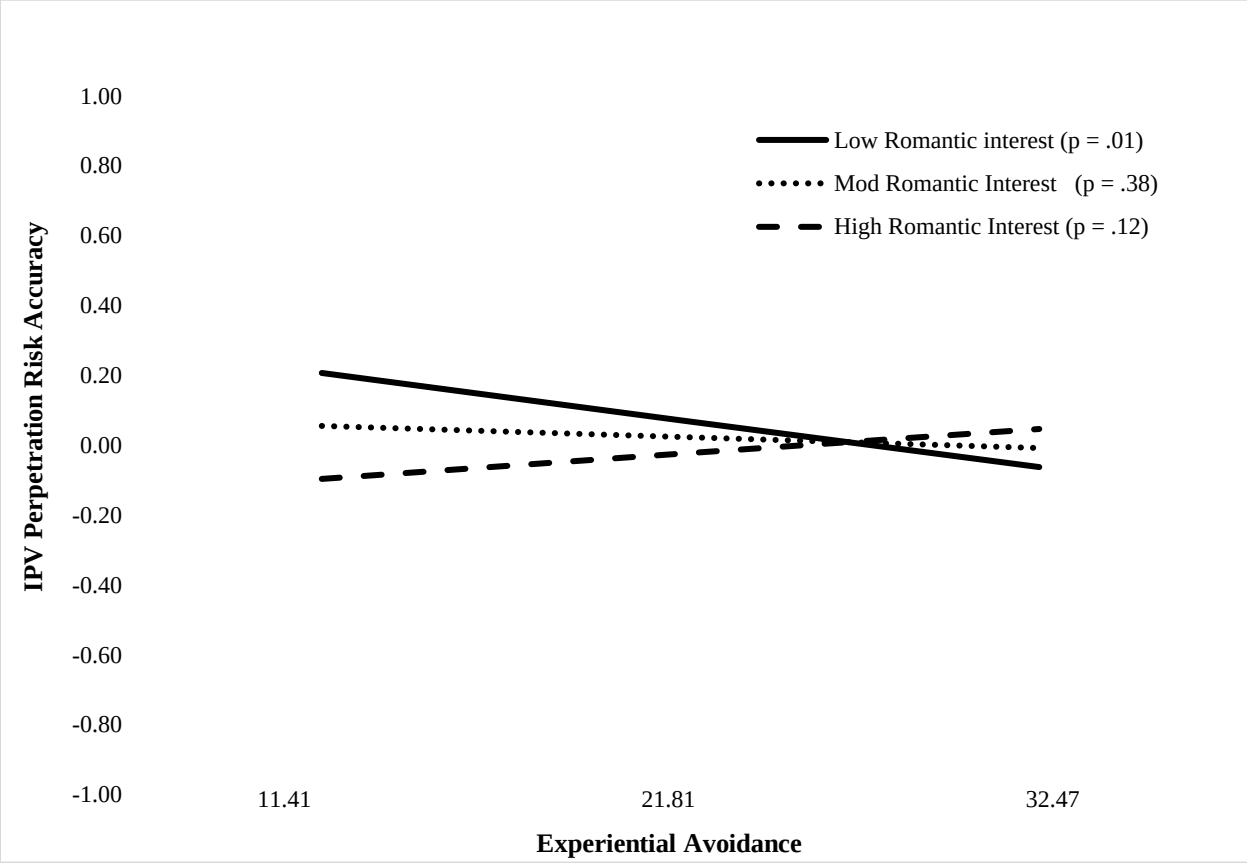
Interaction Between Romantic Interest and Experiential Avoidance in Predicting the Accuracy of Women's Ratings of Men's Aggression.



Note: Romantic interest = Women's level of romantic interest in the men in the profiles; Experiential Avoidance = Women's reported experiential avoidance via the DES-B; Aggression Accuracy = Women's accuracy in rating men's aggression (negative values signify more accuracy). Moderation analyses controlled for women's age, number of romantic relationships, race (dichotomized), and total trauma history.

Figure 4.

Interaction Between Romantic Interest and Experiential Avoidance in Predicting the Accuracy of Women's Ratings of Men's IPV Perpetration Risk.



