



Body-esteem of pupils who attended single-sex versus mixed-sex schools: A cross-sectional study of intrasexual competition and peer victimization



Suzet Tanya Lereya¹, Suna Eryigit-Madzwamuse¹, Chanchala Patra, Joshua H. Smith, Dieter Wolke*

Department of Psychology, University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK

A B S T R A C T

Keywords:

Intrasexual competition
Peer victimization
Body-esteem
Mixed-sex schools
Single-sex schools

In intrasexual competition (competition for reproductive resources), bullying can be viewed as a tool to devalue competitors, gain a high status and a powerful, dominant position in the peer group which may lead to beneficial gains such as access to potential romantic partners. This study investigated the relationship between intrasexual competition, bullying victimization and body-esteem, in single-sex versus mixed-sex schools. 420 participants completed a body-esteem scale, a retrospective bullying questionnaire, and intrasexual competition scales. Our results showed that relational victimization was associated with low body-esteem for both females and males. Females in single-sex schools experienced higher intrasexual competition which in turn was associated with their body-esteem directly and indirectly via relational victimization. In males, intrasexual competition was indirectly associated with body-esteem via relational victimization. Interventions to improve body esteem may focus on reducing intrasexual competition and peer victimization.

© 2014 Published by Elsevier Ltd on behalf of The Foundation for Professionals in Services for Adolescents.

Body image is a psychological construct which refers to people's attitudes about their bodies, incorporating cognitive, perceptual, behavioral, and affective dimensions (Lunde, Frisén, & Hwang, 2006). When inconsistencies arise between the perceived body and a person's perception of an ideal body, this may result in feelings of discontentment; which is commonly referred to as low body-esteem (Ogden, 2000). Schur, Sanders, and Steiner (2000) reported body-esteem dissatisfaction rates as high as 50% of 8–13-year-old North American girls and boys. Given that body dissatisfaction is a potential risk factor for eating disorder diagnoses (Johnson & Wardle, 2005; Polivy & Herman, 2002; Stice & Whitenton, 2002) and is often associated with mood disorder symptoms (McCreary & Sasse, 2000; Stice & Whitenton, 2002), much attention has focused on the root of causes of body dissatisfaction (Ferguson, Munoz, Contreras, & Velasquez, 2011).

Many scholars agree that body dissatisfaction may result from complex sociocultural factors (Keel & Klump, 2003; Klump, McGue, & Iacono, 2000). Media, parents and peers have been identified as the three main factors influencing body image (Ferguson, Winegard, & Winegard, 2011; Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, 2004). The American Psychological Association (2007) and

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 (0)24 7657 3217; fax: +44 (0)24 7652 4225.

E-mail address: D.Wolke@warwick.ac.uk (D. Wolke).

¹ These authors contributed equally to this work.

others (e.g. Levine & Murnen, 2009; Thompson & Stice, 2001) have argued that exposure to thin ideals in the media are an important contributor to body dissatisfaction. This may be due to the discrepancy between an actual body size and an ideal size strongly influenced by images in the media (Dunkley, Wertheim, & Paxton, 2001). However, not all adolescents exposed to mass media will develop body-related concerns. Other factors are likely to contribute to adolescents' increased vulnerability to media impact. It may be that messages communicated by the media only become problematic when they are reinforced by more immediate sociocultural agents such as parents and peers (Dunkley et al., 2001). Parents play an important role in transmitting sociocultural messages regarding the ideal body to adolescents (Stice, 1994) and have an impact on their children's body image (e.g. Agras, Bryson, Hammer, & Kraemer, 2007; Ricciardelli, McCabe, & Banfield, 2000; Rodgers, Faure, & Chabrol, 2009). However, during adolescence, peer interactions take on a heightened importance, supplanting previous reliance on parents (Connell & Dishion, 2006). Accordingly, adolescents compare themselves to friends and close peers most frequently, with more distal peers, family members and individuals in the media being less frequent comparison targets (Jones, 2001; Schutz, Paxton, & Wertheim, 2002). This paper focuses on peer influences on body-image.

