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Abstract

The collective influence of identity styles and romantic attachment insecurity on psychological dating aggression was examined for 1,975 adolescents living in a southern state of the United States. Informational identity style related negatively to psychological dating aggression, but anxious romantic attachment related positively to this behavior. Diffuse-avoidant identity style and using psychological dating aggression were associated positively, whereas normative identity style and receiving psychological dating aggression were associated negatively. Additionally, the combination of high informational or normative identity style with high avoidant romantic attachment was linked to lower psychological dating aggression. Our findings build on the previously noted parallelism between identity styles and romantic attachment insecurity by showing how they work together to explain variability in psychological dating aggression.

Keywords: adolescence, attachment dimensions, dating aggression, identity styles, psychological dating aggression

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Adolescence

In the words of Erikson (1959), "…it is only after a reasonable sense of identity has been

established that real intimacy with the other sex (or for that matter, with any person or even

oneself) is possible" (p. 101). Identity formation, a primary activity of adolescence, contributes

to subsequent intimacy development (Arseth, Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2009; Beyers &

Seiffge-Krenke, 2010; Dyk & Adams, 1990; Montgomery, 2005). However, consistent with the

theorizing of Dyk and Adams (1987) and the high prevalence of adolescent involvement in

romantic relationships (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003), the development of identity may coincide

with, rather than precede, intimacy development. This parallelism between identity exploration

and romantic attachment implies that both factors may contribute to the formation and

maintenance of romantic relationships during adolescence. Expanding on this reasoning, a next

step, and the focus of the current study, was to examine whether identity and attachment

contribute to other romantic experiences, such as dating aggression, during adolescence.

In the present study, dating is defined as going out with the same person for a month or

more. Throughout the literature, terms such as intimate partner violence (IPV) and dating

aggression are typically used to describe aggressive behaviors occurring within the context of

romantic relationships. The term IPV is generally used in reference to aggression occurring

within young adult and adult romantic relationships (e.g., Caldwell, Swan, Allen, Sullivan, &

Snow, 2009; Stover, Meadows, & Kaufman, 2009; Swartout, Cook, & White, 2012). Dating

aggression is more commonly used when addressing aggressive behaviors

experienced/perpetrated within adolescent dating relationships (e.g., Fritz & Slep, 2009; Slep,

Cascardi, Avery-Leaf, & O'Leary, 2001). Such behaviors are often expressed/experienced via

forms of physical aggression (e.g., pushing, grabbing, or slapping) and/or psychological aggression (e.g., insulting, threatening, or doing something to spite one's partner) (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). Across studies, physical dating aggression is relatively rare, reported by 9%-20% of high school aged adolescents within the United States (USA) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2014; Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001). In contrast, 50%-90% of middle and high school aged adolescents within the USA and Canada indicate they have experienced some form of psychological dating aggression (Ellis, Crooks, & Wolfe, 2009; Holt & Espelage, 2005; Jouriles, Garrido, Rosenfield, & McDonald, 2009). This level of aggression suggests that it is approaching a normative behavioral strategy in adolescent relationships. Although psychological dating aggression is more prevalent than physical dating aggression, studies have suggested that the effects of psychological dating aggression are just as harmful and lasting as the effects of physical dating aggression (Follingstad, Rutledge, Berg, Hause, & Polek, 1990; Jouriles et al., 2009) and that such behaviors may lead to various consequences ranging from psychological distress, depression, anxiety, and negative health symptoms (Taft et al., 2006). Our goal in this study was to understand how psychosocial variables (i.e., identity and romantic attachment) are associated with aggressive conflict management skills relating to psychological dating aggression given their prevalence and potential detrimental effects.

We also examined whether the relationship between these psychosocial variables and psychological dating aggression hold for using and receiving such behaviors. Given that many adolescents who perpetrate dating aggression also indicate being victims of those same behaviors (e.g., Cano, Avery-Leaf, Cascardi, & O'Leary, 1998; Connolly, Friedlander, Pepler, Craig, & Laporte, 2010; Williams, Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Laporte, 2008), using and receiving

psychological dating aggression are to be regarded as comparable outcomes of the same processes. However, despite the co-occurrence between these experiences, the interpretation and/or meaning behind these experiences may vary (Johnson, 2000; Johnson & Ferraro, 2006). Therefore, it is important to understand whether differences emerge for predicting using versus receiving psychological dating aggression.

Attachment and Identity

The co-development of identity and intimacy during adolescence has been argued (Dyk & Adams, 1987; Pittman, Keiley, Kerpelman, & Vaughn, 2011) and supported by previous empirical studies suggesting a bi-directional relationship between identity exploration and the anxiety and avoidance dimensions of romantic attachment (e.g., Kerpelman, Pittman, Saint-Eloi Cadely, Tuggle, Harrell-Levy, & Adler-Baeder, 2012). Furthermore, research has shown a relationship between attachment and identity formation within the dating context (McElwain, Kerpelman, & Pittman, 2015; Pittman, Kerpelman, Soto, & Adler-Baeder, 2012). For example, Kerpelman et al. (2012) found associations between identity and romantic attachment that varied according to the strategies adolescents used in their approach to identity formation. Furthermore, Pittman et al. (2012) and McElwain et al. (2015) showed that avoidant attachment was related to less, and anxious attachment was related to more, identity exploration within the dating context. Thus, involvement in romantic relationships may provide a context for adolescents to learn about themselves through developing an emotional bond with their partners. Our aim was to build on current knowledge of the parallelism between identity and attachment by examining how they work together to explain psychological dating aggression.

