
Dating Experiences of Bullies in Early Adolescence

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In this study, 196 young adolescents who reported that they bullied their peers were identified out of a sample of 1,758 students in Grades 5 through 8. After selecting from the total sample a group of nonbullying youth who were matched on gender, school, and grade, a comparison was made of the groups' dating experiences, quality of friend and boyfriend or girlfriend relationships, and acts of physical and social aggression. The results indicated that bullies started dating earlier and engaged in more advanced dyadic dating than comparison adolescents. Bullies were highly relationship oriented, yet their views of their friends and boyfriends or girlfriends were less positive and less equitable than the comparison adolescents. Finally, bullies were more likely to report physical and social aggression with their boyfriends or girlfriends. Although the bullies reported more advanced pubertal development, this factor did not fully account for their dating precocity and negative romantic relationships. The results confirmed our hypotheses that adolescents whose peer relationships are characterized by bullying are at risk in their development of healthy romantic relationships.

Romantic relationships are an integral feature of development in adolescence (Dickinson, 1975; Furman & Wehner, 1994; Hansen, 1977). The early adolescent years are a critical transitional period because it is during this time that boys and girls progress from same-sex to other-sex relationships, including involvement with romantic partners (Connolly & Goldberg, 1999; Furman, 1999). Recently, the role of peers in the development of romantic relationships has been highlighted (Brown, 1999; Connolly &

Goldberg, 1999). Romantic development proceeds most smoothly for adolescents whose peer relationships are based on reciprocity, intimacy, and mutual support. Hence, young adolescents who are abusive in their interactions with their peers may be at risk in their romantic development. For these youth, intimidating patterns of interaction in their friendships may persist in the transition to romantic relationships, thus setting the stage for continuing difficulties in relationships with romantic partners across the life span. In this article, we examine the dating experiences of young adolescents whose peer interactions are characterized by bullying. We hypothesize that patterns of dating activities, as well as the quality of relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends, will be atypical in these youth in comparison with boys and girls who do not bully.

Romantic Development

In the early years of adolescence, biosocial conditions converge to support the initiation of romantic

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interactions. The biological pressures of puberty create the possibility of romantic interest as peer groups channel adolescents' romantic behaviors and expectations (Connolly, Goldberg, Pepler, & Craig, 1998; Dornbusch et al., 1981). Developmentally, romance in adolescence is embedded in the social context provided by the peer group (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000; Dunphy, 1963; Feiring, 1996). Following the transition from same-sex relationships, adolescents' close friend cliques merge with other-sex cliques to form mixed-sex groups. These groups form the nexus for interaction, yet they are only indirectly focused on dating. Later in adolescence, these groups become large and more complex when dyadic dating begins to occur as a component of interaction in them. Developmental researchers have argued that embedding the development of romantic relationships within the context of the peer group is highly functional for early adolescents. By serving as the chief vehicle for social interaction, the peer group can provide models of appropriate interaction, set norms for acceptable behavior, and constrain the levels of intimacy or sexual contact so that it does not exceed the coping capabilities of young adolescents (Connolly & Goldberg, 1999; Furman, 1999).

Complementing the functions of peer groups, adolescents' friendships also provide models of relationship quality. Adolescents with emotionally supportive friendships are more likely to report supportive romantic relationships, whereas adolescents with coercive friendships are more likely to report difficulties in their romantic relationships (Connolly et al., 2000; Connolly & Johnson, 1996). Because the interactional style that has been established with friends may generalize to romantic relationships, adolescents who bully may be at increased risk to experience similar problems with their romantic partners.

Bullying

The focus of the present article is on the dating and romantic experiences of children who engage in bullying. Bullying is the abuse of power by one child over another through repeated aggressive behaviors. As in other abusive relationships, bullies can acquire power over their victims in many ways. For bullies, power may arise from superior physical strength and maturity, higher status within the peer group, by knowing another child's weaknesses, or by recruiting the support of other children (O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman & Kaukiainen, 1996). Bullying can be physical, and it can also take the form of verbal or social aggression (Olweus, 1991). Increasingly with age, bullies rely less on physical means to intimidate their victims and turn

more often to indirect forms of bullying that entail verbal abuse and social exclusion (Olweus, 1991).

By definition, bullying comprises a subset of behaviors typically described as aggressive or antisocial. In bullying, these behaviors unfold in the context of relationships in which the roles of abuser and victim are reinforced through repeated acts of unidirectional aggression. Like aggressive and antisocial children, children who bully often come from homes that are neglectful, and their parents often use harsh punishment (Olweus, 1993). Also like aggressive youth, children who bully are often embedded within a group of peers who support and facilitate their negative behaviors (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Gest, & Garipey 1988; Salmavalli, Huttunen, & Lagerspetz, 1997). Finally, children who bully are at risk for continuing difficulties into adulthood in the form of criminality, marital violence, child abuse, and sexual harassment (Farrington, 1993; Olweus, 1993).

