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Directionality of Dating Violence Among High School Youth: Rates and Correlates by Gender and Sexual Orientation

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Abstract

Sexual minority adolescents are at greater risk for experiencing teen dating violence (TDV) in their dating relationships. Although adolescents in dating relationships often report experiencing and perpetrating various forms of TDV, the directionality of TDV based on youth's reported gender and sexual orientation is not known. A sample of 10th-grade students ($N = 1,622$) recruited from high schools in the Northeastern United States completed assessments of TDV victimization and perpetration and reported their past-month heavy alcohol use and marijuana use. Sexual minority girls (58%) and boys (36%) were more likely to experience TDV than heterosexual girls (38%) and boys (25%), respectively. Sexual minority boys were less likely, although the confidence intervals included one, to engage in dualrole physical TDV (odds ratio [OR] = 0.14, 95% confidence interval [CI] [0.00, 1.26]) and threatening TDV (OR = 0.14, 95% CI [0.00, 1.02]), and instead were more likely to be victimized. In contrast, the profiles of TDV were similar for girls, with sexual minority girls only being more likely than heterosexual girls to report dual-role physical TDV (OR = 2.23, 95% CI [1.07, 4.66]). Compared with unidirectional TDV, bidirectional TDV was significantly associated with sexual minority girls' substance use, but not with heterosexual girls' substance use. Sexual minority youth report higher rates of TDV, with sexual minority boys being distinctly at-risk for being victimized within their dating relationships. Engagement in both TDV victimization and perpetration was distinctly associated with substance use for sexual minority girls, highlighting the need for integrated prevention efforts and support.

Keywords

teen dating violence; sexual minority youth; victimization; perpetration

Intimate partner violence (IPV) includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological aggression, or stalking by a former or current intimate partner, including a spouse,

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boyfriend/girlfriend, or dating partner (Breiding et al., 2015). National data suggest that over 8 million women and 4 million men in the United States experience IPV in their lifetime, often for the first time in adolescence (Smith et al., 2017). Involvement in IPV during adolescence—when individuals often first start dating—is referred to as teen dating violence (TDV). Approximately 10% of dating-involved youth experience past-year physical dating violence and 11% experience past-year sexual dating violence (Kann et al., 2016). These rates are concerning given that TDV is associated with poor health outcomes as well as later experiences of IPV (Banyard & Cross, 2008).

One group that is particularly at-risk for experiencing TDV is sexual minority youth (i.e., youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer). However, the processes that underlie and contribute to TDV as a function of sexual orientation is relatively understudied. Although numerous researchers are investigating IPV among adults based on sexual orientation (e.g., Edwards & Sylaska, 2013; Finneran & Stephenson, 2013; Krahé & Berger, 2013; R. J. Lewis et al., 2015), research on sexual minority youth remains sparse. This is unfortunate because sexual minority youth consistently report higher rates of TDV than their heterosexual peers (Dank et al., 2014; Freedner et al., 2002; Halpern et al., 2004), including both victimization and perpetration (Reuter et al., 2015). For example, in one school-based study of youth in New York by Dank et al. (2014), 43% of sexual minority students, compared with only 29% of heterosexual youth, reported physical dating violence in a current or recent dating relationship. Furthermore, TDV is associated with a broad range of negative outcomes, including involvement in IPV in adulthood as well as negative mental health sequelae and substance use (Edwards, 2018; Martin-Storey & Fromme, 2016; Shorey et al., 2018).

Sexual Minority Youth and TDV: Gaps in Understanding

Much of the research on sexual minority youth and TDV has (a) exclusively focused on rates of violence, (b) examined sexual minority youth without a heterosexual comparison group, (c) assessed only victimization, and (d) often collapsed sexual minority boys and girls into one category. However, the limited research that does exist suggests there are differences in the perpetration of dating violence (Reuter et al., 2015) as well as gender differences in risk of TDV among sexual minority boys and girls (Dank et al., 2014). Furthermore, it is unclear whether and how correlates of TDV in general, such as substance use, are similarly associated with TDV perpetration and victimization among sexual minority youth as they are for youth more broadly. Although some research suggests that sexual minority youth are at greater risk for negative correlates of TDV (e.g., poor mental health, binge drinking) than heterosexual youth (Dank et al., 2014; Edwards, 2018), other research suggests that these traditional correlates of TDV do not hold for sexual minority youth (Reuter et al., 2015).