Attachment. Attachment theory provides a framework for understanding behaviors in romantic relationships (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Bartholomew

(1990) suggested that the ways individuals approach relationships reflect the insecurities that they bring to relationships. These insecurities are linked to relationship dependence and the avoidance of intimacy. Being highly dependent on one's romantic partner describes the anxious orientation. Individuals scoring high on this dimension value closeness to their romantic partners, even at the risk of losing themselves. In contrast, individuals scoring high on the avoidant dimension resist getting too close to their romantic partners; they may desire intimacy with their partners, but tend to pull back out of fear of rejection, or they may avoid intimacy altogether due to concerns of losing their independence (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998).

Research indicates that both attachment dimensions predict physical dating aggression among adolescents (Grych & Kinsfogel, 2010; Miga, Hare, Allen, & Manning, 2010) and young adults (Henderson, Bartholomew, Trinke, & Kwong, 2005; Sandberg, Suess, & Heaton, 2010; Yarkovsky & Fritz, 2014). In comparison to physical dating aggression, the relationship between these attachment dimensions and psychological dating aggression is understudied. However, Grych and Kinsfolgel (2010) showed that an anxious attachment orientation related positively to the use and receipt of psychological dating aggression among adolescent girls. Two earlier studies on young adult samples also showed that both insecure attachments predicted the use and receipt of psychological dating aggression (Dutton, Saunders, Starzomski, & Bartholomew, 1994; Henderson et al., 2005).

Romantic attachment insecurities may create difficulties when expressing one's needs or desires for intimacy and lead adolescents to turn to aggression. Specifically, individuals with higher anxious attachment scores may use aggression out of fear of losing their partner or as a means to remain close to their partners, whereas individuals scoring higher on avoidance may

resort to aggression as an attempt to maintain distance from their partners (Roberts & Noelle, 1998). Romantic attachment insecurities may also lead to a tolerance of aggression within romantic relationships (Grych & Kinsfogel, 2010; Henderson et al., 2005). Individuals with high scores on anxious attachment may be more receptive to aggression from their partners due to their high level of dependence on the relationship. In contrast, individuals with high scores on avoidance may be more accepting of their partner's use of aggression as it may provide them with opportunities to avoid proximity with their partners. *Thus, we expected that both attachment dimensions would be positively related to using and receiving psychological dating aggression* while controlling for identity exploration strategies.

Identity. At its core, identity formation involves a pair of processes through which individuals consider different options for themselves (exploration), and make decisions about these different alternatives (commitment) (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Beyers, & Vansteenkiste, 2005; Marcia, 1994). In line with the concept of identity exploration, different approaches (i.e., identity styles; Berzonsky, 1989, 1990) that individuals may undertake to explore their identity beliefs were investigated.

The three primary styles that have been identified are: (a) informational identity style (considering and exploring different alternatives), (b) normative identity style (exploring by seeking views and expectations of significant others), and (c) diffuse-avoidant identity style (little-to-no involvement in the process of identity exploration). Adolescents who prefer an informational identity style tend to be more proactive when making identity-related decisions, are more likely to seek social support for decisions, are more open to varied perspectives, and are more likely to engage in effective problem-solving strategies. Those favoring a normative identity style often engage in little exploration and rely mainly on significant others'

expectations when making important decisions. Greater endorsement of a diffuse-avoidant identity style is associated with procrastination, lack of openness about different ideas, and avoidance in decision-making (Berzonsky, 1989; 1990; 1992; Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996; 2009).

Research indicates that the diffuse-avoidant identity style is associated with conduct problems that are predictive of psychological aggression, whereas the informational and normative identity styles are negatively related to such outcomes (Adams et al., 2001). Our study attempted to build on prior research by examining the relationship between identity styles and psychological aggression within the context of romantic involvement. During adolescence, dating partners become a meaningful source of identity input (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001). Adolescents may use psychological dating aggression when they are less open to input from others. *Thus, we hypothesized that greater use of an informational or normative identity style would relate negatively to the use of psychological dating aggression. In contrast, greater use of a diffuse-avoidant identity style, was expected to be positively associated with the use of psychological dating aggression. There is no literature supporting hypotheses about identity styles and receipt of psychological dating aggression, therefore, we explored these associations.*

In line with the assumption that identity styles and attachment dimensions work together to explain psychological dating aggression, we also examined whether the interactions between these constructs related to these behaviors. Due to the co-development of these dimensions during adolescence (Kerpelman et al., 2012), the interaction of these constructs may provide further explanation for experiences with adolescent dating aggression. We expected the identity styles to affect the relationship between anxious or avoidant attachment and psychological dating aggression. Specifically, a *high level of a diffuse-avoidant identity style was expected to strengthen the positive relationship between both types of insecure attachment and psychological*

dating aggression. The sense of distrust for others and/or rejection of others' input associated with this identity style (Berzonsky, 1992; Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996; 2009) may contribute to feelings of insecurity within the relationship which, in turn, would be associated with greater psychological dating aggression. *In contrast, high endorsement of an informational or normative identity style was expected to weaken the relationship between both insecure attachment dimensions and psychological dating aggression.* Both of these identity styles are associated with less problem behaviors (Adams et al., 2001) and a higher likelihood of using positive conflict-resolution strategies (Berzonsky, 1992; Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996; 2009).

