The Relationship between Dating and Body Image in Adolescence

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Abstract
Due to changes in dating relationships and body image during adolescence, the purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between these constructs among girls and boys in middle school. We sought to determine whether drive for muscularity, drive for thinness, and body dissatisfaction differed among girls and boys who were dating versus those who were not as well as for those who desired to date versus those who did not. Self-report data was obtained from 85 girls and 75 boys in seventh through ninth grades, and included measures of current dating status, desire to date, drive for muscularity, drive for thinness, and body dissatisfaction. Results from MANOVAs revealed no significant relationship between current dating status and body image in girls. However, there was a significant effect for desire to date in girls. Results from ANOVAs revealed significant effects for girls who wanted to date and drive for thinness and for girls who wanted to date and body dissatisfaction, such that girls who desired to date had higher levels of both drive for thinness and body dissatisfaction. There were no significant findings for boys. Our results suggest a need for future prevention and intervention programs to focus on girls and the unique experiences they face.

Introduction
During adolescence, girls and boys face many changes in both body shape and the beginning of romantic relationships. Adolescents at this time tend to experience body dissatisfaction, likely due to social pressures (Schooler et al., 2008). Furthermore, adolescents associate a thin body with success in their dating relationships (Smolak et al., 1993). The purpose of the present study was to thoroughly examine the relationship between dating and body image among girls and boys in middle school. More specifically, we sought to determine whether body image, which included a drive for muscularity, drive for thinness, and body dissatisfaction, differed among girls and boys who were dating versus those who were not. Additionally, we sought to determine if body image differed among girls and boys who desired to date versus those who did not.

Method
Participants
- 85 girls and 75 boys in seventh through ninth grades
- Primarily White (90%), and from the Midwest

Procedure
- Self-report questionnaires were administered after school in a large auditorium
- Compensation was a $25 gift card to the local mall

Measures
- Dating
  - Current dating status: “Are you currently dating someone exclusively or are you currently dating more than one person?” (yes/no)
  - Desire to date: “Do you want to date?” (yes/no)
- Body Image
  - Drive for muscularity: 15-item Drive for Muscularity Scale (McCrea & Sasse, 2000)
  - Drive for thinness: 7-item Drive for Thinness subscale of the Eating Disorders Inventory (Garner et al., 1983)
  - Body dissatisfaction: 9-item Body Dissatisfaction subscale of the Eating Disorders Inventory (Garner et al., 1983)

Analysis Plan
- We conducted two multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs), separately for girls and boys, to examine whether body image differed according to current dating status and desire to date.
- Follow-up univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted.

Table 1
ANOVA Results for Desire to Date and Drive for Muscularity, Drive for Thinness, and Body Dissatisfaction in Girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body Image Variable</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drive for muscularity</td>
<td>269.26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>269.26</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drive for thinness</td>
<td>349.71</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>349.71</td>
<td>5.42*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body dissatisfaction</td>
<td>647.73</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>647.73</td>
<td>5.40*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results
MANOVA results revealed no significant relationship between current dating status and the three body image variables in girls. However, results indicated a significant multivariate main effect for desire to date in girls (λ = .90, F (3, 78) = 2.81, p < .05, η² = .10).

Follow-up ANOVA revealed significant effects for girls who wanted to date and drive for thinness and for girls who wanted to date and body dissatisfaction (see Table 1). Specifically, girls who desired to date reported higher levels of drive for thinness than girls who did not (M = 12.97 and M = 8.32, respectively). In addition, girls who desired to date had higher levels of body dissatisfaction than girls who did not (M = 21.39 and M = 15.00, respectively). For boys, results revealed no significant findings regarding either current dating status or desire to date on any of the body image variables.

Discussion
In summary, we found that adolescent girls who wanted to date had a higher drive for thinness and higher body dissatisfaction, indicating a clear relationship between dating and body image. It is likely that adolescent girls internalize messages from significant others and the media that suggest a link between successful romantic relationships and thinness.

Adolescence is a particularly challenging time for girls, as their bodies move farther from the thin ideal due to pubertal gains in weight. Educators, researchers, and therapists should be able to use this information when dealing with both girls and boys during middle school.

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