Peers can influence body-image through verbal comments, communication of beauty norms, and explicit verbal comparisons. This socialization process may be driven by competition for mating resources (Geary, 2010). Evolutionary theories of sexual selection propose that individuals must compete with their same-sex peers for reproductive resources (Buss, 1988; Fisher & Cox, 2011). This is called intrasexual competition and dates back to Darwinian theories of sexual selection (Darwin, 1859). Intrasexual competition is well-documented among males (Archer, 2009; Geary, 2010; Wilson & Daly, 1985), while, female intrasexual competition has been less comprehensively investigated (Clutton-Brock, 2007). Female intrasexual competition will be likely to occur when males of high genetic quality are considered to be a resource. It has been shown that females compete in terms of attractiveness since this is one of the primary criteria used by men when selecting mates (Fisher, 2004). Observation studies indicate that females mainly use two competition strategies: self-promotion and the derogation of rivals. Both are designed to decrease a rival's perceived value. Self-promotion refers to the enhancement of physical attractiveness such as wearing makeup and form-fitting clothing that are used to attract the attention of males (Barber, 1995; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Fisher & Cox, 2009). Derogation of rivals takes the form of repeated indirect or relational aggression (Fisher, 2004; Vaillancourt, 2005; Walters & Crawford, 1994) which may be used to diminish the value of rivals and decrease their chances of winning the competition (Buss & Dedden, 1990; Campbell, 1999; Fisher, 2004; Vaillancourt, 2005). It may be one strategy to gain a high status and a powerful, dominant position in the peer group (Olthof, Goossens, Vermande, Aleva, & van der Meulen, 2011; Reijntjes et al., 2013; Salmivalli & Peets, 2009). Relational aggression includes behaviors such as spreading rumors, disparaging the competitor's appearance, excluding the rival from the peer group, giving the silent treatment, or using derisive body and facial gestures to make the rival feel badly about themselves and thus less willing to compete (Olthof et al., 2011).

As a form of aggression, bullying can also be used to acquire a dominant status within the peer group (Garandeau & Cillessen, 2006; Volk, Camilleri, Dane, & Marini, 2012). Bullying is defined by aggressive behaviors, engaged in repeatedly, by an individual or group of peers with more power than the victim (Olweus, 2002). The aggressive behavior may be direct (physical or verbal) or relational (Wang, Nansel, & Iannotti, 2011; Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield, & Karstadt, 2000). Acquiring dominant status allows access to increased resources including beneficial gains in finding a partner for romantic, sexual or reproductive purposes (Griskevicius et al., 2009) while devaluing the victims (potential competitors). Hence, the function of bullying may be to assert social and sexual dominance (Kolbert & Crothers, 2003; Volk et al., 2012). Indeed, bullies of both sexes appear to start dating at a younger age, are more active with members of the opposite sex and report greater dating/mating opportunities (Connolly, Pepler, Craig, & Taradash, 2000). Adolescents have been shown to be particularly sensitive and affected by being socially excluded (Sebastian, Viding, Williams, & Blakemore, 2010). Bullying can thus be seen as one potential act of intrasexual competition (Fisher & Cox, 2011), however, this has been rarely systematically investigated.

Being the victim of bullying may decrease the perceived self-value in intrasexual competition and body-image. Jones (2004) highlighted the importance of peers and social acceptance in the prediction of satisfaction with body-image and the importance of concern for social acceptance and self-assessment relative to peer norms and peer feedback (Compian, Gowen, & Hayward, 2009). Previous research has shown that bullied children are more likely to have low body-esteem (Farrow & Fox, 2011). Moreover, Lunde et al. (2006) reported that frequently victimized adolescents tend to display more habitual appearance monitoring, and lower satisfaction with their body later in life.

Evolutionary theory proposes that intrasexual competition and bullying will increase by the scarcity of the resource (e.g. available sexual partners) or the higher the number of competitors (Volk, Craig, Boyce, & King, 2006). In other words, if the number of non-romantic peers is higher or the access to potential romantic partners is more restricted, competition may be fiercer and might result in aggressive behaviors. This suggests that school type may have an influence on the frequency of intrasexual competition and bullying behavior leading to higher body dissatisfaction. Indeed, the frequency of bullying has been found to vary according to school types (single-sex school vs. mixed-sex school) (Velasquez, 2010); while direct studies on intrasexual competition in different school types are lacking. Moreover, only a few studies, that have examined perception of physical appearance, showed evidence for increased dissatisfaction with body image in single-sex settings compared to mixed-sex settings especially for females (Davison & McCabe, 2006; Dyer & Tiggemann, 1996; Limbert, 2001). Additionally, although low body-esteem can be present at all ages (Jones, 2004), it is most prominent during adolescence (Littleton & Ollendick, 2003) as adolescence is a time of establishing one's own identity, with concomitant increases in self-awareness, preoccupation with image, concern with social acceptance (Harter, 1999), and involvement in romantic relationships increases (Collins, 2003).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10436709>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10436709>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)