Identity commitment was controlled when examining the relationship between identity styles and psychological dating aggression. The role of commitment is important to consider given its relationship with identity styles (Berzonsky, 1989, 1990). Specifically, Berzonsky (1989) indicated that identity commitment is positively related to the informational and normative identity styles but negatively related to the diffuse-avoidant identity style. In the framework of identity status theory and research (Berzonsky, 1989, 1990; Marcia, 1994), commitment combined with an informational identity style should represent an achieved identity whereas commitment combined with a normative identity style should represent foreclosure. Furthermore, identity commitment has been shown to contribute to the relationship between identity and personal well-being (Berzonsky, 2003).

Universality of Identity and Attachment as Predictors of Psychological Dating Aggression

We also examined whether the contributions identity and attachment make to explaining psychological dating aggression held across gender, age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and dating experience. Although these demographic factors show associations with dating aggression (Caetano, Field, Ramissetty-Mikler, & McGrath, 2005; Ellis et al., 2009; Saint-Eloi

Cadely, Pittman, Pettit, Lansford, Bates, Dodge, & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2017), identity styles

(Berzonsky, 1992; Boyd, Patricia, Kandell, & Lucas, 2003; Saint-Eloi Cadely, Pittman,

Kerpelman, & Adler-Baeder, 2011) and attachment (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Geher et

al., 2005; Henderson et al., 2005; Reed, Tolman, Ward, & Safyer, 2016), we expected the

theorized associations between identity styles, romantic attachment insecurity and psychological

dating aggression to operate similarly across demographic groups.

In summary, we considered how identity styles and romantic attachment dimensions

work together to explain psychological dating aggression. We hypothesized that anxious and

avoidant attachment and diffuse-avoidant identity style will be positively related to

psychological dating aggression, whereas informational and normative identity styles will be

negatively related to psychological dating aggression. We also anticipated that high levels of an

informational or normative identity style will weaken the association between the attachment

dimensions and psychological dating aggression, however high levels of a diffuse-avoidant

identity style will strengthen the association between the attachment dimensions and

psychological dating aggression. Additionally, we examined whether the relationships between

these constructs hold across different demographic groups.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Data were drawn from a five-year evaluation project known as Healthy Couples Healthy

Children: Targeting Youth (HCHCTY) (Kerpelman et al., 2012). Only pre-test data (data

collected prior to intervention) were used in the present study. Participants were recruited from

various public high schools across a southern state in the USA, and were enrolled in a mandatory

health class. Data were collected at school during regular class sessions. Participating students and their parents gave written consent for the data collection.

Participants were 2,577 high school students. Of these participants, 541 were dropped because they did not indicate a previous or current dating relationship ($n = 257$) or because they were missing data on all variables of interest to our study ($n = 284$). Another 61 cases had problematic data on the variables of interests and/or control variables and thus were dropped from this study. These problematic cases appeared not to have taken the survey seriously (e.g., reported the same response for all items) or their responses suggested they did not understand the questions. Problematic cases were more likely to have been males ($\chi^2 (1) = 11.44$, $p < .001$), to have been part of a minority ethnic group ($\chi^2 (1) = 23.86$, $p < .001$), and to receive free/reduced lunch ($\chi^2 (1) = 15.61$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, these cases had lower scores on the informational identity style ($t (1996) = 5.22$, $p < .001$), the normative identity style ($t (1994) = 3.02$, $p = .003$), identity commitment ($t (1978) = 4.42$, $p < .001$), and higher scores on the avoidant attachment dimension ($t (1970) = -6.84$, $p < .001$). The removal of cases dropped for any reason resulted in an analytic sample of 1,975 high school students.

Participants in the analysis sample were predominately 10th graders (58.0%; M age = 16.22 years old; $SD = 1.07$) and slightly more than half were girls (52.6%). The analysis sample was reasonably diverse, 54.8% Whites, 34.6% Blacks, and 9.9% were of other ethnic/racial backgrounds. Nearly half of participants (47.1%) received free/reduced lunch. Moreover, 51.9% of participants were dating at the time of data collection, and 43.1% of participants reported on a previous romantic relationship. Participants who were dating at the time of data collection indicated a relationship length of approximately seven months ($M = 7.39$; $SD = 9.69$) and

participants who reported on a past dating relationship had dated their partner for approximately

four months ($M = 4.75$; $SD = 7.56$).

Measures

      Identity Styles and Commitment. Identity styles and identity commitment were

assessed using six selected items per subscale from the *Identity Style Inventory – Version III* (ISI

III; Berzonsky, 1992). Items were selected based on results of a factor analysis from the full

scale conducted on a sample of college students ($N = 291$). Example items include: informational

identity style: "I've spent a great deal of time thinking seriously about what I should do with my

life;" normative identity style: "I've more or less always operated according to the values with

which I was brought up;" diffuse-avoidant identity style: "I try not to think about or deal with

problems as long as I can;" and commitment: "I know what I want to do with my future."

