Adolescent Dating Violence

Do Adolescents Follow in Their Friends’, or Their Parents’, Footsteps?

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Past research suggests that adolescents whose parents are violent toward one another should be more likely to experience dating violence. Having friends in violent relationships also may increase the odds of dating violence. The authors examined which antecedent, friend dating violence or interparental violence, if either, is more strongly predictive of own dating violence perpetration and victimization. Five hundred and twenty-six adolescents (eighth and ninth graders) completed self-report questionnaires on two occasions over a 6-month period. Consistent with hypotheses, friend dating violence and interparental violence each exhibited unique cross-sectional associations with own perpetration and victimization. However, only friend violence consistently predicted later dating violence. The authors explored influence versus selection processes to explain the association between friend and own dating violence.

Key words: dating violence; adolescents; physical abuse

Although research on violence in intimate relationships has increased markedly over the past three decades, much remains to be discovered about the origins of intimate violence. To identify the origins, several studies have examined predictors of dating violence in college relationships (Stets & Pirog-Good, 1987; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989). However, the origins of dating violence may be established before college; the first episode typically occurs by age 15 (Henton, Cate, Koval, Lloyd, & Christopher, 1983). We examined dating violence in an adolescent population and specifically ado-
lescents who were physically violent toward a dating partner (dating violence perpetration) or who were the target of physical violence from a dating partner (dating violence victimization). Our primary aim was to compare the relative strength of two key antecedents: having friends in violent dating relationships and having parents who are violent toward one another. We were interested in which antecedent condition—friend dating violence or interparental violence—is more strongly linked to perpetration and victimization in one’s own dating relationship.

There is much to be gained from focusing on dating violence among adolescents. Although adolescent dating relationships are more fluid than college or adult dating relationships, adolescents are nonetheless strongly affected by their dating relationships (Cairns & Cairns, 1994). Adolescent dating relationships provide a foundation for adult romantic relationships (cf. Crockett & Crouter, 1995), including violent adult relationships (Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, & Silva, 1998). If violent habits during adolescence spill over into adulthood, an understanding of adolescent dating violence is critical in forming an understanding of adult partner violence.

There is also much to be gained from examining both dating violence perpetration and dating violence victimization. Persons who are victimized in their relationships often also perpetrate violence (cf. Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989), but not all relationships involve mutual violence. Moreover, the factors that predict perpetration are not necessarily the same factors that predict victimization (cf. Riggs, Caulfield, & Street, 2000). Thus, a separate examination of victimization and perpetration is warranted.

There is extant research on adolescent aggression toward peers (e.g., Dodge, Coie, Pettit, & Price, 1990) and on adolescent dating violence (e.g., O’Keefe, Brockopp, & Chew, 1986). However, the relative contribution of friend dating violence and interparental violence in predicting adolescent dating violence remains largely unknown.

**Parental and Friend Behavior as Predictors of Adolescent Dating Violence**

*Theoretical background.* How do adolescents come to be perpetrators or victims of dating violence? Several theories have suggested that parents and peers are important in this process. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) suggests that adolescents learn to be violent toward dating partners by observing the behavior of important others (models such as parents, friends) and its positive consequences. Because perpetrators are more likely to receive positive consequences for their behavior than victims, social learning theory typically has been applied to understanding perpetration (more than
victimization). However, learning can occur even in the absence of external positive consequences (Bandura, 1986).

Interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) similarly suggests that close others influence adolescent behaviors. This theory posits that interaction behaviors are strongly influenced by beliefs and expectations about what a relationship should be like or a comparison level. Behavioral standards for dating relationships are likely to be influenced by one’s own past experiences with dating relationships. Because many adolescents have not had extensive dating experiences, instead they are likely to form standards based on observations of close others, such as parents and friends. Moreover, standards of acceptable interaction behaviors can shape either perpetration or victimization interactions. These theories are supported by a large extant literature documenting parental and friend influence on adolescent behavior.

**Parental influence.** Parents influence their adolescent children in many ways (cf. Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000), including aggression (Sheridan, 1995). Gelles and Straus have provided extensive evidence that parental aggressive behavior may encourage child aggressive behavior (cf. Gelles & Straus, 1988; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). The intergenerational transmission hypothesis posits that children may later become violent as adults either because they were abused as children or because they witnessed interparental abuse. Although there is support for the notion that violence breeds violence (cf. Widom, 1989), results concerning the effect of witnessing interparental violence have been mixed. In a recent meta-analysis on the intergenerational transmission of violence hypothesis, Stith et al. 2000 concluded that there are small but significant effect sizes for both perpetration and victimization and stronger effects of perpetration for men. These studies suggest that although the effects may be small, there is reason to anticipate that parents who are violent toward one another will model dating violence in their adolescent children.