Note: Romantic interest = Women's level of romantic interest in the men in the profiles; Experiential Avoidance = Women's reported experiential avoidance via the DES-B; IPV Perpetration Risk Accuracy = Women's accuracy in rating men's IPV perpetration risk (negative values signify more accuracy). Moderation analyses controlled for women's age, number of romantic relationships, race (dichotomized), and total trauma history.

STUDY 3 DISCUSSION

Understanding how various psychological processes impact women's perception of risk in unknown men is paramount to gaining insight into the intricacies of making appraisals in online dating contexts. In this final study, I endeavored to elucidate the nuanced role of psychological phenomena, including hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance, in shaping women observer's (N = 341) judgments of unknown men's propensity for aggression and IPV perpetration risk. Furthermore, I aimed to investigate the moderating effect of women's romantic interest in the men depicted in the dating profiles on the relationship between these psychological processes and perceptions. It is important to note that trauma history can significantly influence individuals' psychological processes and perceptions (Jungilligens et al., 2020; Tursi et al., 2022). Importantly, the majority (82%) of our sample reported some form of trauma exposure. Therefore, to ensure the validity and accuracy of our findings, I controlled for trauma in these analyses. By controlling for trauma, rather than IPV victimization or CM exposure directly, I aimed to isolate the specific effects of hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance on risk perception, independent of potential confounding factors. Since participants did not indicate which specific traumatic events informed their responses to the psychological measures, controlling for trauma overall provided a more consistent baseline across the sample. This approach allowed for a more accurate assessment of how these psychological processes impact perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk in unknown men, while minimizing noise introduced by different trauma histories. By establishing this more uniform foundation, this study can better examine the relationship between various psychological processes and women's risk perception in online dating contexts, without the additional variability that might arise from focusing on specific trauma types. Through this comprehensive

examination, the study sheds light on the multifaceted interplay between psychological factors and romantic interest, providing valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying risk assessment in online dating scenarios.

Women's Ability to Identify Aggression & IPV Perpetration Risk in Unknown Men

Consistent with Study 1 and 2, women once again demonstrated a keen ability to differentiate between varying levels of aggression and IPV perpetration risk based on the information provided in dating profiles. In terms of aggression, this strongly suggests that women possess a consistent and reliable perceptual acuity when gauging the aggressive tendencies of men through online dating profiles. This ability to accurately discern between low, moderate, and high levels of aggression underscores the robustness of women's judgment processes in evaluating potential risks associated with interpersonal behavior. However, it is important to note that these perceptions may not singularly determine whether a person proceeds with a potential romantic partner. Other appealing aspects of a profile, such as shared interests, values, and personality traits, may also influence women's decision-making process (Miller, 2012). Therefore, while the ability to discern aggression is crucial, it is only one factor among many that contribute to women's overall evaluation of compatibility and suitability in a romantic partner. Further research should delve into the interplay between perceived aggression and other profile attributes to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how women navigate online dating dynamics and make informed decisions about potential partners.

Similarly, women also demonstrated a remarkable ability to assess the risk of IPV perpetration associated with potential dating partners. While previous studies indicated that women could effectively distinguish between high and low levels of IPV perpetration risk in potential partners, this study revealed that women were able to discern between high, moderate,

and low levels of risk, suggesting a more nuanced perception in this regard. This may be due to a combination of individual factors, including socialization, past experiences, and instincts geared towards self-preservation that made these women more preceptive of the subtle cues and red flags indicative of IPV (Christopher et al., 2014; Short et al., 2000). Further research is needed to explore the underlying mechanisms driving women's nuanced perception of IPV perpetration risk in the context of online dating, as well as whether these perceptions influence their decision-making process (i.e., whether they go on a date with a person or not). Understanding the specific factors that contribute to women's ability to discern varying levels of risk, and how they respond to it, can inform the development of targeted interventions aimed at promoting safety and well-being in online dating environments.