International studies of bullying indicate a common prevalence among school-age children. In Canada, Australia, Scandinavia, and England, 6% to 12% of children admit to bullying others more than once or twice over a 6-week period, and 15% to 20% of children report that they have been the victims of bullying (Bentley & Li, 1995; Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Olweus, 1991; O'Moore & Hillery, 1989; Pepler, Craig, & O'Connell, 1999). In general, twice as many boys as girls report bullying (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Charach, Pepler, & Ziegler, 1995). Although the reported frequency of bullying decreases from elementary to secondary school (Pepler et al., 1999; Whitney & Smith, 1993), other abusive behaviors, such as sexual harassment, emerge as adolescents enter high school (McMaster, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 1997; Whitney & Smith, 1993).

Romantic Development and Bullying

Our concern is that the use of power and aggression in peer relationships will generalize to romantic relationships for those children who bully. Because romantic relationships develop in the context of peer groups and are linked to the quality of friendships, we suggest that the negative characteristics of bullies' peer relationships create unsuitable conditions for early romantic development. In the present study, we examine whether bullies' early dating experiences in the peer group differ and whether the quality of relationships with girlfriends or boyfriends is compromised for youth who bully in comparison with non-bullying youth. Currently, there are no empirical studies of the cross-sex activities of bullies. However, studies may provide some guidance, given that bullying is a type of aggressive behavior (Olweus, 1991).

Evaluations of the long-term sequelae of boys' antisocial behavior indicate that they have a range of difficulties in their adjustments to the community, including their romantic relationships (Capaldi & Crosby, 1997; Dishion, Eddy, Haas, Li, & Spracklen, 1997). Although less is known about antisocial girls, in a recent study, teenage girls who were deemed to be at high risk because of long-term involvement with child welfare agencies indicated that they initiated dyadic dating earlier and were far more likely to have romantic partners than their peers. The quality of their romantic relationships was, however, inferior to that of their peers, being characterized by more arguments and less open communication with their boyfriends (Pawley, Mills, & Quinton, 1997).

Pubertal Maturation

Although the findings are somewhat sparse, there is evidence to suggest that early pubertal development is a consideration in evaluating the adolescent development of troubled youth. Antisocial youth appear to mature somewhat earlier than their peers, and this has been thought to play a role in their earlier initiation of sexual activity (Caspi, Lynam, Moffitt & Silva, 1993; Caspi & Moffitt, 1991; Stattin & Magnusson, 1990). Because puberty is a factor in the initiation of dating activities, we thought it important to examine its effects at the same time as those of bullying. We speculate that bullies mature earlier than their peers and that this may be a factor in their earlier initiation of dating activities.

To summarize, this study examines dating activities among young adolescent boys and girls who bully their peers in school. Our goals are to examine their involvement in peer group dating activities, the quality of their relationships with their friends and boyfriends or girlfriends, and whether there is any evidence of aggressive behaviors in their relationships with their boyfriends or girlfriends.

METHOD

Participants

Total sample. The bullies in this study were identified from 874 boys and 884 girls who were participants in a study of school bullying. These adolescents were enrolled in seven elementary schools that were all located in a large south central Canadian city. The schools were similar in structure and included Grades 1 through 8 in a single school building; the students in this study were enrolled in Grades 5 through 8. There were 335 students in Grade 5, 347 in Grade 6, 526 in Grade 7, and 550 in Grade 8. In each of the schools,

approximately 75% of the students had parental consent to participate in the study. Five were coeducational public schools and two were single-sex independent schools, one for boys only and one for girls only.

The average age of the adolescents was 12.6 years ($SD = 1.2$ years) and ranged from 9.4 years to 15.2 years. The majority were from Euro-Canadian backgrounds (74%), with 4% African-Canadian adolescents, 13% Asian-Canadian adolescents, and 9% from other ethnic backgrounds. Most of the adolescents came from two-parent households (84%). Of the remaining adolescents, 13% came from single-parent homes and 3% were living in other types of family configurations (e.g., with legal guardians). The sample was well educated: Sixty-six percent of the adolescents' parents (fathers 67%; mothers 65%) had completed postsecondary education. Less than 15% of the parents had a high school education or less.

Measures

Bullying. The Safe School Questionnaire (Pepler, Craig, Zeigler, & Charach, 1993) was used to identify bullies. Prior to distributing the questionnaire, bullying was defined for the students in the following way:

Bullying is when another student or group of students say nasty and mean things to a student or tease a lot in a mean way. It is also bullying when a student is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, and things like that. These things may happen often and it is hard for the student being bullied to defend him/herself. But, it is not bullying when two students of about the same strength argue or fight. (Olweus, 1989; Pepler et al., 1999)

This definition was also included at the beginning of the questionnaire. The Safe School Questionnaire includes two items derived from Olweus's Student Questionnaire (Olweus, 1989) that have been used in several international studies to identify bullies (Ahmad & Smith, 1990; Charach et al., 1995; O'Moore & Hillery, 1989). The first question, which targets a 6-to-8-week time frame, asks, "How often have you taken part in bullying others since the March break?" It is scored from 0 (*haven't bullied other students*) to 5 (*several times a week*). The second question targets a short-term time frame and asks, "How often have you taken part in bullying others in the last five days?" It is scored from 0 (*not at all*) to 5 (*five or more times*). The correlation between the two bullying items was .84, a finding that is consistent with prior research. The two items were averaged to yield a total bully score, and this score was then standardized. As in previous research, bullies were defined as youth

whose scores were .70 *SD* or more above the mean, and nonbullying youth were defined as those who scored .25 *SD* or more below the mean on the scale.