Cronbach alphas for each identity style and identity commitment were .71, .65, .61, and .66,

respectively. These reliability coefficients are in line with those reported for the full subscales

(Berzonsky, 1992; Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996; Berzonsky & Luk, 2005). Correlations between

the six-item subscales and the full sets of items ranged from .79-.94 (see Kerpelman et al., 2008;

2012). All items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly*

agree). A composite score for each identity style and identity commitment was created based on

the mean of the relevant items. Higher scores indicated more endorsements of an identity style or

identity commitment.

      Attachment Dimensions. The *Experiences in Close Relationships* (ECR) scale was used

to assess the two dimensions of romantic attachment insecurity (Brennan et al., 1998). Nine

selected items comprised each dimension and were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1

(*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). Correlations between the selected items and the full

subscale, calculated on an independent sample, were .97 for both subscales (Kerpelman et al.,

2012). An example avoidant dimension item is: "I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep

down;" an example anxious dimension item is: "I worry a fair amount about losing my partner."

Cronbach alphas were .76 for avoidance and .81 for anxiety. A composite score based on the

mean of the items for each attachment dimension was created. Higher scores indicated more

endorsement of each attachment dimension.

Psychological Aggression. The same four items selected from the *Conflict Tactics Scale*

(CTS; Straus, 1979) were used to assess using and then receiving psychological dating

aggression (i.e., Insult or swear at; Sulk or refuse to talk about the problem; Stomp out of the

room, house or yard; Do or say something to spite). A Cronbach alpha of .75 and .79 was

reported for using and receiving psychological dating aggression, respectively. Participants were

asked to report only behaviors that were not enacted with playful intentions (Hamby, 2016) in

the most recent month of their current or latest relationship. Items were rated on a 4-point scale

ranging from 0 (*None*) to 3 (*3 or more times*). The individual items were used to create latent

factors for using psychological dating aggression and for receiving psychological dating

aggression.

Demographic Variables. Gender was dichotomized (0 = *Boys*, 1 = *Girls*). Race was also

treated as a dichotomous variable (0 = *Whites*, 1 = *Minorities*). A categorical SES variable

reflected participants' qualification for Free/Reduced Lunch (0 = *No*, 1 = *Yes*). Age was coded in

years and ranged from 14-20 years old (*M* = 16.22; *SD* = 1.07). Lastly, a dichotomous variable

reflected whether participants were reporting on a previous or current dating relationship (0 =

Dated in the past, 1 = *Currently dating*). These demographic variables served as controls for the

main effects model and were the grouping factors considered in our test of the universality of the main effects models.

Plan of Analysis

MPLUS Version 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012) was used for conducting the main analyses of the current study. Latent factors, each indicated by four items, were created for use and receipt of psychological dating aggression. Two separate confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were used to test whether each latent variable fit the data adequately. Next, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the study's hypotheses. Two models were fit to the data, one for each latent variable as the outcome. In each, the outcome was predicted by all three identity styles and both attachment dimensions while controlling for demographic factors (i.e., gender, race, age, free/reduced lunch, and dating experience) and identity commitment. Because we posed directional hypotheses for using psychological dating aggression, one-tailed tests were used to determine significant main effects for this behavior. Two-tailed tests were used to determine significant main effects for receiving psychological dating aggression given that no directional hypotheses were made for this type of behavior when predicted by identity styles. For the CFA and SEM analyses, a non-significant chi-square (χ^2), a comparative fit index (CFI) and a Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) of .90 and above, a non-significant root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) with a value less than .08, and a standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) lower than .08 was indicative of a good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Separate interaction terms were added to the full main effects models individually for using and receiving psychological dating aggression. Each interaction term was created by multiplying two variables together (e.g., informational identity style x anxious attachment).

The degree to which findings obtained in the structural analyses held across demographic categories was assessed via multi-group analyses for the dichotomous factors. Pathways from the SEM models (i.e., using and receiving) were tested across dichotomous groups while controlling for identity commitment and all other demographic variables except for the one used as a grouping factor. The effects of these demographic variables and identity commitment on psychological dating aggression were set to equality across the two groups. Furthermore, a p-value of .01 was used as the criterion for significance given the number of tests conducted. Tests were conducted whereby pathways were estimated in the comparison group (e.g., males vs. females) when free to be different and when constrained to equality. Significant differences were indicated if the change in the overall chi-square ($\Delta\chi^2$) for the constrained model relative to the unconstrained model exceeded the critical value for one degree of freedom (χ^2 (1) = 6.64, $p <$ .01).

For age as a moderator (a continuous variable), separate interaction terms were created by multiplying age with each attachment dimension and each identity style individually (e.g., age x informational identity style). Each interaction term was individually added to the full model for using and receiving psychological dating aggression.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

Preliminary Analyses

Approximately 70% of participants reported using at least one form of psychological dating aggression, whereas 66% of the sample said they were the recipient of one of these behaviors. Table 1 shows the means for use and receipt of psychological dating aggression, identity styles, and romantic attachment variables. Means were compared across the categorical demographic groups; significant differences are noted in the table (see Table 1).