Psychological Processes Predicting General Aggression & IPV Perpetration Ratings

In terms of whether women's psychological processes (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) were predictive of the overall magnitude of their ratings of men's aggression/IPV perpetration risk level, analyses revealed that only hypervigilance, as well as total trauma history, were significantly associated with rating men higher on aggression and IPV perpetration risk. This aligns with theory as hypervigilance, often a consequence of prior traumatic experiences (Dalgleish et al., 2001), primes individuals to perceive ambiguous cues as indicative of danger (Hayes et al., 2012), potentially leading to a tendency to overestimate men's propensity for aggression and IPV perpetration. In online dating, this may lead individuals to rely heavily on profile information, photos, and initial details to gauge compatibility and safety. However, the tendency to overestimate risk, particularly in the context of aggression and IPV perpetration, could lead to biased judgments and potentially affect decision-making processes. For individuals who have experienced trauma and exhibit hypervigilant tendencies, online dating

platforms may inadvertently exacerbate their perception of risk. Innocuous behaviors or ambiguous cues may be misinterpreted as red flags, triggering heightened anxiety and reluctance to proceed (Miller, 2012). As this pattern was found with both aggression and IPV perpetration risk, it reasons that women reporting more hypervigilance tend to view potential romantic partners as a high risk for threat. While it is essential to remain vigilant for self-protection, this hyper-awareness may also result in an exaggerated perception of threats, causing harmless interactions to be misinterpreted as dangerous signals (Dunmore et al., 2001).

In contrast to these significant findings, neither dissociation nor experiential avoidance were associated with women's ratings of men's aggression or IPV perpetration risk level. In other words, women reporting more dissociation and experiential avoidance tendencies did not perceive men as significantly more or less aggressive/at risk for IPV perpetration compared to women reporting less dissociation and experiential avoidance tendencies. Perhaps these processes operate differently in the context of evaluating potential risk in romantic partners, particularly in online contexts. Dissociation, characterized by a disconnection from thoughts, feelings, or memories (Carlson et al., 2012), may not directly influence perceptions of external threats or interpersonal dynamics in the same way as hypervigilance. Individuals experiencing dissociation may be more focused on internal experiences or may have developed coping mechanisms that prioritize emotional detachment (Spitzer et al., 2006), potentially reducing the salience of external cues related to aggression or IPV perpetration. Similarly, individuals reporting experiential avoidance may avoid or suppress uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, or situations (Carlson et al., 2012; Nijenhuis & Van der Hart, 2011), which may differentially impede perceptions of aggression or IPV perpetration in settings where the cues for such behaviors are subtle or ambiguous, such as in online dating profiles. Further research is needed

to explore how these psychological processes interact with individual differences, relationship dynamics, and situational factors to shape risk perception and decision-making in online dating settings, ultimately informing targeted interventions and support strategies for individuals navigating relationships in the digital age.

Psychological Processes Predicting Accuracy in Aggression & IPV Perpetration Ratings

Next, I theorized that women's psychological processes (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) would be associated with women's accuracy in rating men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk level. This prediction was only partially supported. Specifically, only higher reported hypervigilance, as well as trauma history, was associated with greater accurately overestimating men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk. This is likely a result of individuals with hypervigilant tendencies taking a more cautious approach to interpersonal interactions, particularly in contexts where there is uncertainty, such as online dating platforms (Dunmore et al., 2001). This heightened vigilance may lead them to scrutinize potential partners' behavior even more closely, allowing for a more accurate assessment of potential risk factors. This suggests that while hypervigilance may predispose individuals to perceive ambiguous cues as indicative of danger (Hayes et al., 2012), it may also equip them with a heightened sensitivity to accurately detect potential threats. Perhaps individuals with higher levels of hypervigilance are more attuned to subtle behavioral cues or situational factors that signal a potential for aggression or IPV perpetration, identifying them even in the absence of face-to-face interactions. This aligns with work by Leber and colleagues (2009) which found that individuals reporting hypervigilance, relative to controls, were able to identify negative emotions in others more quickly. Future studies should consider exploring potential moderators, such as past experiences or attachment style, that could provide further insights into the relationship between

