Development and initial psychometric validation of the Women's Partner-Directed Insults Scale

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ABSTRACT

Verbal conflict is an unfortunate feature of some intimate relationships, and can have serious consequences for relationship members. Some previous research has investigated the content and correlates of men's partner-directed insults. No previous research has investigated the content or correlates of women's partner-directed insults, despite the fact that women also abuse their partners physically and non-physically. Here, we present the development and validation of a measure of women's partner-directed insults. In Study 1, we identified Women's Partner-Directed Insults Scale (WPDIS) items using men's nominations of insults directed at them by their female intimate partner. In Study 2, we developed a final version of the WPDIS, and provided evidence for the discriminant validity of the WPDIS. Discussion highlights limitations and future directions for research investigating women's partner-directed insults.

1. Introduction

Conflict is common in intimate relationships (Catalano, 2000; Karakurt & Silver, 2013; Schafer, Caetano, & Clark, 1998; Straus & Gelles, 1986). Relationship conflict can be physical as well as non-physical, including verbal abuse. Data from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey document that about half of American women report non-physical abuse by an intimate partner during their lifetime (Black et al., 2011). Other research indicates that non-physical conflict, including verbal abuse and insults, occurs in nearly 80% of relationships (Carney & Barner, 2012). Despite the prevalence of this type of conflict, there is limited research specifically investigating the content and correlates of verbal abuse in intimate relationships.

The first study to investigate the content and correlates of partner-directed insults in intimate relationships led to the development of an inventory of men's partner-directed insults, known as the Partner-Directed Insults Scale (PDIS; Goetz, Shackelford, Schipper, & Stewart-Williams, 2006). This inventory was developed using women's reports of insults directed against them by their male intimate partners. The researchers conducted principle components analyses of additional data, using men's self-reports and women's partner-reports of men's partner-directed insults from participants in the United States and New Zealand to develop the final inventory of insults. The PDIS consists of 47 insults organized along four content domains: Derogating Physical

Attractiveness (e.g., "My partner told me that I am ugly"), Derogating Value as a Partner/Mental Competency (e.g., "My partner told me that I am stupid"), Derogating Value as a Person (e.g., "My partner told me that I am worthless"), and Accusations of Sexual Infidelity (e.g., "My partner accused me of having sex with another man"). The researchers demonstrated that the PDIS provides a valid and reliable assessment of men's partner-directed insults in intimate relationships (Goetz et al., 2006).

Subsequent studies have used the PDIS to test hypotheses derived from evolutionary psychological theory. McKibbin et al. (2007) argued that partner-directed insults may be used as a cost-inflicting tactic of mate retention, insofar as inflicted insults reduce a woman's self-esteem and cause her to assess that she can do no better than her current partner. The results supported the researcher's hypotheses: Men's performance of mate retention behaviors (Buss, 1988; Buss, Shackelford, & McKibbin, 2008) positively correlated with their use of partner-directed insults, suggesting that the use of insults is designed, in part, to retain a partner. In a subsequent study, researchers found that partner-directed insults predicted men's sexual coercion of their intimate partners (Starratt, Goetz, Shackelford, & Stewart-Williams, 2008). Miner, Shackelford, and Starratt (2009) investigated the relationship between mate value (value as a prospective long-term partner on the "mating market;" see Buss & Shackelford, 1997, for a discussion) and men's partner-directed insults. The researchers found that women's and especially men's mate value predicted men's use of partner-directed

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insults. The researchers argued that men who perceive that they have lower mate value than their partner resort to cost-inflicting mate retention tactics, including partner-directed insults, to retain their partner.

Research on partner-directed insults has focused exclusively on men's insults directed against their female partners. No research has investigated *women's* insults, despite the fact that women also abuse their partners physically and non-physically (Archer, 2000; Goetz et al., 2006). The contents of the insults that women direct against their male partners may differ substantively from the contents of the insults that men direct against their female partners, perhaps because the sexes differ somewhat in their preferences for and expectations about long-term partners (Buss, 1989; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Shackelford, Schmitt, & Buss, 2005). The objective of the current research is to develop and validate an inventory of women's partner-directed insults to complement the PDIS. In Study 1, we identified Women's Partner-Directed Insults Scale (WPDIS) items using men's nominations of insults directed at them by their female intimate partners. In Study 2, we used principal components analysis on data secured from a new sample to refine the WPDIS. We also provide initial evidence for the reliability and discriminant validity of the WPDIS, testing hypotheses derived from research regarding men's partner-directed insults (see "Validation of the WPDIS" below for details of hypotheses).