Bivariate associations are presented in Table 2. Confirmatory factor analyses showed that all indicators of psychological dating aggression significantly loaded on their respective factors (use and receipt). The model fit the data well for use of aggression ($\chi^2 = 4.87$, $p = .09$; DF = 2; CFI = 1.00; TLI = 1.00; RMSEA = .03, $p = .86$; SRMR = .01) and for its receipt ($\chi^2 = 8.65$, $p < .01$; DF = 2; CFI = 1.00; TLI = .99; RMSEA = .04, $p = .61$; SRMR = .01).

Identity and Attachment as Predictors of Psychological Dating Aggression

The models examining identity styles and the attachment dimensions as predictors of psychological dating aggression fit the data well for both using and receiving psychological dating aggression. Across both models, the informational identity style was negatively related to psychological dating aggression, although this relationship approached significance for receiving psychological dating aggression. In each model, the anxious attachment dimension was positively associated with psychological dating aggression. The normative identity style was negatively linked to receiving psychological dating aggression, and the diffuse-avoidant identity style was positively associated with using psychological dating aggression (see Table 3). The identity and attachment variables uniquely accounted for 6% and 7% of the variance, respectively, in the use and the receipt of psychological dating aggression. For the full model including demographic variables the variance accounted for was 18% and 10%, respectively, for use and receipt of psychological dating aggression.

Identity and Attachment Interacting to Predict Psychological Dating Aggression

Significant interactions for the identity styles and attachment dimensions were plotted based on one $\pm$ 1 SD to indicate high and low values of the interacting variables. One interaction was significant (normative x avoidance) and one interaction approached significance (informational x avoidance) for using psychological dating aggression. Specifically, adolescents

endorsing high levels of a normative identity style and an avoidant attachment dimension

indicated less use of psychological dating aggression compared to other combinations of these

two factors (see Figure 1A). Similarly, adolescents with high levels of an informational identity

style along with high levels of an avoidant attachment dimension indicated lower use of

psychological dating aggression relative to other combinations of these two factors (see Figure

1B). One marginal significant interaction emerged for receiving psychological dating aggression

in which high levels of an informational identity style along with high levels of an avoidant

dimension predicted receiving less psychological dating aggression compared to other

combinations of these variables (see Figure 1C).

Testing the Universality of the Model

Twenty multi-group tests (four demographic factors x five predictors) were conducted for

using and for receiving psychological dating aggression. None of these tests showed significant

differences across any of the dichotomous groups. Ten interaction tests for age were conducted

(five for using and five for receiving psychological dating aggression). None of these interactions

were significant. Thus, these tests support the universality of the patterns in the model.

<div align="center">**Discussion**</div>

This is the first study to examine whether identity exploration strategies employed during

adolescence help explain variability in the use and receipt of psychological dating aggression.

Overall, our findings were generally consistent with expectations. First, the informational

identity style negatively related to the use and receipt of psychological dating aggression.

Adolescents with an informational identity style are generally less likely to demonstrate conduct

problems relating to psychological aggression (Adams et al., 2001). Such adolescents may use

more effective problem-solving strategies when dealing with conflicts (Berzonsky, 1992). In line

with this reasoning, these adolescents may turn to more effective conflict resolution strategies when confronted with aggression. Next, adopting a diffuse-avoidant identity style was positively related to using psychological dating aggression. Adolescents with high scores on this style are more likely to engage in psychologically aggressive behaviors (Adams et al., 2001) and are less likely to find positive means to deal with problems (Berzonsky, 1992). Lastly, endorsing a normative identity style negatively related to receiving psychological dating aggression. Adolescents with a normative identity style may have influences from socially conforming parents, peers, other adults or organized groups that discourage the use of aggression in romantic relationships, which may lead to a lower tolerance of such behaviors or selecting partners who are less likely to engage in psychological dating aggression. Alternately, some of these adolescents may be underreporting receipt of psychological dating aggression if their perceptions of a partner's psychologically aggressive behavior are defined differently (e.g., they do not interpret their partner's behavior as aggressive but rather as legitimately asserting authority within the relationship).

Collectively, our findings fit with past literature, but more importantly build on past research by showing that endorsing a particular identity style can contribute positively and negatively to the use and receipt of psychological aggression within romantic relationships. Of additional importance, our findings held across demographic categories for using and receiving psychological dating aggression. Out of 50 comparisons across various demographics variables, none were significant, implying universality in our reported patterns.

Similar to previous studies, our findings suggest that insecure attachment dimensions are related to more difficulty with conflict management within romantic relationships (Creasey, Kershaw, & Boston, 1999; Li & Chan, 2012). However, this notion is only supported in the

current study for the anxious dimension of romantic attachment. Although unexpected, the lack of association between the avoidant dimension and psychological dating aggression does coincide with some past findings. A few previous studies have shown that when both attachment dimensions were examined together, only anxious attachment was associated with dating aggression perpetration and victimization (Henderson et al., 2005; Roberts & Noelle, 1998; Sandberg et al., 2010). Given the importance that individuals scoring higher on anxious attachment place on maintaining their intimate relationships (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan et al., 1998), engagement in psychological dating aggression for such individuals may be viewed as an expression of love and/or fear of losing their partner. This high dependence on the relationship may also lead to clinging to romantic partners, even when experiencing aggression or abuse.