hypervigilance and risk assessment. It is also worth noting that awareness of danger does not always lead to action. Although primarily explored in response to natural disasters, studies reveal that being aware of risk or danger, even with evidence or past experience, does not always result in people taking precautions or altering their behaviors (Eiser et al., 2012). Thus, while individuals with heightened hypervigilance may possess an ability to perceive and interpret subtle cues indicative of risk, their responses may diverge from conventional expectations, particularly if they have low confidence in their judgments (Wachinger et al., 2013) or if they have received negative reactions in the past when seeking support from others (Overstreet & Quinn, 2016). Future research should aim to elucidate the interplay between hypervigilance, interpersonal dynamics, and behavioral responses in the context of risk assessment. By addressing these multifaceted factors, researchers can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how psychological processes shape perceptions of risk and inform subsequent actions or interventions aimed at mitigating IPV.

Romantic Interest as a Moderator Between Psychological Processes and Rating Tendencies

Finally, I examined whether women's romantic interest in the men in the profiles moderated the relationship between women's psychological processes (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) and their ratings of men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk. I theorized that higher romantic interest would interact with higher levels of hypervigilance/dissociation/experiential avoidance and lead to decreased ratings of aggression and IPV perpetration risk due to a bias towards positive information that frequently occurs when romantic interest is high (Chang, 2019). This prediction was only somewhat supported. Neither hypervigilance nor dissociation interacted with romantic interest to predict women's general ratings of aggression and IPV perpetration risk. One possibility is that the interplay between

romantic interest and hypervigilance and dissociation varies depending on individual differences and situational factors. For instance, individuals with higher levels of hypervigilance or dissociation may possess coping mechanisms that dampen the influence of romantic interest on their perception of risk (Cloitre & Rosenberg, 2016; Frowijn et al., 2022; Özdemir et al., 2015). Alternatively, the intensity of romantic interest may fluctuate depending on contextual cues or the nature of interactions with the individuals depicted in the dating profiles, thereby modulating its effect on risk perception. Another consideration is the role of cognitive biases in shaping perceptions of risk in the context of romantic interest. While romantic interest typically elicits a bias towards positive information (Chang, 2019), individuals may still exhibit heightened sensitivity to potential threats, particularly in situations involving unfamiliar individuals or online interactions where risks may be perceived differently (Fox & Warber, 2013). Thus, the influence of romantic interest on risk perception may be tempered by concurrent cognitive processes that prioritize self-preservation and safety. It is important to also acknowledge the potential limitations of the study design in capturing the intricacies of the interaction between romantic interest and psychological processes, particularly as the average level of romantic interest in participants was quite low (2.58 out of 7). This may be in part to the lack of pictures on the dating profiles used in this study, as evidence shows physical appearance is one of the most salient driving factors when determining if you are romantically interested in someone online (Brand et al., 2012). Future research should consider developing an experimental paradigm that involves a more nuanced measure of romantic interest to provide deeper insights into these relationships, ideally one that would still control for the variables for which we sought to control (race/ethnicity/age) and would preserve the confidentiality of the participants. For instance, perhaps artificial intelligence (AI) could be useful in creating profile pictures

reminiscent of the men creating the dating profiles that still preserve confidentiality and can be tailored to different racial/ethnic/age preferences.

In contrast to the pattern with hypervigilance and dissociation, romantic interest significantly interacted with experiential avoidance to predict aggression and IPV perpetration ratings. However, conditional analyses revealed that romantic interest and experiential avoidance were only associated with women's ratings of men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk when women's romantic interest was low, or below the mean level. In other words, when women reported lower levels of romantic interest, higher levels of experiential avoidance were associated with greater perceived aggression and IPV perpetration risk in men, however there was no significant association when romantic interest was high. This suggests that the impact of experiential avoidance on risk perception is most heightened in situations where romantic interest is at low levels. In interpreting this effect, it is important to keep in mind that sample-wide mean levels of romantic attraction were already low (2.58 on a scale of 1 to 7), so low levels were very low (M = 1.54). One possible explanation for this finding is that individuals who engage in experiential avoidance may rely more heavily on negative external cues, such as observable behaviors, when forming judgments about others, particularly in the absence of strong emotional investment or attachment (Pickett & Kurby, 2010). Indeed, one study found that women exhibiting experiential avoidance tendencies tend to generalize perceived risk more broadly (Cooper et al., 2022). In the context of online dating, where initial interactions are often based on limited information and superficial cues, individuals with higher levels of experiential avoidance may be more prone to interpreting ambiguous behaviors as indicative of aggression or potential risk (Pickett & Kurby, 2010), especially when their level of romantic interest is low. Additionally, women experiencing experiential avoidance may develop coping strategies that