One hundred ninety-six bullies (134 boys and 62 girls) were identified in the sample. To compare these bullies with youth whose peer relationships were not characterized by bullying, our strategy was to select a comparison group of 196 students from the sample of nonbullying youth. We employed this strategy rather than use the total sample to reduce the potential effects of unequal *N*s on statistical analyses (Hays, 1963).¹ A comparison of the bullies with the rest of the sample indicated that they were slightly older, with an average age of 12.8 years (*SD* = 1.0) versus 12.6 years (*SD* = 1.2) for nonbullies, $F(1, 1200) = 6.66, p < .01$. There was also a difference in the gender ratio, with proportionally more males in the group of bullies than in the rest of the sample—68% versus 41%, $\chi^2(3) = 52.24, p < .001$. Bullies did not differ on any demographic variables, including parental education, family composition, and ethnicity. In view of the age and gender differences, we selected the comparison group in such a way as to be equivalent to the bully group in the distribution of boys and girls as well as in age. To do this, we first determined the number of bullies who were boys and the number who were girls in each grade of each school. Then, within each grade in each school, we randomly selected an equivalent number of nonbullying boys and girls. The resulting comparison group did not differ from the bullies on any demographic variables, including age.

Dating experiences. The Dating Questionnaire (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 1999) was administered to obtain information about the adolescents' mixed-sex activities, dating activities, and boyfriend or girlfriend status. They were first asked to indicate whether they participated in activities with other-sex peers or only in same-sex activities. Those who indicated they participated in other-sex activities were then asked about their mixed-sex group activities (e.g., "hang around with a group of boys and girls"; "go to clubs, groups, sports activities where there are both boys and girls"; "go to dances or parties where there are both boys and girls") and their dating activities ("go out with boys and girls at night"; "go out with another boy [girl] and a couple of girls [boys]"; "go on dates with a girl [boy], but with a group"; "go on dates with a girl [boy], just the two of us"). For these questions, dating was defined as spending time or going out with a girl (boy) whom the adolescent liked, loved, or had a crush on, and adolescents described each item as either true or false. Factor analyses have supported the independence of the two types of activi-

ties (Connolly et al., 1998), and the alpha coefficients for the two computed scales were .76 and .74. The adolescents were then asked to indicate whether they had started dating and, if so, at what age. They were also asked if they had a current girlfriend or boyfriend or, if not, whether they had previously had one. To assess the frequency of their contact with boyfriend or girlfriend and other-sex friends, the adolescents were asked to rate the amount of time they spent outside of school with other-sex friends and with boyfriends or girlfriends and the amount of time they spent on the phone with them. The amounts of time spent with other-sex friends and boyfriends or girlfriends were rated separately for both kinds of contact. The 5-point Likert rating scales ranged from a score of 1 for *not at all* to 5 for *at least once a day*. A summary score was computed by averaging across the four ratings. The alpha coefficient was .82 for the summary contact score.

Relationship quality. To assess emotional support, adolescents completed three subscales from the Networks of Relationships Inventory (NRI) (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). The intimacy subscale has three items that assess self-disclosure (e.g., "I tell this person things I would not want others to know"); the affection subscale includes two items that assess relationship warmth (e.g., "This person cares about me"); and the commitment subscale includes three items that assess confidence in the durability of the relationship (e.g., "My relationship with this person will last no matter what"). Adolescents were asked to evaluate their relationships with current or previous boyfriends or girlfriends. If they reported never having had boyfriends or girlfriends, they rated what they expected such a relationship would be like. They were also asked to rate their same-sex best friends on the same scales. The items for each scale were rated on a 5-point Likert scale on which a score of 1 indicates that the quality is *almost never or never true* of the relationship and a score of 5 indicates *almost always or always true*. Mean scores for each scale were computed, and the alpha coefficients (or correlations for two-item scales) averaged .86.

To assess perceptions of relationship equity, the adolescents completed the relative power subscale of the NRI and the Extreme Peer Orientation Scale (EPO) (Fulgini & Eccles, 1993). Ratings were obtained for friends and for current or recent boyfriends or girlfriends only because we considered it unlikely that adolescents would anticipate negativity in an expected relationship. The power subscale includes two items that assess adolescents' perceptions of the extent to which one person in the relationship dominates the other (e.g., "How often does

someone tend to be the boss in this relationship?"). The items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale on which a score of 1 indicates shared control and a score of 5 indicates inequitable power. The correlation between the two items was .84, and a mean score was computed. The EPO contains four items that evaluate the extent to which adolescents believe that they would engage in undesirable behaviors to maintain the relationship with their friends or boyfriends or girlfriends (e.g., "How often would you break your parents' rules to keep this relationship?"). The items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale on which a score of 1 indicates they would *never* engage in the behavior and a score of 5 indicates that they *always* do. The alpha coefficients averaged .74.