Moreover, high levels of an informational or normative identity style along with high endorsements of avoidant attachment negatively related to the use of psychological dating aggression, and high informational style combined with high avoidant attachment related negatively to the receipt of psychological dating aggression. Given that an avoidant attachment did not predict using nor receiving psychological dating aggression, these findings are counter to our initial expectation that these identity styles would buffer the effects of insecure romantic attachment on psychological dating aggression. Nevertheless, our results reveal that under conditions of high avoidance combined with high informational or normative identity style can decrease the likelihood of using and receiving psychological dating aggression. Although holding high levels of an avoidant attachment is associated with maintaining a distance in the romantic relationship, particularly during conflict, the avoidance by itself does not predict the use or receipt of psychological dating aggression. However, it may be that being socially

competent (consistent with using an informational identity style) and/or socially responsive (consistent with using a normative identity style) supports using better alternatives than psychological aggression during conflicts. In any event, these findings further support the notion that identity attachment processes may work together to explain the prevalence of psychological dating aggression among adolescents.

Findings for the relationships between identity styles and psychological dating aggression were similar but not identical for the use and receipt of aggression. Similarity in the relationships between identity styles and attachment dimensions across using and receiving such behaviors may be due to the general co-occurrence across these experiences (e.g., Cano et al., 1998; Connolly et al., 2009; Williams et al., 2008). However, the few differences may be due to variation in perceptions between these experiences (Johnson, 2006; Johnson & Ferraro. 2000). In other words, adolescents may view the aggression differently when they receive compared to when they perpetrate the aggression. Therefore, future studies will need to examine potential differences in interpretations for using and receiving dating aggression in order to understand the differences in the relationship between identity styles and psychological dating aggression more thoroughly.

Limitations

The current study offers valuable contributions to the literature, but the findings must be interpreted in light of its limitations. First, items assessing psychological dating aggression mainly represented minor forms of such behaviors. The relatively large numbers of participants who report using and receiving them would not necessarily extend to more severe types of such behaviors. Furthermore, the assessed items mainly reflect aggressive types of conflict management, one aspect of psychological dating aggression. Future studies will need to replicate

and extend the current findings using a wider range of psychologically aggressive behaviors that go beyond conflict management.

Additionally, 61 participants were dropped due to data problems. These data problems were more likely to occur among males, minorities, those receiving free/reduced lunch, those with lower scores for informational and normative identity styles, identity commitment, and higher scores for avoidant attachment. The differences between the analytic sample and the dropped cases were generally small, therefore the compromise to generalizability is considered minimal.

Our comparisons across ethnic groups is another limitation, as all adolescents from ethnic minority backgrounds within our sample were collapsed into one group. Although this is a common procedure across studies, this technique limits our ability to examine potential differences across various ethnicities (Hamby, 2015). Given that the number of participants within our sample that were of other ethnic/racial backgrounds than Black or White was small (*n* = 194; 9.9% of the full sample), these individuals were grouped with adolescents who identified as Black in order to have a more robust comparison of adolescents classified as minority versus majority ethnic status. Despite this limitation, collapsing all ethnic minorities into one group in our study permits controlling for social privilege, and the inclusion of free/reduced lunch allows us to control for economic privilege. Therefore, our analysis sample represents the diversity of adolescents attending public schools in the southern state where the data were collected, offering a diverse community sample across age, gender, race/ethnicity, and SES. It will wait for future research, with samples containing more robust numbers of ethnically diverse adolescents, for variability due to ethnic background to be examined more extensively.

Summary and Future Directions

Our findings suggest that the co-development of identity and intimacy may help explain variability in experiences of psychological dating aggression. Specifically, adolescents' approaches to the identity exploration process in conjunction with their romantic attachment matters for their experience of psychological dating aggression. Implications from this study suggest knowing adolescents' endorsements of identity styles and/or extent of insecure attachments can help researchers identify who is more at-risk for using or receiving psychological dating aggression. Our research extends previous theorizing and research on the parallelism between identity and intimacy development (Dyk & Adams, 1987; Kerpelman et al., 2012; Pittman et al., 2011) by suggesting that both processes may work in accordance to help explain negative romantic relationship experiences during adolescence.

In order to elucidate further how identity styles and attachment dimensions influence each other and psychological dating aggression, future studies will need to examine these relationships longitudinally. The cross-sectional design of the present study limits the ability to discuss the order of effects. Our ordering of identity styles and attachment dimensions preceding psychological dating aggression is speculative. Additionally, due to the significance of identity exploration during young adulthood (Arnett, 2000) and the prevalence of romantic relationships (Carver et al., 2003) and dating aggression during this time period (Makepeace, 1981), the relationship between these constructs will need to be investigated within this population.