prioritize avoidance of negative emotions or discomfort (Penley et al., 2002), potentially heightening their sensitivity to perceived threats or negative attributes in others. In situations where there is no romantic interest, these individuals may be more inclined to rely on such coping mechanisms, leading to heightened vigilance and sensitivity to potential risks in interpersonal interactions. However, it is important to interpret these findings cautiously and acknowledge the need for further research to elucidate the underlying mechanisms driving the interaction between romantic interest, experiential avoidance, and perceptions of aggression and IPV perpetration risk.

Romantic Interest as a Moderator Between Psychological Processes and Rating Accuracy

When it came to accuracy, the interaction between romantic interest and women's psychological processes (hypervigilance, dissociation, experiential avoidance) in predicting men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk level mirrored the general trend observed in women's overall ratings: Only experiential avoidance had a significant interaction with romantic interest on women's accuracy in predicting men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk level. Conditional analyses revealed that the interaction between romantic interest and experiential avoidance was only significant at low levels of romantic interest. Specifically, at low levels of romantic interest, women's accuracy in rating men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk increased with higher levels of experiential avoidance. One potential explanation is that at low levels of romantic interest, individuals may allocate more cognitive resources and attention towards evaluating potential risks (Fisher et al., 2002; Meier et al., 2023), including cues related to aggression and IPV perpetration, due to reduced distractions that often accompany romantic interest (e.g., bias towards positive information/view of the person; Chang, 2019). In this context, individuals with higher levels of experiential avoidance may exhibit a heightened

sensitivity to perceived threats, leading to a more accurate assessment of risk (Pickett & Kurby, 2010). This suggests that individuals employing avoidance strategies may possess a heightened ability to discern subtle cues indicative of aggression or IPV risk when they have little romantic interest in the other person, particularly in online dating contexts where they may be predisposed to make quick judgements about another person. However, it is important to note that these findings are preliminary, and further research is necessary to replicate and validate these results. Additionally, future studies should explore the underlying mechanisms driving the interaction between romantic interest, psychological processes, and risk perception, including past experiences, attachment style, and situational dynamics. Understanding how these factors interact with romantic interest and psychological processes can provide deeper insights into the complexities of risk perception within intimate relationships.

Strengths and Limitations

This study further demonstrates that college women can accurately identify men's propensity for aggression or IPV perpetration risk based on viewing de-identified dating profiles, illustrating the fourth replication of these findings. Psychological processes, specifically hypervigilance, were also revealed to be relevant when understanding risk perception of potential dating partners in online contexts, although these small effects should be considered tentative until replicated. This study also controlled for trauma history, allowing examination of these psychological processes above and beyond participants past experiences with trauma. Future research should further explore the direct relationship between IPV victimization and CM exposure on these psychological processes and how they impact individuals' perceptions of aggression and IPV risk in others. Understanding these dynamics at a deeper level will provide critical insights for designing targeted interventions and support mechanisms for individuals with