**Friend influence.** The idea that parents shape their children’s behavior may seem obvious. However, peers may be an even more powerful source of influence (Harris, 1995), particularly on deviant behaviors (cf. Kandel, 1996). Little is known about the influence of friends on adolescent dating violence. Studies with college samples reveal that peer involvement in dating violence and own use of dating violence are correlated (Gwartney-Gibbs, Stockard, & Bohmer, 1987). Moreover, peers exert a strong influence on male sexual aggression (DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1995). The theories described above both would suggest an influence process whereby friends who experience dating violence encourage dating violence. Having friends involved in
dating violence may convey to the adolescent that dating violence is acceptable, which would increase the likelihood of experiencing dating violence at a later point in time. However, there may also be a selection process (Bauman & Ennett, 1996): once in a violent relationship, an adolescent may be attracted to, and seek out, friends who are also in a violent relationship.

The Relative Role of Parents and Friends

We anticipated that interparental violence and friend dating violence each would be associated with adolescents’ own dating violence. However, we were also interested in which association would be stronger so as to better understand the potential causes of intimate violence and develop appropriate interventions. For instance, if the association with friend dating violence is stronger, interventions might focus on peer culture among adolescents rather than on parental factors.

Previous research has not directly compared the relative influence of parental behaviors versus friend behaviors in predicting adolescent dating violence. However, in the context of adolescent substance abuse, friends’ substance use is a better predictor than parental substance use (Biddle, Bank, & Marlin, 1980). Sexual aggression also is more strongly tied to peer behavior than parental behavior (DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1995), although there is some evidence that difficult father-son relationships may contribute to a son’s sexual aggression (Lisak, 1994).

Consistent with the relatively stronger peer effects for substance use and sexual aggression, we expected friends to exert more influence than parents in predicting own dating violence. Problem behaviors (i.e., substance use) tend to covary with violence, particularly among adolescents who exhibit violent tendencies by age 13 (Cairns & Cairns, 1994). Moreover, substance and alcohol use may create a risk factor for dating aggression (O’Keefe, 1997); if friends encourage substance use, they may also encourage inflicting or tolerating dating violence.

Current Research

To assess the relative effects of having friends in violent relationships versus observing parents hit one another, we adopted a longitudinal design with two measurement occasions (or times). This design allowed us to examine whether Time 1 interparental and friend violence predicted adolescents’ own dating violence at Time 2. Our predictions regarding violence perpetration and victimization were as follows:
Hypothesis 1: Adolescents who report having friends in violent relationships or parents who are violent toward one another should exhibit greater cross-sectional (i.e., concurrent) rates of perpetrating violent dating behaviors.

Hypothesis 2: Time 1 friend violence and Time 1 interparental violence each should predict onset of dating violence perpetration by Time 2.

Hypothesis 3: Adolescents who report having friends in violent relationships or parents who are violent toward one another should exhibit greater cross-sectional rates of being a victim of dating violence.

Hypothesis 4: Time 1 friend violence and Time 1 interparental violence each should predict onset of being the target of dating violence by Time 2.

We also anticipated that when testing friend violence and interparental violence simultaneously, friend dating violence would be a relatively stronger predictor of own violence.

We explored mechanisms linking our predictors (friend dating violence and interparental violence) to our outcome variables (adolescents’ own perpetration and victimization). The theories outlined earlier posit an influence process. However, a robust link between friend and own dating violence could also reflect a selection process (cf. Bauman & Ennett, 1996): Adolescents who experience dating violence may seek friends with similar dating violence experiences.

We also explored gender differences. We expected to replicate the robust finding that rates of perpetration are higher for girls than boys (Henton et al., 1983; O’Keefe, 1997; O’Keeffe et al., 1986). On the other hand, we had no a priori predictions regarding gender differences in the effects of friend and interparental violence (i.e., whether gender would moderate the hypothesized associations). The research on other problem behaviors is mixed, with some studies showing stronger peer effects for girls (Farrell & White, 1998) and others for boys (Alexander, Allen, Crawford, & McCormick, 1999), yet other studies reveal no gender differences in peer effects (MacNeil, Kaufman, Dressler, & LeCroy, 1999). Males who sexually aggress are influenced by peers, but rates of female sexual aggression are too low to assess comparable peer effects. Thus, we did not advance predictions regarding gender differences in links between others’ relationship violence and own dating violence.

METHOD

Design and Participants

We made use of an extant data set that was based on a large-scale experiment to prevent adolescent dating aggression (cf. Foshee et al., 1996). Fourteen
public middle schools (eighth and ninth grades) in a rural county of North Carolina participated in the larger study and were randomly assigned to treatment (i.e., prevention program) or control conditions. All enrolled students were eligible for participation in the study. At Time 1, questionnaires were completed by 81% of the eligible respondents \((n = 1,965)\). Time 1 prevalence rates among the overall sample were comparable to other adolescent samples (cf. Bergman, 1992; O’Keeffe et al., 1986): 14\% of participants \((n = 284)\) reported having perpetrated dating violence at some point in time, and 26\% \((n = 503)\) reported having been a victim. The experiment consisted of six waves of data collection. Because the sample size decreased substantially after the first two waves, we used data only from Times 1 and 2 for the current study. Of the respondents who completed Time 1, 90\% completed Time 2.