Aggressive behaviors with a boyfriend or girlfriend. To assess the occurrence of physically aggressive behaviors, the adolescents responded to three items with reference to their current boyfriends or girlfriends, if any, or previous boyfriends or girlfriends. These items ("slapped or kicked"; "choked, punched, or beat up"; "threatened with a knife") were derived from the Conflict Tactics Scale—Form R (Straus, 1979) and represent severe acts of physical aggression that we nonetheless believed might occur in this age group. Because psychological or social aggression is sometimes included in definitions of abusive relationships (Wolfe et al., 1997), we included three items from the Relational Aggression Scale (Crick, 1995) that we viewed as most appropriate to assess social aggression among adolescents ("spread rumors about you," "get even by keeping you out of the group," "keep you from being involved in group activities"). Using a 10-point scale, ranging from 0 times to more than 9 times, adolescents reported whether they had perpetrated these behaviors with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Using the same items, they also indicated whether they had been the victim of these behaviors from a boyfriend or girlfriend. Averaging across the three items, separate perpetration and victimization scores were computed for physical and social aggression. The alpha coefficients for perpetration and victimization averaged .94, .83 for physical aggression, and .83 and .76 for social aggression.

Puberty. To assess pubertal maturation, the adolescents were administered the Pubertal Development Scale (Petersen, Crockett, Richards, & Boxer, 1988), which describes pubertal changes in secondary sex characteristics, including growth spurt, appearance of body hair, changes in skin, breast growth and menarche (for girls), and appearance of facial hair and voice changes (for boys). Adolescents responded on a 4-point scale ranging from *has not yet started* to *seems*

TABLE 1: Dating Experiences Reported by Bullies and Comparison Adolescents

| Variable | N | Bullies | | Comparison Adolescents | |
|---|-----|---------|------|------------------------|------|
| | | M | SD | M | SD |
| Age (years) started dating ^a | 149 | 10.85 | 1.51 | 11.36 | 1.45 |
| Number of mixed-sex activities | 340 | 2.50 | .89 | 2.37 | 0.96 |
| Number of dating activities ^b | 318 | 1.81 | 1.51 | 1.06 | 1.25 |
| Frequency of other-sex contact ^c | 330 | 3.04 | 1.28 | 2.67 | 1.24 |

NOTE: Possible score ranges are 0-3 (mixed-sex activities), 0-4 (dating activities), and 1-5 (other-sex contact). Because of incomplete or missing values, Ns for individual variables range from 149 (age started dating) to 340 (mixed-sex activities).

- a. Difference between groups significant at $p < .05$.
- b. Difference between groups significant at $p < .01$.
- c. Difference between groups significant at $p < .001$.

completed for each item. A summary score was computed by averaging the five items, and the alpha coefficient was .80. Scores on this scale are reliable and have been shown to correlate well with objective assessments of pubertal status. Nonetheless, it is most appropriate to view this scale as an index of perceived pubertal status.

RESULTS

Dating Experiences

Differences in the mixed-sex group activities, age of dating onset, dating activities, and other-sex boyfriend or girlfriend contact between the bullies and comparison adolescents were assessed by means of analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with group (bully and comparison) as a between-subjects factor.² A preliminary ANOVA of perceived pubertal status indicated that the bullies were more advanced than the adolescents in the comparison group, with mean scores of 2.59 ($SD = .60$) versus 2.38 ($SD = .71$), $F(1, 345) = 5.80$, $p < .01$. Because pubertal status has been associated with dating activities, we included it as a covariate in the analyses. The means for the dating variables are shown in Table 1.

Significant main effects for group were found for age started dating, $F(2, 146) = 3.93$, $p < .05$; dating activities, $F(2, 315) = 17.45$, $p < .0001$; and other-sex contact, $F(2, 327) = 5.55$, $p < .01$. Bullies reported that they started dating earlier than comparison adolescents, participated in more types of dating activities, and spent more time outside of school with other-sex friends and their boyfriends or girlfriends than comparison adolescents.

TABLE 2: Boyfriend/Girlfriend Status of Bullies and Comparison Adolescents

| Variable | Bullies | Comparison Adolescents |
|-------------------------------------|----------|------------------------|
| Current boyfriend or girlfriend | 63 (35%) | 31 (17%) |
| Previous boyfriend or girlfriend | 66 (36%) | 72 (39%) |
| Never had a boyfriend or girlfriend | 53 (29%) | 81 (44%) |

NOTE: $N = 182$ bullies; $N = 184$ comparison adolescents.

Boyfriends and Girlfriends

Next, we computed the percentage of adolescents who reported a current boyfriend or girlfriend, a previous boyfriend or girlfriend, or never having had a boyfriend or girlfriend. These percentages are shown in Table 2.