a history of trauma. Furthermore, exploring potential moderating variables, such as cultural values or attachment orientation, may provide a more nuanced understanding of these processes. As such, several limitations should be considered. The study's sample, while racially/ethnically diverse, limits the generalizability of findings to men/non-binary individuals, individuals in LGBTQIA+ relationships, and people who are not in college or at other ages. Future research would benefit from having more diverse participants complete the paradigm to assess whether various populations are able to accurately identify potential romantic partners who are more aggressive or risky or if this is unique to heterosexual women. Additionally, findings primarily apply to online dating environments and may not fully capture risk assessment processes in other relationship contexts, or the actions that follow this assessment. Future research should explore the transferability of results to offline dating or other social settings, as well as how these perceptions influence potential dating interactions. Finally, this study found only low to moderate levels of romantic interest among participants, potentially affecting the strength of the interaction between romantic interest and psychological processes. There are many reasons this likely occurred. One key factor is the somewhat sanitized nature of the dating profiles used in the study. Each profile contained only one photo, depicting a pop culture reference selected by the profile creator, such as an image of an athlete, a nature scene, or a character from TV show or movie. This type of image does not necessarily convey personal characteristics or physical features that might elicit stronger romantic interest from viewers. Another possible reason for lower levels of romantic interest could be the absence of other interactive elements commonly found in current dating profiles, such as voice notes, where the individual can talk and interact with potential dating partners. These elements can add a more personal touch, allowing potential partners to get a sense of the person's personality, voice, and demeanor. However, the study

limited these possibilities due to confidentiality reasons, ensuring that the men creating the profiles remained unidentifiable. These restrictions were necessary to protect the participants' privacy, but they could have contributed to a lack of deeper connection or interest among the observers. Future research should consider using more dynamic and interactive profile formats that reflect current dating platform trends while still maintaining participant anonymity. Additionally, exploring other factors that might contribute to romantic interest or attraction could further illuminate the complex relationship between psychological processes and risk perception in online dating contexts. Overall, while the study provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between psychological processes, romantic interest, and risk perception in online dating, addressing these limitations in future research can enhance the robustness, reliability, and applicability of findings.

Taken together, this study provides an initial exploration into how women's psychological processes, such as hypervigilance, dissociation, and experiential avoidance, interact with their perception of aggression and IPV perpetration risk in online dating contexts. The findings highlight the significance of hypervigilance in shaping women's risk assessments, suggesting that individuals with heightened vigilance may be more prone to perceiving ambiguous cues as signals of danger. This pattern was consistent across both aggression and IPV perpetration risk, emphasizing the potential impact of trauma history on women's interpretations of online dating profiles. However, it is also evident that these psychological processes do not operate in isolation. The study demonstrated that romantic interest could moderate the relationship between experiential avoidance and risk perception, with significant effects observed at lower levels of romantic interest. This finding underscores the complexity of factors influencing women's judgments about potential romantic partners in online dating settings and

highlights the need for strategies that promote safety while acknowledging the subjective nature of online interactions. By addressing the identified gaps and limitations, subsequent studies can build a more comprehensive framework for examining risk perception in digital dating environments and inform interventions that support individuals in making informed, safe decisions when seeking romantic connections online.

CONCLUSION

The findings from these three studies offer significant insights into the complex dynamics of risk perception in online dating contexts. A key achievement is the consistent replication of results demonstrating that women college students can accurately identify aggression and IPV perpetration risk in unknown men based on dating profiles. This effect has now been replicated four times, showcasing the reliability of women's ability to discern potential threats even when only limited information is available (see Table 13 for an overview of replicated findings across my pilot and 3 dissertation studies). This significant result underpins the idea that women can detect cues that may indicate aggressive or violent tendencies in potential dating partners, contributing to broader efforts in IPV prevention and safety education. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this paradigm—where women rate men based solely on dating profiles—is not entirely reflective of actual dating interactions. The findings, while informative, should not be overextended, as we do not know whether or how these risk perceptions influence real-world dating behaviors. In practice, actual dating interactions are more complex, involving a range of verbal, non-verbal, and contextual cues that may affect risk assessment. Additionally, online dating profiles often present a curated image of the individual (Bacey-Giles & Haji, 2017), potentially obscuring traits that might otherwise be indicative of aggression or IPV perpetration risk. This limitation underscores the need for caution when applying these findings to broader dating contexts, suggesting that further research is necessary to understand the real-world implications of these perceptual abilities. For instance, future work should explore whether women's accurate identification of aggression and IPV perpetration risk from online dating profiles translates into safer dating decisions or behavioral changes. Investigating how women

interpret and act upon these risk perceptions in face-to-face interactions will provide a clearer understanding of the impact these findings may have on dating outcomes.