The current research was based on a sample of 526 adolescents who completed Times 1 and 2 (6 months apart), who were in the control condition of the larger study (and therefore not “contaminated” by the violence prevention program), and who reported being on a date by Time 1. We focused only on individuals who had been on a date to obtain a sample of those who potentially could have been violence victims or perpetrators. The current sample included 280 girls and 246 boys; most participants were White (83\%), with the remainder 13\% Black, 1\% Hispanic, and 3\% Other. Participant age ranged from 12 to 17; the median age was 13 years old.

**Procedure**

Parental consent was sought prior to collecting data (see Foshee et al., 1996). Data were collected via self-administered questionnaires during 50-minute in-class sessions. To encourage confidentiality, participants put completed questionnaires in an envelope and then gave the sealed envelope to the experimenter. Teachers were not present during data collection sessions.

**Measures**

To measure dating violence perpetration, we administered a scale similar to Straus’s (1990) Conflict Tactics Scale, reworded for adolescents and excluding instances of self-defense. Participants were asked, “How many times have you ever done the following things to a person that you have been on a date with? Only include it when you did it to him/her first. In other words, don’t count it if you did it in self-defense.” Several behaviors followed: “scratched them”; “slapped them”; “physically twisted their arm”; “slammed or held them against a wall”; “kicked them”; “bent their fingers”; “bit them”; “tried to choke them”; “pushed, grabbed, or shoved them”;
“dumped them out of a car”; “threw something at them that hit them”; “forced them to have sex”; “forced them to do something sexual that they did not want to do”; “burned them”; “hit them with my fist”; “hit them with something hard besides my fist”; “beat them up”; “assaulted them with a knife or gun.” For each behavior, participants indicated how many times it occurred, using a 4-point response scale including 0 (never), 1 (1 to 3 times), 2 (4 to 9 times), and 3 (10 or more times). We excluded the two items tapping sexual behavior from our measure, given that it was not the focus of this research.

Because the response scale did not involve equal intervals, summing responses across items would not have yielded meaningful rates (e.g., a score of 3 could reflect three distinct acts, each occurring 1 to 3 times, or one act occurring 10 or more times). Moreover, summed variables yielded highly skewed distributions. Thus, we recoded responses to form a dichotomous variable reflecting the presence or absence of perpetration, or the perpetration rate.

We also recoded responses to form an ordinal variable reflecting the extent of severe violence. Severe perpetration rate differentiated having experienced no violent behaviors, less severe violent behaviors, and severe behaviors, as determined by exploratory factor analyses. (Detailed results can be obtained from the authors.) Severely violent behaviors included the following: physically twisted their arm, slammed or held them against a wall, tried to choke them, dumped them out of a car, burned them, hit them with something hard besides a fist, beat them up, and assaulted them with a knife or gun. Thus, for this variable, each participant was coded as reporting the presence of a severe act, the presence of a less severe act (i.e., the remaining perpetration behaviors), or the absence of perpetration. These three groups were mutually exclusive: Participants who were in the severe perpetration group were not included in the less severe perpetration group, even though they may have perpetrated less severe acts.

To measure victimization, participants were asked, “How many times has any person that you have been on a date with done the following things to you? Only include it when the dating partner did it to you first. In other words, don’t count it if they did it to you in self-defense.” The same behaviors were listed as those measuring perpetration but were worded to reflect victimization (e.g., “hit me”). We created two victimization variables that paralleled the two perpetration variables.

Four questions measured friend dating violence. Participants were asked, “How many of your female friends have told you that their boyfriends were violent to them?” The 4-point response scale ranged from 0 (none) to 4 (four or more). A second question tapped the number of male friends that told them
that their girlfriends were violent toward them. A third question tapped how many female friends were violent toward their boyfriends, and a fourth tapped how many male friends were violent toward their girlfriends. We summed and recoded responses to form a dichotomous variable tapping the presence or absence of at least one friend who experienced dating violence.

To measure interparental violence, participants were asked, “How many times have you seen one of your parents hit the other parent?” Participants indicated the frequency using a 4-point response scale including 1 (never), 2 (1 to 3 times), 3 (4 to 9 times), and 4 (10 or more times). As was the case with violence measures, this variable was highly skewed. Thus, responses were recoded into a dichotomous variable tapping presence or absence of interparental violence.

RESULTS

Overview

Although we provide descriptive information comparing rates of no violence, moderate violence, and severe violence (see Table 1 for perpetration rates and Table 2 for victimization rates), our primary analyses used the dichotomous perpetration and victimization variables (presence/absence). We focused on the presence of dating violence rather than on its severity or degree because ultimately we were more interested in predicting whether violence occurred at all, rather than whether severe or high levels of violence occurred. However, we conducted parallel chi-square and regression analyses using severity of violence variables (which provides more variance than a dichotomous variable), which yielded the same pattern of results unless otherwise noted.

At Time 1, 22% of participants had observed one parent hit the other, and 31% had at least one friend who had been in a violent relationship. Friend dating violence and interparental violence exhibited a small, albeit significant, positive Pearson correlation ($r(524) = .09, p < .05$).

