

Bullying and Dating Experiences: A Retrospective Examination

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Introduction

- Many children and adolescents are involved in bullying as either a perpetrator, victim, bystander, or bully-victim (Bradshaw et al., 2007).
- Involvement in bullying is related to a multitude of internalizing and externalizing problems including depression, anxiety, and aggression (Sweeting et al., 2006).
- As adolescents mature, their involvement in bullying may transfer to other forms of social aggression including sexual harassment and dating violence (Leadbeater et al., 2008).
- Dating violence may take many different forms including psychological aggression and physical assault (Lewis, 2001).
- Being involved in dating violence increases the risk of suffering from depression and anxiety (Banyard & Cross, 2008).
- Adolescents who engage in bullying behaviors have been found to be more likely to experience dating violence (Connolly et al., 2000).
- Victims of bullying and bully-victims with the highest levels of dating violence display the highest levels of anxiety and depression (Espelage & Holt 2007).

Hypotheses

- Participants previously involved in bullying during their school-age years will report using more psychological aggression and physical assault tactics in resolving conflicts in their dating relationships.
- Participants previously involved in bullying during their school-age years will report using fewer negotiation tactics in resolving conflicts in their dating relationships.
- Participants reporting the highest levels of anxiety and depression will be previous victims of bullying or bully-victims and will report higher rates of dating aggression.

Method

Participants

- Sixty-nine undergraduate students (38% male; 62% female) attending a Midwestern university.
- Participants ranged in age from 19 to 26 years old.
- Participant race was Caucasian (92%), followed by Latino/Hispanic (5%), and biracial (3%).

Measures

- The Bully Survey – Retrospective Version* (BYS-RV; Swearer, 2006).
- The Beck Anxiety Inventory* (BAI; Beck & Steer, 1990). Internal consistency reliability for the BAI has been reported as ranging from .85 - .94 (Dowd, 1998). In the current study, the internal consistency reliability was .88.
- The Beck Depression Inventory II* (BDI-II; Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996). The internal consistency reliability for the BDI-II is .92 (Arbisi, 2001). In the current study, the internal consistency for the BDI-II was .87.
- The Revised Conflict Tactics Scales* (CTS2; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). Three of the subscales from the CTS2 were used in the current study: Negotiation (alpha=.93), Psychological Aggression (alpha=.86), and Physical Assault (alpha=.63).

Data Analyses

- One-way ANOVA was used to examine the overall significant difference between bully/victim status and the prevalence of psychological aggression and physical assault tactics in resolving conflicts in dating relationships as well as anxiety scores. Additionally, one-way ANOVA was used to determine the overall significant difference between severity of anxiety and depression with both psychological aggression and physical assault.
 - Tukey HSD post-hoc tests were used to examine differences between specific bully/victim statuses for each of these variables.
- Because equal variances could not be assumed, Welch's t-test was used to examine the overall significant difference between bully/victim status and the prevalence of negotiation tactics in resolving conflicts in dating relationships as well as depression scores.
 - Games-Howell post-hoc tests were used to determine the differences between specific bully/victim statuses for each of these variables.

Table 1

Bully/Victim status and dating experiences

Measure	Bully/Victim Status			F	p
	Uninvolved	Bully	Victim		
Negotiation	M (SD) .94 (.11)	M (SD) .81 (.19)	M (SD) .81 (.34)	-2.47 ^a	.02
Psychological Aggression	.25 (.19)	.44 (.22) ^b	.23 (.22) ^b	3.41	.04
Physical Assault	.03 (.06)	.06 (.08)	.03 (.06)	.88	.42

^a Welch's t-test

^b Means for bully and victim are significantly different at $p = .04$

Table 2

Cohen's d effect size between bully/victim status and depression

	Uninvolved	Bully	Victim
Bully	.52		
Victim	.43	.09	
Bully-Victim	1.14	.62	.71

Table 3

Cohen's d effect size between bully/victim status and anxiety

	Uninvolved	Bully	Victim
Bully	.10		
Victim	.83	.72	
Bully-Victim	.74	.64	.08

Results

- Due to missing data, the results from a total of 64 participants were analyzed: 32 uninvolved, 21 victims, 8 bullies, and 3 bully-victims.
- Due to the low number of bully-victims, they were excluded from the analyses of hypotheses 1 and 2, but since hypothesis 3 specifically examines bully-victims, they were included in those analyses.
- Involvement in bullying was determined using the cutoff of "one or more times a week."