The bullies were more likely than the comparison adolescents to report a current boyfriend or girlfriend and less likely to report never having had a boyfriend or girlfriend, $\chi^2(2) = 17.00, p < .001$. To assess whether the difference in percentages was the same for boys and girls, we conducted separate analyses. The results indicated a significant difference in the distributions for the boys: Forty percent of bullies reported a current girlfriend compared with 15% of comparison adolescents, and 22% of bullies reported never having had a girlfriend compared with 44% of comparison adolescents, $\chi^2(1) = 23.60, p < .001$. Among the girls, the distribution of dating status between the bullies and comparison adolescents was not significant: $\chi^2(1) = .07, ns$.

Quality of Relationships

Differences in perceptions of emotional support and relationship equity between the bullies and comparison adolescents were analyzed by means of ANOVAs, with group as a between-subjects factor and perceived pubertal status as a covariate. The group means for these variables are shown in Table 3.

Boyfriends and girlfriends. Significant main effects for group were found for affection, $F(2, 334) = 8.25, p < .001$; commitment, $F(2, 334) = 19.05, p < .0001$; intimacy, $F(2, 334) = 12.47, p < .0001$; extreme relationship orientation, $F(2, 99) = 5.67, p < .01$; and relative power, $F(2, 99) = 4.22, p < .05$. Bullies perceived relationships with their boyfriends or girlfriends to be less intimate, less affectionate, and less durable than did comparison adolescents. They were more likely to report that they would engage in undesirable activities to keep boyfriends or girlfriends and perceived relationships as less equitable in the relative power of each person than did the comparison adolescents.

TABLE 3: Quality of Relationships Reported by Bullies and Comparison Adolescents

| Variable | Bullies | | Comparison Adolescents | |
|---|---------|------|------------------------|------|
| | M | SD | M | SD |
| Emotional support— boyfriend/girlfriend ^a | | | | |
| Affection ^b | 4.41 | 0.98 | 4.64 | 0.64 |
| Commitment ^b | 3.85 | 1.07 | 4.28 | 0.79 |
| Intimacy ^b | 3.79 | 1.05 | 4.08 | 0.82 |
| Emotional support—friend ^a | | | | |
| Affection ^b | 4.00 | 0.89 | 4.28 | 0.69 |
| Commitment ^b | 3.72 | 0.98 | 3.92 | 0.84 |
| Intimacy | 3.45 | 1.15 | 3.47 | 1.10 |
| Relationship equity— boyfriend/girlfriend | | | | |
| Power ^c | 1.53 | 0.82 | 1.26 | 0.62 |
| Orientation ^c | 1.83 | 0.75 | 1.48 | 0.63 |
| Relationship equity—friend | | | | |
| Power ^b | 1.90 | 1.02 | 1.44 | 0.81 |
| Orientation ^b | 1.78 | 0.65 | 1.38 | 0.59 |

NOTE: Due to missing data, N s vary from 337 to 343, except for relative power and orientation of boyfriends and girlfriends, where N s = 99.

a. Adolescents without current boyfriends or girlfriends rated their expectations of future boyfriends or girlfriends.

b. Difference between groups significant at $p < .001$.

c. Difference between groups significant at $p < .05$.

Best friends. Significant main effects for group were found for commitment, $F(2, 340) = 4.09, p < .05$; affection, $F(2, 341) = 11.57, p < .001$; relationship orientation, $F(2, 338) = 29.14, p < .0001$; and relative power, $F(2, 335) = 17.36, p < .0001$. Bullies perceived relationships with their friends to be less affectionate and less durable than did comparison adolescents. They were more likely to report that they would engage in undesirable activities to keep their friends and perceived relationships as less equitable in the relative power of each person than did the comparison adolescents.

Aggressive Behaviors

One hundred eighty-nine adolescents in the bully and comparison groups completed the aggression items, and of these, almost all reported one or two incidents. In view of this, we decided to dichotomize the scores and assign 1 to a report of any violence and 0 if no violence was reported. The percentages of adolescents reporting aggression with a boyfriend or girlfriend in the two groups are shown in Table 4.

The frequency of reporting acts of physical or social aggression with a boyfriend or girlfriend by the bullies and comparison adolescents was compared using chi-square analyses. Both forms of aggressive perpetration were reported more frequently by the

TABLE 4: Bullies and Comparison Adolescents Reporting Aggression With Boyfriends or Girlfriends

| Variable | Bullies | | Comparison Adolescents | |
|---------------------------|---------|----|------------------------|---|
| | % | N | % | N |
| Perpetrator of aggression | | | | |
| Social ^a | 27 | 29 | 8 | 5 |
| Physical ^b | 10 | 11 | 3 | 2 |
| Victim of aggression | | | | |
| Social ^a | 23 | 25 | 5 | 4 |
| Physical ^b | 17 | 19 | 6 | 5 |

NOTE: N = 110 bullies; N = 79 comparison adolescents.

a. Difference between groups significant at $p < .001$.

b. Difference between groups significant at $p < .05$.