Dating Violence Perpetration

Rates of dating violence perpetration are provided in Table 1. Because of missing data, the sample size was 517 for Time 1 (rather than 526).

The top third of Table 1 reveals that dating violence perpetration increased from Time 1 to Time 2. At Time 1, 20% of respondents reported having perpetrated violence at some point in their lives (12% moderate behaviors, 8%
# TABLE 1: Perpetration Rates at Time 1 and Time 2 for the Entire Sample, for Boys Only, and for Girls Only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Moderate Behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entire sample (%)</strong></td>
<td>80 (414)</td>
<td>12 (61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall level</strong></td>
<td>65 (100)</td>
<td>21 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time 1 friend dating violence</strong></td>
<td>86 (314)</td>
<td>8 (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presence of friend dating violence</strong></td>
<td>65 (100)</td>
<td>21 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absence of friend dating violence</strong></td>
<td>86 (314)</td>
<td>8 (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time 1 interparental violence</strong></td>
<td>71 (82)</td>
<td>20 (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presence of interparental violence</strong></td>
<td>83 (332)</td>
<td>9 (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absence of interparental violence</strong></td>
<td>71 (82)</td>
<td>20 (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys (%)</strong></td>
<td>89 (214)</td>
<td>6 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall level</strong></td>
<td>78 (46)</td>
<td>10 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time 1 friend dating violence</strong></td>
<td>92 (168)</td>
<td>4 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presence of friend dating violence</strong></td>
<td>92 (168)</td>
<td>4 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absence of friend dating violence</strong></td>
<td>78 (46)</td>
<td>10 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time 1 interparental violence</strong></td>
<td>85 (39)</td>
<td>7 (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Presence of interparental violence</strong></td>
<td>90 (175)</td>
<td>6 (11)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Absence of interparental violence</strong></td>
<td>85 (39)</td>
<td>7 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls (%)</strong></td>
<td>72 (200)</td>
<td>17 (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall level</strong></td>
<td>57 (54)</td>
<td>28 (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time 1 friend dating violence</strong></td>
<td>80 (146)</td>
<td>12 (21)</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Presence of friend dating violence</strong></td>
<td>57 (54)</td>
<td>28 (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absence of friend dating violence</strong></td>
<td>80 (146)</td>
<td>12 (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time 1 interparental violence</strong></td>
<td>61 (43)</td>
<td>29 (20)</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Presence of interparental violence</strong></td>
<td>76 (157)</td>
<td>13 (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Absence of interparental violence</strong></td>
<td>61 (43)</td>
<td>29 (20)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**NOTE:** Table entries are percentages rounded to the nearest whole number; sample sizes are in parentheses. Moderate behaviors versus severe behaviors are mutually exclusive. Because of missing data, the sample size for Time 1 was 517; the sample size for Time 2 was 526.
### TABLE 2: Victimization Rates at Time 1 and Time 2 for the Entire Sample, for Boys Only, and for Girls Only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time 1</th>
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<th>Time 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Moderate Behaviors</td>
<td>Severe Behaviors</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Moderate Behaviors</td>
<td>Severe Behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entire sample (%)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall level</td>
<td>64 (337)</td>
<td>17 (88)</td>
<td>19 (98)</td>
<td>52 (272)</td>
<td>24 (128)</td>
<td>24 (126)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presence of friend dating violence</td>
<td>44 (70)</td>
<td>22 (35)</td>
<td>34 (54)</td>
<td>30 (48)</td>
<td>30 (49)</td>
<td>40 (64)</td>
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<td>12 (44)</td>
<td>61 (224)</td>
<td>22 (79)</td>
<td>17 (62)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presence of interparental violence</td>
<td>51 (60)</td>
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<td>27 (32)</td>
<td>38 (45)</td>
<td>31 (36)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>16 (63)</td>
<td>16 (66)</td>
<td>56 (227)</td>
<td>23 (92)</td>
<td>22 (89)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Boys (%)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall level</td>
<td>62 (151)</td>
<td>23 (57)</td>
<td>15 (36)</td>
<td>50 (124)</td>
<td>29 (72)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presence of friend dating violence</td>
<td>44 (27)</td>
<td>29 (18)</td>
<td>27 (17)</td>
<td>35 (22)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Absence of friend dating violence</td>
<td>68 (124)</td>
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<td>10 (19)</td>
<td>56 (102)</td>
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<td>13 (25)</td>
<td>54 (106)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Girls (%)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall level</td>
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<td>20 (56)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>38 (37)</td>
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<td>29 (20)</td>
<td>33 (23)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>71 (148)</td>
<td>10 (20)</td>
<td>20 (41)</td>
<td>58 (121)</td>
<td>17 (36)</td>
<td>25 (53)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Table entries are percentages rounded to the nearest whole number; sample sizes are in parentheses. Moderate behaviors versus severe behaviors are mutually exclusive. Because of missing data, the sample size for Time 1 was 523; the sample size for Time 2 was 526.
severe behaviors). By Time 2 (6 months later), 32% reported having perpetrated some type of violence (16% moderate, 16% severe). A repeated measures ANOVA with time as the independent variable and presence of perpetration as the dependent variable indicated that the increase was significant, \( F(1, 516) = 70.31, p < .001 \). The same pattern emerged using severity of perpetration as the dependent variable, \( F(1, 516) = 79.95, p < .001 \).