Bullying and Dating Experiences

- Welch's t-test revealed significant differences between bully/victim status and the use of negotiation tactics to resolve conflicts in dating relationships, $t(30) = -2.47, p = .02$. Small to medium effects sizes were found between those uninvolved in bullying ($M = .94, SD = .11$) and both victims ($M = .81, SD = .34$), $d = .60$ and bullies ($M = .81, SD = .19$), $d = .57$.
- One-way ANOVA revealed significant differences between bully/victim status and the use of psychological aggression tactics to resolve conflicts in dating relationships, $F(2, 57) = 3.41, p = .04$. Tukey HSD post-hoc test revealed a significant difference between bullies ($M = .44, SD = .22$) and victims ($M = .23, SD = .22$), $p = .04$. Large effects sizes were found between bullies and both victims, $d = 1.04$ and the uninvolved ($M = .25, SD = .19$), $d = .95$.
- One-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences between bully/victim status and the use of physical assault tactics to resolve conflicts in dating relationships. Small effect sizes were found between bullies ($M = .06, SD = .08$) and both victims ($M = .03, SD = .06$), $d = .49$ and the uninvolved ($M = .04, SD = .06$), $d = .46$.

Internalizing Disorders, Bully/Victim Status, and Dating Aggression

- Welch's t-test revealed no significant differences between bully/victim status and depression scores. Medium to large effect sizes were found between bully-victims ($M = 16.00, SD = 18.36$) and the uninvolved ($M = 7.55, SD = 5.40$), $d = 1.14$, victims ($M = 10.74, SD = 7.94$), $d = .71$, and bullies ($M = 11.43, SD = 8.14$), $d = .62$. A small effect size was found between victims and the uninvolved, $d = .43$.
- One-way ANOVA revealed significant differences between bully/victim status and anxiety scores, $F(3, 57) = 3.09, p = .03$. Tukey HSD post-hoc test revealed a significant difference between victims ($M = 14.29, SD = 8.60$) and the uninvolved ($M = 8.24, SD = 6.15$), $p = .03$. Medium to large effect sizes were found between victims and both the uninvolved, $d = .83$ and bullies ($M = 9.00, SD = 4.66$), $d = .72$. Medium effect sizes were found between bully-victims ($M = 13.67, SD = 13.32$) and both the uninvolved, $d = .74$ and bullies, $d = .64$.
- One-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences between severity of depression or anxiety and dating aggression.

Discussion

- The current study suggests that being involved in bullying during school-age years is related to one's use of prosocial tactics to resolve conflicts in his or her later dating relationships.
- Compared to those who were either perpetrators or victims of bullying, participants who were uninvolved during their school-age years were more likely to use negotiation tactics to resolve conflicts in their current dating relationships.
- Perpetrators of bullying during their school-age years were more likely than victims to use psychological aggression to resolve conflicts in their current dating relationships.
- Victims of bullying during their school-age years were more likely to have current symptoms of anxiety compared to those who were not involved in bullying.
- Future research should examine possible social-ecological factors that may influence change in participants' tactics to resolve conflict.
- Future research should also use a longitudinal design to examine differences between factors when participants are in secondary school and college.

Limitations

- A small sample size led to very few participants endorsing the role of bully-victim or more severe dating aggression items.
- The retrospective nature of the study may have confounded the data based on the participants' memory of bullying events during their school-age years.
- Internalizing disorders are marked by cognitive distortion and may have had an affect on the memory of participants (Beck, 1963).
- The alpha for the physical assault subscale was low and may have contributed to non-significant findings.