bullies than the comparison adolescents: $\chi^2(1) = 4.04$, $p < .05$ for physical aggression and $\chi^2(1) = 11.12$, $p < .001$ for social aggression. Both forms of victimization were also reported more frequently by the bullies than the comparison adolescents: $\chi^2(1) = 4.94$, $p < .02$ for physical victimization and $\chi^2(1) = 11.57$, $p < .001$ for social victimization. To ascertain whether these results were comparable for both boys and girls, we conducted the analyses separately by gender. The results were in the expected direction, although the distributions of physical aggression were no longer significantly different between the bullies and comparison adolescents for either gender, likely because of the reduction in sample size. Social aggression was still significant for the boys, $\chi^2(1) = 9.59$, $p < .01$, but not the girls, $\chi^2(1) = 1.94$. The distributions of social victimization were significantly different for both the boys, $\chi^2(1) = 7.51$, $p < .01$ and the girls, $\chi^2(1) = 3.88$, $p < .05$. Rates of physical victimization were not significantly different for the boys, $\chi^2(1) = 2.11$, and were marginally significant for the girls, $\chi^2(1) = 3.46$, $p < .06$.

To consider whether perceived pubertal status might play a role in the relationship between bullying and romantic aggression with a boyfriend or girlfriend, we computed logistic regression analyses in which romantic aggression was predicted from bullying and puberty. Because the numbers of adolescents in the bully and comparison groups were too small to conduct such an analysis, we used all the adolescents in the sample who had a score for both bullying and aggression ($N = 577$) and treated the bullying score as a continuous variable, with age and gender included as covariates. Using this analytic approach, we focus on the range of bullying behavior rather than on an extreme group of bullies. For these analyses, we computed a total score for perpetration of aggression with a boyfriend or girlfriend by summing across physical

and social items, and a similar summary score for victimization. For the analysis of perpetration, both puberty and bullying were significant predictors (Wald statistic = 4.01, $p < .05$ for puberty and 13.05, $p < .001$ for bullying), and there were no significant interactions. For victimization, only bullying was a significant predictor (Wald statistic = 14.82, $p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that young adolescents whose peer relationships are characterized by bullying may be at risk for continued difficulties when they begin to initiate romantic relationships. Bullies reported that they initiated dating at earlier ages and participated in more advanced forms of dating than peers who were not involved in any bullying. Bullies viewed relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends as less emotionally supportive and less equitable than their nonbullying peers. Most significant, bullies reported more experiences of physical and social aggression with boyfriends and girlfriends than the comparison adolescents. As a group, then, young adolescents who bully their peers appear to be on a negative developmental trajectory for romantic relationships.

Our first goal was to examine whether the dating experiences of bullies would be different in comparison with adolescents who were not involved in any incidents of bullying. Boys and girls who bullied their peers reported that, on average, they started dating by the end of their 10th year, whereas the comparison adolescents more typically initiated dating activities at 11 1/2 years of age. This earlier start was accompanied by more dating activities, both in group contexts and as couples. Also, the bullies reported spending more nonschool time with other-sex and romantic partners than the comparison youth, either directly or on the phone. Young adolescents who bully their peers, then, appear to initiate a different romantic timetable than youth who do not bully.

Two questions arise: Why do bullies start to date earlier? Should this early dating be viewed as problematic? At least part of the explanation for the early dating found in this study is that these youth are maturing physically more quickly than their age-mates. Pubertal maturation is accompanied by both hormonal changes and changes in physical appearance, and each of these may potentially be implicated in our findings, particularly for boys. Levels of testosterone have been linked to aggressive behaviors (Buchanan, Eccles, & Becker, 1992), and it is possible that the higher testosterone levels of earlier

developing boys are also responsible for their aggressive behaviors with peers and romantic partners. Also, the more mature physical appearance of both the boys and the girls may encourage them to act in more adult ways and elicit similar responses from others. However, in our study, bullying was linked to advanced dating activities, independent of the adolescents' reports of their pubertal development. Thus, some aspect of bullying behavior itself may be linked to advanced dating. Bullying behaviors, especially among boys, are not without their rewards in the peer group. Some bullies can be dominant in their social groups and may have a circle of friends who support or at least condone their bullying behaviors. Because dating in early adolescence is often seen as a means of establishing status in the peer group (Brown, 1999), these youth may initiate dating as a reflection of their social positions in their groups. Not all bullies are popular, however, and some are marginalized by the peer group. For those bullies, an explanation of their advanced dating may be found in recent research that has noted that both very unpopular and very popular adolescents readily turn to relationships with other-sex peers (Bukowski, Sippola, & Hoza, 1999). Bullies who have made themselves unpopular with their same-sex peers may become involved with friends of the other sex in both dating and other contexts.

With regard to the risks of earlier dating, the results of this study suggest that it may not necessarily be contact with other-sex peers that is problematic for youth in early adolescence, because frequency of mixed-sex activities did not differ between the bullies and comparison adolescents. Rather, it is the earlier initiation of advanced forms of dating that differentiate the groups. It is quite normal for young adolescents to begin interacting with other-sex peers in a quasi-romantic fashion. These interactions are typically initiated in the context of their peer groups, and this may serve as a protective function by inhibiting overly intimate behaviors. The fact that the bullies have progressed beyond group activities to dyadic dating may be problematic because it places them in situations in which greater intimacy, especially sexual intimacy, is likely to occur. There is some evidence that troubled youth with early physical maturation tend to socialize with older peers (Silbereisen, Petersen, Albrecht, & Kracke, 1989), and this is thought to account for their earlier introduction to sexuality. A similar socializing effect may be occurring with the bullies in our study, with older peers inducting them into advanced dating and sexual experiences with which the bullies are ill equipped to cope. In such peer environments, coercive behaviors are perhaps more likely to occur as a means of coping and

then become part of the adolescents' romantic repertoires. Early and advanced dyadic dating may then constitute a risk factor for bullies' future development of healthy romantic relationships.

