Adolescent Dating and Disordered Eating: Are Young Girls Especially at Risk?
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INTRODUCTION

- Adolescent dating is associated with a number of negative outcomes such as low achievement and depression (e.g., Quatman et al., 2001).
- Some studies have linked adolescent dating with eating disorder symptoms (Compan et al., 2004) while other studies have not (Paxton et al., 2005).
- Developmental Appropriateness Hypothesis (DAH): Adolescents who engage in novel behaviors at a younger age than their peers are at risk for maladjustment (e.g., Welsh et al., 2003).
- Supported in regards to dating and depressive symptoms (e.g., Natsukai et al., 2009).
- Not thoroughly studied in regards to dating and disordered eating.

PURPOSE

- To investigate whether or not dating is associated with eating disorder symptoms among younger, but not older, adolescents (i.e., investigate the DAH).

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS (N = 75)
- Females aged 12 to 18 years (M = 15.4, SD = 1.8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eating Disorder (n = 25)</th>
<th>Depressive Disorder (n = 25)</th>
<th>Healthy Controls (n = 25)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 (68%) = anorexia</td>
<td>20 (80%) = MDD</td>
<td>8 (32%) = bulimia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 (32%) = bulimia</td>
<td>4 (16%) = Dysthymia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 (4%) = Elevated BDI (21)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

MEASURES

- Kiddie Schedule for Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia (Chambers et al., 1985)
- Eating Disorder Inventory (Garner, 1991)
  - Body dissatisfaction (BD)
  - Drive for thinness (DT)
  - Bulimia (B)
- Dating questionnaire (Kuttler & La Greca, 2004)
  - 6-point Likert scale:
    1) Not dating now
    2) Dating/sees 1 person casually
    3) Dating/sees 2+ people casually
    4) Mostly going out with 1 person and dating a few others

RESULTS

Table 1. Frequencies for Dating by Group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>ED</th>
<th>DD</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not currently dating</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently dating (2+ on dating)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Regression Analyses on EDI subscales.

1. Regression on BD (ns)
2. Regression on DT (ns)
3. Regression on B
   Block 1
   Age menarche
   Block 2
   Age
   Dating
   AgeXDating

Figure 1. Mean EDI Subscale Scores by Dating.

Figure 2. Age By Dating Interaction on EDI-Bulimia

DISCUSSION

- Current dating is associated with increased bulimic symptoms but not increased body dissatisfaction or drive for thinness (Figure 1).
- Interaction between age and dating on bulimic symptoms: Among younger adolescents, dating is associated with increased bulimic symptoms, but among older adolescents, dating is not associated with bulimic symptoms (Figure 2).
- The DAH was partially supported. Young adolescent girls who date experience increased bulimic symptoms but not increased body dissatisfaction or drive for thinness.

- Future longitudinal studies should examine whether dating is a risk factor for bulimic symptoms among younger adolescents.

REFERENCES