To assess support for Hypothesis 1, that friend dating violence and interparental violence each should be associated concurrently with violence perpetration, we performed a series of chi-square analyses (one for each predictor). Consistent with Hypothesis 1, friend dating violence and interparental violence each exhibited a significant univariate association with Time 1 friend dating violence, respectively, \( \chi^2(2, N = 517) = 29.51, p < .001 \), and \( \chi^2(2, N = 517) = 8.26, p < .004 \). Participants with friends who experienced dating violence (see Table 1, Time 1 columns, “Presence of friend dating violence” versus “Absence…” ) and those with parents who were violent toward one another (see Table 1, “Presence of interparental violence” versus “Absence…” ) were more likely to perpetrate violence. In fact, the rate for participants who reported friend dating violence was more than double the rate for those who did not report friend violence, whereas differences due to interparental violence were smaller. In addition, gender was significantly associated with Time 1 perpetration, \( \chi^2(2, N = 517) = 21.53, p < .001 \). Girls were more likely to perpetrate violence than boys (see Table 1, Time 1 columns, “Overall level” for boys versus girls).

When examined simultaneously in a logistic regression analysis (along with all higher order interactions, none of which were significant), the odds of being a perpetrator significantly increased as friend dating violence increased, odds ratio = 3.03, \( p < .001 \); as interparental violence increased, odds ratio = 1.75, \( p < .029 \); and among females, odds ratio = 2.77, \( p < .001 \). Analyses predicting perpetration severity yielded one difference: The effect of interparental violence was marginal.

Hypothesis 2 focuses on onset of perpetration between Time 1 to Time 2. We opted to examine perpetration onset because our variables measured whether a participant had ever been a perpetrator or victim (participants who had ever perpetrated violence by Time 1 by definition were among those who had ever perpetrated violence by Time 2), resulting in highly stable perpetration rates from Time 1 to Time 2 (\( r = .75 \)). Thus, changes from Time 1 to Time 2 only reflected becoming violent rather than becoming “un”violent. As is commonly done with lifetime prevalence rates, we examined correlates of becoming violent from Time 1 to Time 2 in a subsample of participants who did not report any perpetration at Time 1 (\( n = 414; 214 \) boys and 200 girls); any changes observed in this sample indicated that the person became a per-
petrator between Time 1 and Time 2. We also analyzed the data using a residualized change approach (i.e., using the entire sample, predicting Time 2 violence from Time 1 predictors while controlling for Time 1 violence), which yielded a comparable pattern of results.

We conducted separate chi-square analyses to assess the univariate association between each Time 1 predictor and Time 2 perpetration. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, onset of perpetration by Time 2 was predicted from Time 1 friend dating violence, \( \chi^2(2, N = 414) = 5.11, p < .024 \), and from being female, \( \chi^2(2, N = 414) = 7.67, p < .001 \). Participants who were not perpetrators at Time 1 were more likely to become perpetrators by Time 2 to the extent that at Time 1 they had friends in violent relationships and were girls. Interestingly, girls who became perpetrators were more likely to use moderate behaviors, whereas boys who became perpetrators were more likely to use severe behaviors, a pattern that is also apparent in the full sample (see Table 1, Time 2 column, “Overall level” for girls and boys, specifically the “Moderate Behaviors” column versus the “Severe Behaviors” column). Contrary to Hypothesis 2, Time 1 interparental violence did not predict onset of perpetration, \( \chi^2(2, N = 414) = 0.88, p < .347 \).

When examined simultaneously in a logistic regression analysis (along with all higher order interactions, none of which were significant), the odds of becoming a perpetrator by Time 2 significantly increased as Time 1 friend dating violence increased, odds ratio = 1.85, \( p < .039 \), and among females, odds ratio = 2.11, \( p < .009 \), but not as interparental violence increased, odds ratio = 1.32, \( p < .404 \).

In summary, adolescents were more likely to perpetrate dating violence to the extent that their friends experienced dating violence. Although friend dating violence and interparental violence each exhibited cross-sectional associations with own violence perpetration, only friend dating violence predicted onset of perpetration. A higher proportion of girls were perpetrators than boys, but boys who were perpetrators used more severe behaviors than girls who were perpetrators.

**Dating Violence Victimization**

Rates of dating violence victimization are provided in Table 2. Because of missing data, the sample size was 523 for Time 1 (rather than 526).