Our second goal was to examine the quality of bullies' relationships with their boyfriends and girlfriends. These relationships were very salient for the bullies, who reported a greater willingness to engage in undesirable behaviors to gain their friends' approval than did the comparison group. Yet, at the same time, relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends were viewed by the bullies as less affectionate, less intimate, less concerned with commitment, and less equitably balanced. These qualitative dimensions may be interrelated. On one hand, adolescents who bully place a great deal of importance on having a boyfriend or girlfriend and spend more time than is typical for their age-mates in this context. On the other hand, they tend not to experience these relationships as supportive and equitable. As a result, they may worry about relationship loss and hence may be prone to behave in unacceptable ways if this will help to sustain the relationship. These expectations and concerns would be consistent with the notion of rejection sensitivity, which has been identified as an important explanatory mechanism in intimate hostility. Rejection-sensitive adolescents, especially girls, anxiously expect to be spurned in close relationships, and when rejection occurs, they overreact, often with hostility (Downey, Bonica, & Rincon, 1999). Particularly for the girls who bully, then, overvaluing their boyfriends while lacking security in relationships may lead them to react with previously learned patterns of peer aggression. Conditions such as these likely bode poorly for fostering positive development in romantic relationships.

We hypothesized that the quality of bullies' relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends was linked to their friendships. Our examination of their relationships with their friends provided support for this view. The bullying adolescents in our sample reported that their friendships were unaffectionate and lacking in shared power and equity. Yet, they were more likely than the comparison adolescents to report that they would act in socially undesirable ways to maintain the affections of their boyfriends and girlfriends. These features are similar to the qualities found in the boyfriend and girlfriend relationships and support previous suggestions that friendships provide one of the contexts in which relationship skills are learned. Romantic relationships have many pathways, including familial relationships, peer relationships, and experiences with boyfriends and girlfriends (Furman & Wehner, 1994). Yet, in early adolescence, when affili-

ating characteristics of romance are dominant, adolescents' patterns of interaction with their friends likely play a very significant role. Coerciveness in interactions with peers may transfer to their initial forays into romantic relationships. Whereas some youth may eventually develop other ways of relating to boyfriends or girlfriends, for others there is a risk for continuing these coercive patterns. Whether these patterns prove successful in maintaining romantic relationships is likely a factor in their persistence.

Our final goal was to consider the extent to which bullies might be prone to aggressive acts in their romantic relationships. Before discussing our results, there is an important caveat. The adolescents in our study were in the initial stages of romantic development, and many of them did not have boyfriends or girlfriends. Also, physical aggression was not reported very often by the adolescents, and the rate of occurrence in this study is lower than has been reported by older adolescents or young adults. It is possible that the group context in which young adolescents often see their boyfriends or girlfriends, as well as the relative lack of intimacy in these relationships, inhibits acts of aggression. Our results on dating aggression, then, should be viewed as exploratory and in need of further validation. Despite the low base rate, the likelihood was high that if romantic aggression was reported, the reporters were in the group of bullies. These results support our speculation that the use of aggression to assert dominance and power, a dynamic that is prototypical of bullies, might spread to romantic relationships as these are initiated. Although the majority of the aggression was of low severity, involving social or verbal aggression, physical aggression in romantic relationships did occur. Given the intractable nature of aggression and the interactional patterns that transfer from one relationship to another, it is a fair assumption that these aggressive behaviors in early relationships may persist in future romantic relationships. This finding is particularly worrisome because it suggests that one of the roots of date violence and perhaps later domestic violence is bullying behavior with peers.

It is worth highlighting in our results the absence of a gender difference in the reporting of romantic aggression. Although not as frequent daters as the boys, the bullying girls were similar to the bullying boys in their reports of aggressive romantic acts. There is evidence that girls are more likely to be seriously harmed by date violence; however, our data suggest that for some girls, acting aggressively in romantic relationships is a part of the dynamics of romantic aggression. This finding is not completely anomalous. Domestic abuse researchers find that adult men and

women report comparable levels of aggression in their relationships, even occasionally finding that women report more acts of aggression than men (Riggs, O'Leary, & Breslin, 1990). Our results suggest that one developmental pathway leading to romantic aggression is having engaged in bullying behaviors with peers, which may well be an antecedent for both boys and girls.