Identity control theory (Burke, 1991; Kerpelman, Pittman, & Lamke, 1997) states that adolescents are constantly seeking confirmation that they are effectively enacting behaviors consistent with their identities. Adolescents hold expectations regarding their identities and want to ensure that their self-perceptions coincide with significant others' perceptions of who they are. From this perspective, it may be possible that at least some psychological dating aggression is a

response to a romantic partner's input that has implications for the recipient's identity. Given that romantic partners can serve as a significant source of identity input during adolescence (Kerpelman & Pittman, 2001), future studies will need to examine communication patterns among adolescent couples. Specifically, future studies will need to examine communication patterns between romantic partners and their perceptions of that communication in order to investigate the influence of identity input on dating aggression more fully. This will allow for determining whether responses to identity input received from a romantic partner can explain the relationship between identity styles and dating aggression.

Lastly, findings of our study suggest that psychosocial processes during adolescence can contribute to explaining dating aggression during adolescence. These findings can serve as a push for future research to examine how adolescents perceive psychological aggression in their dating relationships and the consequences of psychological dating aggression for subsequent identity and intimacy development in early adulthood.

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Table 1. D*ifferences across demographic variables in reports of psychological aggression, identity styles, identity commitment, and attachment dimensions* (*N* = 1,975).

	Gender		Race		Free/Reduced Lunch		Dating Experience	
	Boys (*n* = 901)	Girls (*n* = 1038)	Minorities (*n* = 878)	Whites (*n* = 1083)	No (*n* = 982)	Yes (*n* = 931)	Past (*n* = 851)	Current (*n* = 1025)
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
Psychological Aggression								
Use	.55 (.66)	.84*** (.83)	.87 (.81)	.58*** (.72)	.61 (.73)	.80*** (.80)	.65 (.75)	.76** (.79)
Receipt	.61 (.75)	.72** (.81)	.62 (.78)	.75*** (.79)	.63 (.76)	.73** (.81)	.69 (.80)	.67 (.78)
Identity Styles								
Informational	3.87 (.67)	4.12*** (.62)	3.99 (.71)	4.01 (.60)	4.01 (.63)	3.99 (.68)	3.96 (.64)	4.03* (.67)
Normative	3.60 (.67)	3.70*** (.68)	3.66 (.65)	3.65 (.70)	3.70 (.68)	3.62 (.68)**	3.69 (.67)	3.63 (.69)
Diffuse-Avoidant	3.04 (.69)	3.04 (.75)	3.13 (.73)	2.96*** (.71)	2.96 (.68)	3.12 (.76)***	3.03 (.70)	3.05 (.74)
Attachment Dimensions								
Avoidant	2.18 (.69)	2.24 (.76)	2.31 (.72)	2.12*** (.72)	2.12 (.70)	2.30*** (.74)	2.37 (.68)	2.06*** (.73)
Anxious	2.62 (.79)	2.69 (.88)	2.61 (.82)	2.69* (.85)	2.61 (.85)	2.72** (.83)	2.75 (.82)	2.60*** (.86)

*p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics and correlations between identity styles, identity commitment, attachment dimensions, psychological aggression, and control variables* (*N* = 1,975).

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Informational	-												
2. Normative	.45***	-											
3. Diffuse	.07**	.12***	-										
4. Commitment	.23***	.29***	-.09***	-									
5. Avoidant	-.14***	-.08***	.11***	-.10***	-								
6. Anxious	-.02	-.12***	.25***	-.11***	.23***	-							
7. PsychP	-.07***	-.09***	.10***	-.04	.08***	.20***	-						
8. PsychV	-.05*	-.08***	.07**	-.04	.04	.22***	.70***	-					
9. Sex	.19***	.08***	.00	.09***	.04	.04	.19***	.07**	-				
10. Race	-.02	.01	.12***	-.08***	.12***	-.05*	.18***	.08***	-.05*	-			
11. Free Lunch	-.01	-.06**	.11***	-.05*	.13***	.07**	.12***	.06**	.07**	.43***	-		
12. Age	.02	-.04	.01	-.06**	-.01	.03	.13***	.13***	-.06**	.17***	.10***	-	
13. Dating Exp.	.05*	-.04	.01	-.02	-.21***	-.09***	.07**	-.01	.10***	.13***	.11***	.15***	-
M	4.00	3.65	3.04	3.66	2.21	2.66	.71	.68	.54	.45	.50	16.22	.55
SD	.66	.68	.72	2.23	.73	.84	.77	.79	.50	.50	.50	1.08	.50

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001; PsychP=Psychological Aggression Perpetration; PsychV=Psychological Aggression Victimization. Sex (0 = *Boys*, 1 = *Girls*), Race (0 = *Whites*, 1 = *Minorities*), Free/Reduced Lunch (0 = *No*, 1= *Yes*), Dating Experience (0 = *Dated in the past*, 1 = *Currently dating*).

Table 3. *Standardized and unstandardized parameter estimates, R-Squares, and fit statistics for*

identity styles and attachment dimensions related to psychological aggression ($N = 1{,}975$).