As can be seen in the top third of Table 2, dating violence victimization increased from Time 1 to Time 2. At Time 1, 36% of respondents reported having been victims at some point in their lives (17% moderate behaviors, 19% severe behaviors). By Time 2 (6 months later), 48% reported being victims (24% moderate, 24% severe). A repeated measures ANOVA with time
as the independent variable and victimization as the dependent variable indicated that the increase was significant, \( F(1, 522) = 78.01, p < .001 \), as was the case when victimization severity was the dependent variable, \( F(1, 522) = 86.47, p < .001 \).

To assess support for Hypothesis 3, that friend dating violence and interparental violence each should be associated concurrently with greater rates of violence victimization, we performed a series of chi-square analyses (one for each predictor). Consistent with Hypothesis 3, the univariate association of Time 1 victimization with Time 1 friend dating violence was significant, \( \chi^2(2, N = 523) = 41.53, p < .001 \), as was the association with Time 1 interparental violence, \( \chi^2(2, N = 523) = 11.38, p < .001 \). As can be seen in Table 2, participants whose friends experienced dating violence or whose parents were violent toward one another were more likely to be victims of dating violence. Although gender was not significantly related to overall victimization at Time 1 (presence/absence), \( \chi^2(2, N = 523) = 1.30, p < .255 \), it was significantly related to victimization severity, \( \chi^2(2, N = 523) = 15.94, p < .001 \): Although boys and girls were roughly equally likely to be victims (boys: 48% at Time 1; girls: 43% at Time 1), boys were more likely to be victims of moderate behaviors, whereas girls were more likely to be victims of severe behaviors (see Table 2, “Overall level” for boys versus girls).

When examined simultaneously in a logistic regression analysis along with all higher order interactions, the odds of being a victim increased with increases in friend dating violence, odds ratio = 3.59, \( p < .001 \), and interparental violence, odds ratio = 1.99, \( p < .002 \), as well as among males, odds ratio = 0.66, \( p < .039 \). In a second logistic regression predicting victimization severity, there was a marginal interaction between friend dating violence and gender, odds ratio = 1.95, \( p < .086 \). For boys, the effect of friend dating violence was significant, odds ratio = 2.69, \( p < .001 \), whereas the effect of interparental violence was marginal, odds ratio = 1.85, \( p < .054 \). For girls, both effects were significant: friend dating violence, odds ratio = 4.30, \( p < .001 \); interparental violence, odds ratio = 1.87, \( p < .032 \). For girls with friends who had been in violent relationships, the odds of being a victim of severe violence were almost twice as high as for boys.

To examine Hypothesis 4, onset of victimization between Time 1 to Time 2, we used the same approach as in analyzing perpetration: We analyzed a subsample of participants who were not victims at Time 1 (\( n = 337 \); 151 boys and 186 girls); this subsample did not necessarily include the same individuals who were not perpetrators at Time 1. We conducted separate chi-square analyses to assess univariate associations between each Time 1 predictor and Time 2 victimization. Consistent with Hypothesis 4, Time 1 friend dating violence predicted Time 2 victimization, \( \chi^2(2, N = 337) = 10.92, p < .001 \).
.001, whereas interparental violence did not, \( \chi^2(2, N = 337) = 1.91, p < .167 \) (the association with severe victimization was marginal). Gender was not associated with Time 2 victimization, \( \chi^2(2, N = 337) = 0.16, p < .689 \).

When examined simultaneously in a logistic regression analysis along with all higher order interactions, there was a significant interaction between Time 1 friend dating violence and gender, odds ratio = 3.87, \( p < .040 \). (The interaction was marginal when predicting severe victimization.) For boys, neither friend dating violence nor interparental violence at Time 1 significantly increased the odds of becoming a victim by Time 2, odds ratio = 1.21, \( p < .709 \), and odds ratio = 1.25, \( p < .697 \), respectively. For girls, on the other hand, friend dating violence at Time 1 significantly increased the odds of becoming a victim by Time 2, odds ratio = 4.64, \( p < .001 \), whereas interparental violence did not, odds ratio = 1.89, \( p < .147 \).

In summary, adolescents were more likely to be victims of severe dating violence to the extent that their friends were in violent relationships. Friend dating violence and interparental violence each exhibited cross-sectional associations with own victimization. However, only friend dating violence predicted onset of victimization, and this effect occurred for girls only. Although boys and girls were equally likely to be victims, girls who were victims were more likely to experience severe violence, whereas boys who were victims experienced more moderate violence.

**Influence Versus Selection of Friends**

To explore further the robust association between friend dating violence and own violence, we conducted a cross-lagged panel analysis, which is useful for ruling out potential causal explanations (cf. Kenny, 1975). This longitudinal analysis differed from those reported above in that it required use of the full sample (526 participants). We could not limit the analysis only to subsamples of individuals who did not report violence at Time 1 because this analysis involved correlating Time 1 own violence with Time 2 friend dating violence. Including Time 1 own violence in a correlation required having it vary (i.e., including presence and absence levels of this variable rather than only the absence level).

