Personality Traits and Attachment Security Predicting Adolescent Dating Violence

Andrea Bellovary, Jessica Houston, Christina Caiozzo, & John H. Grych, PhD.

**Introduction**

**Personality Traits**
- Narcissism has been shown to play a role in dating violence (Ryan et al., 2008).
- Narcissism predicts perpetration of dating violence, particularly in provocative situations, when there is a threat to one’s ego (Betancourt et al., 2006; Baumeister et al., 1996; Rinker, 2010).
- Men and women display narcissistic traits differently; specifically, men exhibit more overt narcissism (Heather et al., 2008; Ryan et al., 2008).
- Gender differences may moderate the relationship between narcissism and dating aggression.
- Research has focused on perpetration, and the role narcissism plays in victimization is not well understood.

**Attachment Style**
- Evidence suggests that adolescent romantic attachment style has an important role in dating aggression, with secure attachment acting as a moderator (Grych & Kinsfogel, 2010).
- There are differences in the way males and females form relationships with their attachment figures (Fralay and Waller, 1990).
- Males are more likely to have an avoidant attachment style with romantic partners (Siminata et al., 1991; Mari, 2008).
- Because there are differences in the attachment patterns of males and females, there are likely differences in how attachment security may impact the likelihood of, manner, and intensity of adolescent dating violence.

**The Present Study**
- The present study examined the following research questions:
  1. What are the combined and unique effects of narcissistic personality traits and romantic attachment styles on adolescent dating aggression?
  2. Are there gender differences in how narcissistic personality traits predict perpetration and victimization of adolescent dating aggression?
  3. Are there gender differences in how romantic attachment style predicts perpetration and victimization of adolescent dating aggression?

**Method**

**Sample**
- 540 participants ages 18-23
- Recruited from Marquette University
- 33% were male, 67% were female
- 61% Caucasian, 6% Asian, 5% African American, 5% Latino, & 23% other

**Procedure**
- Participants were recruited from an undergraduate research pool.
- Trained graduate and undergraduate research assistants administered measures of narcissistic traits, attachment security, and exposure to verbal, physical, and sexual dating aggression.

**Measures**
- Experiences of Dating Violence: Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI; Grasley & Straatman, 2001)
- Measures adolescent dating aggression
- Subscales: verbal/emotional, threatening, physical, & sexual victimization and perpetration
- Narcissism: Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-16; Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2005)
- 16 item scale adapted from the 40-item NPI
- Romantic Relationship Expectations: Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000)
- Measures relationship expectations
- Subscales: Attachment related anxiety & attachment related avoidance

**Results**

**RQ 1: Linear Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Perpetration and Victimization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Dating Aggression Perpetration</th>
<th>Dating Aggression Victimization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narcissism</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.14**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious Attachment</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.21**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant Attachment</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>26.22**</td>
<td>13.41**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RQ 2: Linear Regression Analyses for Narcissism Predicting Perpetration and Victimization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Dating Aggression Perpetration</th>
<th>Dating Aggression Victimization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narcissism</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious Attachment</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant Attachment</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>20.65**</td>
<td>5.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>26.75**</td>
<td>11.10**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RQ 3: Linear Regression Analyses for Attachment Style Predicting Perpetration and Victimization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Dating Aggression Perpetration</th>
<th>Dating Aggression Victimization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narcissism</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious Attachment</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant Attachment</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>26.75**</td>
<td>11.10**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

**Results**
- There were combined effects of narcissism and attachment style for both victimization and perpetration.
- All variables uniquely predicted victimization; only narcissism and anxious romantic attachment uniquely predicted perpetration.
- Narcissistic traits predicted aspects of dating aggression differently for males and females:
  - Narcissism predicted perpetration of dating aggression for both males and females.
  - However, narcissism predicted victimization for only males.
- Gender differences were also found regarding the role of attachment style in dating aggression:
  - Having an anxious romantic attachment style predicted perpetration of dating aggression for males and females, but not predicted victimization of dating aggression for females.
- Further, having an avoidant romantic attachment style only predicted perpetration of dating aggression in males and not predict victimization in males or females.

**Implications**
- It seems that, regardless of gender, when someone with narcissistic traits perceives a threat to their self-esteem, they may react aggressively.
- Males may be more inclined than females to maintain a grandiose self-image in a romantic context and may value maintaining their image above all else, putting them at greater risk for victimization.
- Women may be more concerned with threats to their relationship than men, and thus, participate in high risk situations in order to maintain the relationship.
- Gender differences in how personality and romantic attachment predict dating aggression can serve to inform protective and preventative programs for adolescent dating violence.

**Selected References**