Another noteworthy outcome is the influence of prior victimization history on rating accuracy. While previous research has indicated that personal history could affect risk perception (Cravens et al., 2015), Study 1 provides concrete support for this idea, illustrating that women with a history of IPV victimization and CM exposure tend to rate men higher in aggression and IPV perpetration risk. These findings highlight the complex relationship between past trauma and current risk perception, suggesting that experiences of abuse may lead to heightened vigilance when assessing potential threats in dating contexts. This heightened sensitivity might serve as a protective mechanism, allowing women with a history of victimization to detect subtle cues that might signal aggression or violent tendencies. However, this sensitivity may also have drawbacks, such as overestimation of risk that could lead to unnecessary caution or mistrust. This may also cause women to perceive all potential partners as equally risky, making it challenging to identify those who genuinely pose a greater threat. This balance between protective vigilance and overestimation is a critical area for future research and intervention efforts. Understanding the nuances of how victimization history shapes risk perception can inform trauma-informed practices and interventions aimed at supporting survivors. By recognizing that heightened sensitivity may lead to both accurate risk detection and misjudgments, practitioners can tailor their approaches to help women find a healthy middle ground. This might involve providing education on recognizing genuine risk factors versus generalized anxiety, along with strategies for managing trauma-related hypervigilance, which was associated with accurate overestimation of men's aggression and IPV perpetration risk in

Study 3, suggesting that women with a history of trauma may have a higher propensity for detecting potential threats while also being at risk of misjudging benign situations as dangerous.

Moreover, the need for a balanced approach in assessing aggression and IPV perpetration risk suggests that efforts to address IPV should encompass not only the identification of risk but also the promotion of positive relationship dynamics. Supporting women with a history of victimization involves acknowledging their increased sensitivity while helping them navigate dating environments in a way that fosters safety without promoting undue fear or mistrust. This requires a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between past trauma, current perceptions, and the broader social context. By acknowledging the varied ways in which victimization history can shape perceptions, we can create more effective support systems and interventions that meet the diverse needs of survivors while fostering a safer and more balanced approach to dating. Further research into the specific mechanisms behind these heightened sensitivities, as well as the long-term effects on relationship-building, will be essential in advancing our understanding and improving outcomes for survivors with a history of victimization.

Additional research is also needed to pinpoint the specific factors women consider when assessing aggression or IPV risk in dating profiles. Are there certain cues or patterns that reliably indicate a red flag? The thematic analysis from Study 2 identified several reasons women rated men as more aggressive or higher risk for IPV perpetration, including negative emotional expression, adherence to traditional gender roles or societal stereotypes, and profiles that evoke feelings of discomfort or unease. These themes suggest that women's risk assessments are influenced by a blend of social, cultural, and personal factors, which can shape their perception of potential partners. Understanding these influences is key to guiding future research into the

underlying mechanisms of risk perception and to exploring how these perceptions affect women's dating choices. Overall, the insights from these studies offer a promising starting point for understanding risk perception in unknown dating partners.

Table 13.

Overview of Replicated Analyses and Findings Across My Pilot and 3 Dissertation Studies.

	High/Low Aggression	Mod/Low Aggression	High/Low IPV Risk	Mod/Low IPV Risk	IPV Victimization	Attachment Anxiety	Attachment Avoidance
Pilot	√	√	√			- Predicted ↑ Agg - ↑ Accuracy Agg	- Predicted ↓ Agg - ↓ Accuracy Agg
Study 1	√	√	√		- Predicted ↑ Agg/IPV Risk - ↑ Accuracy Agg/IPV Risk	- Predicted ↑ Agg	- ↓ Accuracy Agg
Study 2	√	√	√		-	-	-
Study 3	√	√	√	√	-	-	-

Note: High/Low = Participant ability to detect between men who reported high and low levels of aggression/IPV perpetration history; Mod/Low = Participant ability to detect between men who reported moderate and low levels of aggression/IPV perpetration history; Agg = Aggression; IPV risk = IPV perpetration risk; √ = A significant finding; - = Not assessed in the study; Blank space = No significant findings.

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