As well as showing an increased risk for perpetrating acts of aggression, the bullying boys and girls reported that they were also victims of aggression from their boyfriends and girlfriends. This finding suggests that adolescents may be both the perpetrators and the victims of romantic aggression, either in the same relationship or from one relationship to another. This overlap of perpetrator and victim status may be of particular importance in exploring the process by which girls become largely the recipients of injurious romantic aggression. Aggressive girls, either in the form of bullying or other means, may begin by acting aggressively in relationships, perhaps in response to their boyfriends or girlfriends. However, they may find themselves increasingly in the role of the victim as their aggression is met with harsher aggression from their partners. The results underscore the need to understand the processes by which adolescents learn to behave aggressively in romantic relationships. Peer relationships are an important source of influence on romantic development and can provide a context for learning both positive and negative attitudes and behaviors. When adolescents bully their peers, they learn a style of interaction in which power can be acquired through aggressive means. Without active intervention, there is a high risk that youth who bully others will persist in this behavior in new relationships.

Although the bullies and comparison adolescents were characterized by different qualities in this study, it is important to note that the sample is most representative of middle-class, Anglo-Canadian youth. Among youth from different cultures and sociodemographic backgrounds, attitudes and expectations may moderate the peer pathway to romantic aggression. It also must be noted that the study focused on heterosexual relationships. Different patterns of romantic and peer relationships may well pertain for gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents. It is important to underscore the relative immaturity of the boyfriend and girlfriend relationships reported by the adolescents in this study. A minority of them, in fact, had not experienced any romantic relationships, and our assessment of their romantic emotional support was based on their expectations of future relationships. The notion of what constitutes a romantic relation-

ship and who is identified as a boyfriend or girlfriend changes with age, becoming more consistent with adult relationships. It would be important to examine bullies later in adolescence when their romantic relationships are both more common and more stable. We also note that our measurements of aggression and of perceived pubertal maturation could be enhanced by using multiple informants to objectively substantiate the self-report data collection. Also, because some of our findings were significant at the .05 level only, we view the analyses of these measures to be exploratory and in need of further examination in future research. Finally, it is important to note that bullying is on a continuum with other forms of aggressive behaviors. Distinguishing the contributions of antisocial behaviors, general aggression, and bullying to dating violence is an important goal of future research.

Despite these limitations to our research, we believe that our results are consistent with the view that child maltreatment has pervasive negative effects on development across time and across relationships. It is well-known that children who grow up in abusive homes learn coercive patterns of interaction, which are then transferred to the peer context when they enter the school system (Dishion et al., 1997), and this may well take the form of bullying their peers. Whereas many forms of aggressive behavior are punished in the school context, bullying has often been viewed as transitory and not in need of intervention. The result is that this kind of behavior is particularly likely to flourish among high-risk youth and to become a prominent feature of their peer interactions. When these youth begin to negotiate dating and romantic relationships, they bring with them a propensity to deal with others in a coercive manner. Because of their physical maturity, they are more likely to get involved with older peer groups, and this compounds the difficulty of learning to deal with these new relationships. Earlier learned patterns of coercive interactions are thus more likely to occur. If these are met with success, the stage is set for transferring the coercive behaviors of bullying to the romantic context and perhaps also to adult domestic relationships.

From a clinical perspective, our findings provide some important directions for preventing violence in adolescents' relationships with their boyfriends and girlfriends. Bullying is a phenomenon that is now recognized as unacceptably harmful to children. By demonstrating the continuity of aggression across relationships, our results provide further confirmation of

that fact and highlight the importance of implementing school programs that prevent or reduce bullying. High school bullying is a factor in the lives of many adolescents, and prevention programs at this level are critical to reduce this behavior, as well as other forms of aggression, such as dating violence, to which it is linked. Schools should also be encouraged to implement antibullying programs in the early grades, when these behaviors are just emerging and control of bullying is easier to effect. Antibullying programs should be directed equally to boys and girls. Although the girls in our study were less often involved in bullying than the boys, there is nonetheless a group of girls who bully and who are thus very much at risk in their future relationships. Finally, programs designed to prevent dating violence should include interventions directed at friendships and peer groups. Clearly, aggression in peer relationships and violence in dating relationships are related phenomena. Addressing both sets of behaviors may be most effective in creating climates of positive development for youth.

In conclusion, most researchers in the area of romantic aggression have focused on the role of the family in creating conditions that may lead to acts of aggression. This study, by focusing on the peer milieu of romantic relationships, highlights a more proximal route to romantic aggression. Bullying is a subtle form of aggressive behavior that is often socially tolerated, and this study suggests that understanding and preventing aggression in romantic relationships will require attention to these destructive peer group processes.

NOTES

1. We wanted to ensure that our comparison group included students who were free of any experiences of bullying, including being a victim of bullying. Hence, we examined their responses to two additional items on the Safe School Questionnaire that parallel the two bullying items but in this case assess whether a student reports having been a victim of bullying. Like the bullying items, the two victim items were averaged and standardized. We required that the nonbullies score $.25 SD$ or more below the mean on the victimization total score as well as the bullying total score. We did not impose this restriction on the sample of bullies because this would have overly restricted the bully sample.

2. Because the groups were equivalent for gender and grade, we did not include these as factors in the analyses. However, as a check, we did conduct preliminary analyses in which gender and grade were included as between-subjects factors and found that these did not significantly moderate the group effect.

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