We examined influence and selection mechanisms. If friend dating violence at Time 1 is not associated with own dating violence at Time 2 (controlling for own violence at Time 1), then friend violence could not have caused changes in own violence; this would rule out the idea that friends cause adolescents to enter violent relationships. Similarly, if own dating violence at Time 1 was not associated with friend dating violence at Time 2 (controlling
for friend violence at Time 1), then own violence could not have caused friend violence; this would rule out the idea that adolescents in violent relationships later select friends with similar dating violence experiences.

The results for perpetration are displayed in Figure 1a. Importantly, there were only negligible differences in the stability of friend dating violence (.79) versus own perpetration (.73), a condition that must be met before attempting to interpret differences in cross-lagged correlations (Rogosa, 1980). Time 1 friend violence significantly predicted Time 2 perpetration (controlling for Time 1 perpetration), and Time 1 perpetration significantly predicted Time 2 friend violence (controlling for Time 1 friend violence). Thus, these results were not informative in that they supported both an influence and selection process (i.e., they failed to rule out either process).

The results for violence victimization were more informative. We analyzed girls and boys separately given that gender moderated the link between friend violence and own victimization. Earlier we reported that for boys, Time 1 friend dating violence did not predict onset of victimization. Indeed, as can be seen in Figure 1b, the cross-lagged correlation between Time 1 friend dating violence and Time 2 victimization was not significant, which ruled out an influence process. On the other hand, Time 1 victimization significantly predicted Time 2 friend dating violence. Thus, it remains plausible that boys who experience dating violence select friends in similar dating violence situations.

The results for girls were different. As can be seen in Figure 1c, Time 1 friend dating violence predicted Time 2 overall victimization of girls (controlling for Time 1 victimization), whereas the reverse did not occur: Time 1
victimization did not predict Time 2 friend dating violence (controlling for Time 1 friend dating violence). These results ruled out a selection process but were consistent with an influence process. It remains plausible that girls’ relationships become violent because they want to be like friends who have experienced dating violence.

The same pattern of results emerged in repeating each analysis using severe violence.
DISCUSSION

Summary and Broader Implications

The results suggest that having friends who are perpetrators or victims of dating violence is associated with an adolescent’s own experiences as both a perpetrator and a victim of dating violence. Similarly, exposure to interparental violence is associated with an adolescent’s experiences as both a perpetrator and a victim. Although both friend dating violence and interparental violence were significant correlates of participants’ own perpetration or victimization, the effect of friend dating violence was more important than the effect of interparental violence. In longitudinal predictions, neither friend dating violence nor interparental violence were related to victimization of boys, but friend dating violence was related to victimization experiences of girls. Thus, overall, friends seem to be more influential than parents in shaping standards of acceptable dating behaviors during adolescents.

There are several possible explanations of why friend dating violence was a more important predictor than parental violence, but the most parsimonious explanation is that friends have a greater influence than parents on adolescent dating behaviors. Such a conclusion is consistent with a sizeable body of evidence on the relative power of peer and parental influences during adolescence (cf. Harris, 1995). Of course, parents may exert a stronger influence in other domains and in younger populations (Bush, Weinfurt, & Iannotti, 1994).

Despite inconsistent statistically significant effects for interparental violence, it is difficult to overlook its clinical significance. As was shown in the tables, rates of dating violence were much higher for adolescents whose parents were violent to one another versus those whose parents were not violent. Rates of dating violence increased, on average, 50% to 60% as a function of interparental violence, supporting the sizable literature on the intergenerational transmission of violence (cf. Stith et al., 2000; Widom, 1989). However, relative to friends, the effect of parents may be relatively small.

Gender differences in dating violence. Girls were more likely to be perpetrators than boys, and they also revealed a slightly higher rate of severe perpetration, a pattern that is consistent with the higher rates observed for girls in high school samples (O’Keefe, 1997). Girls and boys were equally likely to be victims. However, a closer examination of moderately versus severely violent behaviors revealed a second key pattern among those in violent relationships: Girls who were perpetrators used moderate behaviors, whereas
boys used severe behaviors, and girls who were victims received severe behaviors, whereas boys received moderate behaviors. Thus, although there were fewer violent boys, those who were violent were more likely to be severely violent than were violent girls. Moreover, girls were more likely to have been both perpetrators and victims in past dating relationships (50% of those who reported any violence) than boys (only 29% of those who reported any violence). Together, these results are relevant to the debate over whether girls and women are violent in relationships. Consistent with Straus’s (1999) interpretation of extant data, these results reveal that more girls are violent than boys. Consistent with Johnson’s (1995) interpretation of extant data, these results reveal that when girls are violent, they tend to be in relationships marked by a pattern of mutual and less severe violence.

The current study also revealed gender differences in the mechanism linking friend and own dating violence. Whereas both influence and selection may explain girls’ and boys’ own perpetration, girls’ and boys’ victimization may reflect different processes. For girls, results of analyses on the onset of self-reported victimization suggest that girls whose friends experience dating violence may themselves become violent. (Of course, there may be a third variable causing both friend dating violence at Time 1 and victimization at Time 2.) Moreover, the results of cross-lagged analyses ruled out the possibility that for girls, the link between friend dating violence and own dating violence could be explained by victimized girls selecting friends who are also victims. Thus, girls in particular may use friends as models not only in becoming violent but also in becoming a victim of violence.