	Psychological Aggression Use			Psychological Aggression Receipt		
	B	(S.E)	β	B	(S.E)	B
Informational Identity Style	-.12	(.03)	-.10***	-.07	(.04)	-.05~
Normative Identity Style	-.04	(.03)	-.04	-.07	(.04)	-.06*
Diffuse-Avoidant Identity Style	.05	(.03)	.05*	.03	(.03)	.03
Identity Commitment	-.02	(.03)	-.02	.02	(.04)	.02
Avoidant Dimension	-.02	(.03)	-.02	-.04	(.03)	-.04
Anxious Dimension	.18	(.02)	.20***	.22	(.03)	.23***
Sex	.37	(.04)	.25***	.17	(.04)	.11***
Race	.31	(.04)	.20***	.14	(.05)	.09**
Free/Reduced lunch	-.01	(.04)	-.01	-.01	(.05)	-.00
Age	.08	(.02)	.11***	.10	(.02)	.13***
Dating Experience	.04	(.04)	.03	-.07	(.04)	-.04
R-Square						
Psychological Aggression	.18			.10		
Fit Statistics						
Chi-Square	81.35***			82.28***		
DF	35			35		
CFI	.98			.98		
TLI	.97			.97		
RMSEA	.03			.03		
SRMR	.01			.01		

Note. One-tailed tests: ~$p < .10$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.
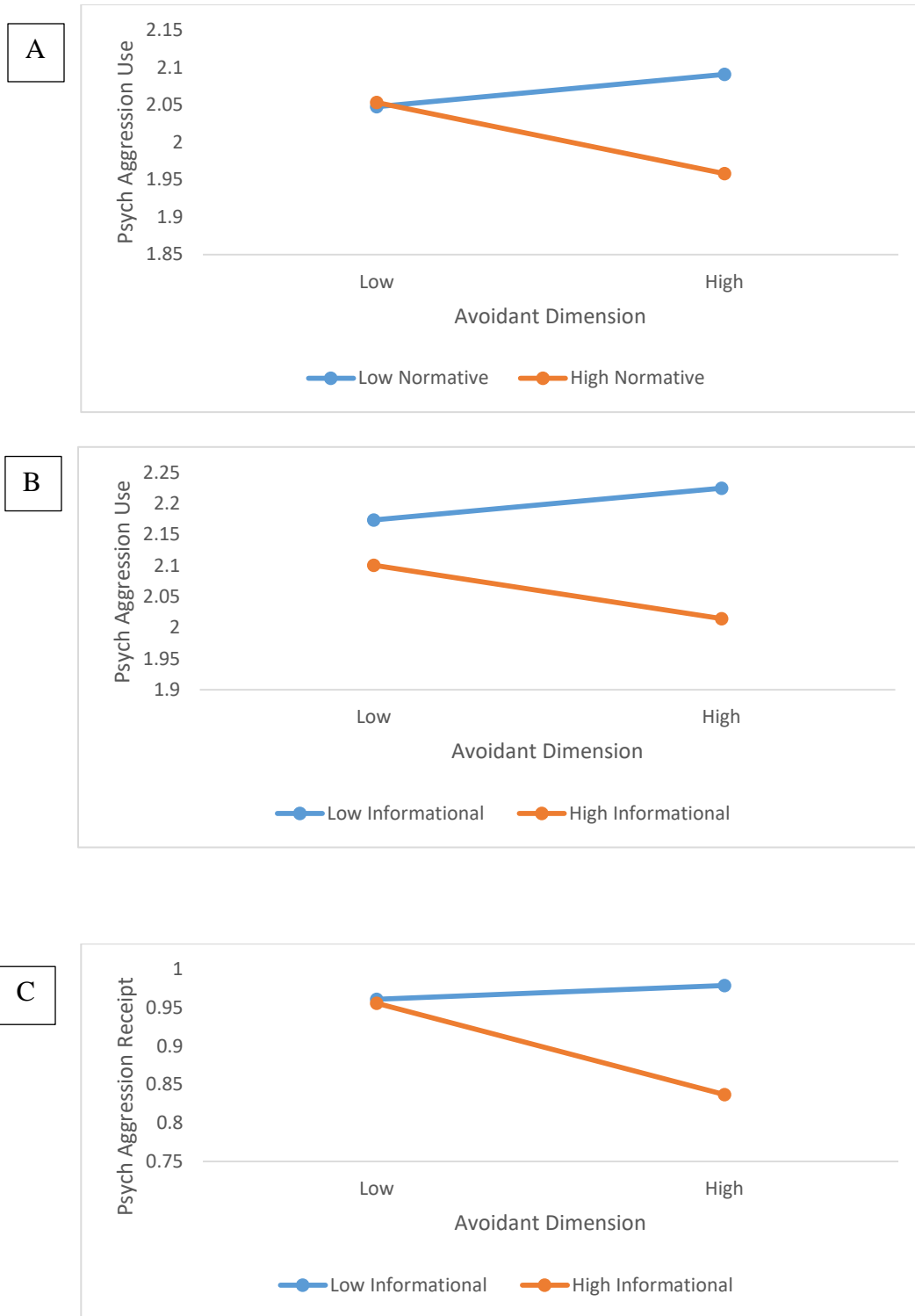
Figure 1. Identity styles interacting with attachment dimensions predicting psychological dating aggression. Points are plotted 1 SD above and below the mean. Analyses controlled for sex, race, age, identity commitment, dating experiences, and whether participants received free/reduced lunch ($N = 1,975$).