2. Study 1: nominations of women's partner-directed insults

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants

Participants were 40 men recruited from psychology courses at a university in the Midwestern United States. Participants were required to be 18 years or older and in a committed, long-term heterosexual relationship, or must have been in such a relationship in the past. Participants received extra credit course points for participating. The sample was 67.5% Caucasian, 22.5% African American, 2.5% Native American, and 7.5% "Other." Participants ranged in age from 18 to 64 years, ($M = 26.9$, $SD = 11.4$). 41% of the sample reported that they were currently in a committed relationship. The mean relationship length was 41.3 months ($SD = 71.1$).

2.1.2. Materials and procedure

Participants were recruited from undergraduate psychology classes. Participants who signed the consent form were instructed to complete the survey packet at home and to bring it to the next class meeting. The survey packet consisted of an Act Nomination Form (Buss & Craik, 1983). This procedure asks participants to nominate specific examples of a target behavior. This procedure has been used productively in previous research (e.g. Buss, 1988; Goetz et al., 2006; McKibbin et al., 2009). Participants reported insults directed at them by a current or former partner in a committed, long-term heterosexual relationship. The instructions stated: "Using the blank lines provided below, please list 10 insults that your current romantic partner or a past romantic partner has used towards you. For example, 'She called me stupid' or 'She said I was worthless.'" Participants were asked to nominate up to 10 insults. After completing the Act Nomination Form, participants completed a demographics questionnaire. Participants returned the survey to the researcher at the next class meeting in a sealed envelope provided to them. No identifying information was recorded. Survey materials and consent forms were stored separately to maintain anonymity.

2.2. Results and discussion

Participants nominated 360 partner-directed insults. The mean number of insults nominated by each participant was 9.2 ($SD = 2.0$). To construct a preliminary inventory of women's partner-directed insults,

we eliminated insults with similar wording (e.g. "She said I was selfish" and "She told me I was selfish"), retaining one exemplar insult. We eliminated nominations that consisted of multiple insults (e.g. "She said her friends were right about me and that I was no good"). We also eliminated nominations that were esoteric, or unlikely to be reported by most men (e.g. "You have a penny anty [sic] job"). Following these eliminations, 93 nominated insults remained. These were used to construct a preliminary Women's Partner-Directed Insults Scale, which we administered to a new sample of participants in Study 2.

3. Study 2: development and validation of the Women's Partner-Directed Insults Scale

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants

Participants were required to be heterosexual and at least 18 years old. The sample consisted of 650 participants recruited from undergraduate psychology courses at a university in the Midwestern United States. Of these, 405 (62.3%) were women and 245 (37.7%) were men. The average age of the sample was 22.7 years ($SD = 7.5$). Three hundred and four (46.8%) participants reported that they were currently in a committed, long-term relationship. The average relationship length was 39.1 months ($SD = 64.7$). The sample was 66.3% Caucasian, 13.5% African American, 0.8% Native American, 5.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.5% Hispanic/Latino, and 11.0% "Other." Participants received course credit for participation.

3.1.2. Materials and procedure

Participants received a link to a preliminary version of the Women's Partner-Directed Insults Scale (WPDIS). We provided the link through email or through online course shell postings. After affirming they were heterosexual and 18 years or older, participants received by email a form on which to indicate their consent to participate. After consenting, participants were directed to an online survey. The survey included the preliminary WPDIS, which consisted of the 93 insults identified in Study 1. Men provided reports of the frequency with which each insult had been directed against them by a current or former female intimate partner. Women provided reports of the frequency with which they had directed each insult against a current or former male intimate partner. Participants were instructed as follows: "Below, rate how often you (your partner) have (has) said each insulting thing to your partner (you)." The instructions were followed by the text *She (I) said…* then approximately 12 insults per online page. Participants reported the occurrence frequency of each insult on a 6-point Likert scale, with 0 = *Never*, 1 = *1 time*, 2 = *2 to 5 times*, 3 = *6 to 10 times*, 4 = *11 to 24 times*, and 5 = *25 or more times*. This scale replicates the response scale used by Goetz et al. (2006) for the Partner-Directed Insults Scale. The survey also included the Mate Retention Inventory-Short Form, a 38-item inventory of cost-inflicting and benefit-provisioning mate retention behaviors (MRI-SF; Buss et al., 2008; see also Results and discussion) and a brief demographic survey. After completing the survey, participants were debriefed and thanked.

3.2. Results and discussion

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin – KMO (0.931) and Bartlett's sphericity tests [χ^2 (4,278) = 29,420.45, $p < .001$] supported the suitability of the data for Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The former indicates the total variance accounted for by a common construct, with 0.50 suggested as the minimum acceptable value (Kaiser, 1970), whereas the latter indicates the existence of correlations in the dataset by testing the null hypothesis that all variables are uncorrelated. We then proceeded with a PCA without setting the number of components for extraction. We found 21 components meeting the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue ≥ 1). However, a parallel analysis (Horn criterion) and a scree plot (Cattell