Boys exhibited the opposite pattern, one suggesting a selection process. Unlike the findings for girls, none of the findings suggested that boys were influenced by their friends to become victims. On the other hand, the cross-lagged results revealed that at Time 2, boys were with friends who had levels of dating violence similar to their own levels at Time 1. There are many possible reasons why boys who are victims of dating violence would seek friends who are also victims. Generally, people are attracted to others who hold similar ideas to themselves (cf. Byrne, 1997). Adolescent boys who tolerate violence may be attracted to other tolerant boys. However, this cannot explain the different findings for girls. It is more likely that boys in particular have something to gain in seeking similar others. Because others may expect boys to be aggressors as compared with girls, boys who are aggressed on may be accused of being “sissies” to put up with aggressive girls. Only other boys in similar situations would avoid such teasing. Yet another explanation is that boys project their own Time 1 status onto their reports of their friends’ status at Time 2 (Iannotti, Bush, & Weinfurt, 1996). However, it is not clear why girls would not do the same. Moreover, projection seems unlikely given that the
measure of friend violence specifically asked participants how many friends had told them that their boyfriends/girlfriends were violent to them, thus focusing on specific communications rather than subjective assessments.

**Significance of adolescent dating violence.** Does the occurrence of dating violence during adolescence have implications for marriage or other adult romantic relationships? Although it is possible that some adolescents will cease this behavior by adulthood, there are several reasons to believe that many will persist in their violent ways (Magdol et al., 1998). First, Straus (1999) has suggested that common forms of violence in adult relationships (e.g., pushing, shoving) are learned from role models at an earlier stage in life. Second, the antecedents of severe violence may include personality disorders that have origins in childhood experiences (Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, Rehman, & Stuart, 2000). Third, many relationship behaviors reflect earlier relationship experiences (Hazan & Shaver, 1994), some of which are established during adolescence (Crockett & Crouter, 1995). This research suggests that violent dating behaviors also may be established during adolescence.

**Limitations and Strengths**

There are several limitations to the current study. First, we did not differentiate between adolescents who were perpetrators only or victims only at both times, perpetrators only at Time 1 but also victims by Time 2, and victims only at Time 1 but also perpetrators by Time 2. The reason for omitting such distinctions is because the perpetrator samples were too small. For example, only 11 participants were perpetrators only at both Times 1 and 2. However, auxiliary analyses of the 74 participants who were victims only at both Times 1 and 2 revealed a pattern of results comparable to the one already reported: For boys, neither friend violence nor interparental violence emerged as consistent predictors of own victimization, whereas for girls, friend dating violence consistently predicted own victimization. (The effect of interparental violence on girls’ victimization was marginal.) Given the importance of distinguishing couples marked by mutual combat versus those marked by unilateral violence (Johnson, 1995), this issue should be addressed in future research.

Second, our measure of friend dating violence was limited. Although questions tapped, separately, male versus female friends who were victims versus perpetrators, the sample sizes were too small to analyze these variables separately.
Third, our primary analyses relied on a general distinction between adolescents who were versus were not in violent relationships, which may obscure individual differences in the amount of violence. However, our analysis that captured differences in severity of violence yielded similar results.

Fourth, we used participants’ reports of their own, their friends’, and their parents’ behaviors rather than actual observations of these events. However, there is reason to believe that perceived and actual behaviors were closely aligned in this study, given that the questions focused on concrete events and behaviors and given the documented reliability of such measures (cf. Bauman & Ennett, 1996).

There are also several strengths to the current study. First, this is the first study to examine the relative influence of friends and parents on dating violence in an adolescent population. It is critically important to examine issues of dating violence in this population given that such findings may provide clues to the origins of adult partner violence.

Second, the current findings make a significant contribution to our understanding of gender differences in dating violence by suggesting that the causes of victimization may be different for girls (i.e., influence) than for boys. Although the current research does not identify the causes of victimization for boys, it does suggest a potential method of coping for boys. Those who are victims select friends who are victims, which may be a way for boys to believe that being a victim is okay; if others are victims, particularly friends or others whom one likes, it must be okay. On a practical level, the findings suggest that victim interventions need to be gender-specific: Interventions for girls should take into account the potential influence of friends, whereas interventions for boys should provide education on adaptive ways of coping, such as telling a dating partner that violent behavior is not acceptable or avoiding future dates with that partner.

Third, our dual focus on dating violence perpetration and victimization is worth noting. The current study revealed gender differences that would not have been obtained if perpetration and victimization had been combined into a single variable.

Fourth, by using longitudinal data, the current study addressed the onset of violence, which is crucial in identifying risk factors that first set in motion a pattern of violence. Such data are required to identify potential causes of dating violence. More generally, this research expands our theoretical understanding of potential sources of influence on adolescent dating violence, and it has practical implications for dating violence interventions.
REFERENCES


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