In line with broader social-ecological models of dating violence (Bell & Naugle, 2008; Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999), risk factors for TDV victimization and perpetration are present across a range of systems, including individual (e.g., substance use, history of abuse, isolation), relationship (e.g., association with aggressive peers, unsupportive family), community (e.g., exposure to violence, lack of social connectedness), and societal (e.g., cultural and social norms that promote violence). Just like their heterosexual peers, TDV

among sexual minority youth is a function of factors across these various levels of the ecological system. However, sexual minority youth face unique challenges as outlined through the minority stress framework (e.g., stigma, threats of social isolation, rejection sensitivity) that contribute to relational violence across these ecological systems (e.g., Lewis et al., 2012; McCauley et al., 2018). For example, compared with heterosexual youth, sexual minority youth are more likely to experience relational and community violence (Merrick et al., 2018; Sterzing et al., 2019), are more likely to use substances (Dermody, 2018; Dermody et al., 2016), report lower-quality social support networks (Williams et al., 2005), face unique rejection experiences associated with their sexual orientation disclosures (Puckett et al., 2015), and experience a general devaluation of their identities and same-sex relationships as a function of a heterosexist society. Therefore, in addition to greater levels of some general risk factors, sexual minority youth also face risks their heterosexual peers do not. For example, some sexual minority youth express fears about negotiating their sexual identity with dating partners, as partners might threaten or have the power to “out” them to others (Freedner et al., 2002). Some sexual minority youth also minimize their relationship value in line with societal devaluing of nonheterosexuality (Gillum & DiFulvio, 2012).

These processes might contribute not only to differences in rates of TDV experiences, but also in the quality (i.e., participation dynamics) and correlates (e.g., substance use) of TDV as a function of sexual orientation. One key feature that has rarely been examined is the directionality of TDV based on sexual orientation. Adolescence is a period that appears to be qualified by a dynamic of aggression, such that youth are most likely to be experiencing both TDV victimization and perpetration rather than a single form (cf. Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). Furthermore, assessing victimization and perpetration processes more broadly, rather than confined to one relationship as is typically done with adults, is developmentally appropriate given the nature of adolescents’ relationships at this age. Adolescents’ relationship duration lengthens over time in line with developmental processes, such that mean romantic relationship duration is only 4 to 5 months for 13- to 15-year-old adolescents (Carver et al., 2003; Meier & Allen, 2009; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003).

And yet most research has examined only victimization or perpetration separately (Espelage et al., 2018; Freedner et al., 2002; Hipwell et al., 2013; Martin-Storey, 2015; Reuter et al., 2017; Sterzing et al., 2019), or collapsed across these to measure any experience of dating violence (Dank et al., 2014; Martin-Storey & Fromme, 2016). Yet although some researchers have operationalized the occurrence of violence within a relationship as a dichotomy—delineating only between perpetrators and victims (cf. Lewis & Fremouw, 2001)—early research by Foshee (1996) highlights how TDV is often bidirectional, with partners experiencing and perpetrating aggression. Importantly, examining directionality in TDV does not assume that both partners are equally violent or that violence in the relationship is symmetrical, perpetrated for the same reasons, or associated with the same consequences (Amar, 2007; Gray & Foshee, 1997). Nevertheless, the nature and directionality of violence in relationships appears important to understanding associated outcomes (Gray & Foshee, 1997).

One reason to investigate the directionality of TDV involvement among sexual minority youth is a lack of theoretical clarity on how risk factors are associated with TDV specifically

among these youth. Although the distress associated with the marginalization of sexual minority youth (i.e., minority stress: Meyer, 2003) certainly serves as a risk factor for them being victimized (McCauley et al., 2018), this marginalization might also contribute to experiencing TDV perpetration in two broad ways. First, sexual minority youth are more likely to experience numerous factors that serve as risk factors for *both* TDV victimization and perpetration, including greater adverse childhood experiences (Merrick et al., 2018), exposure to community violence and violent role models (Sterzing et al., 2019), as well as higher rates of substance use (Dermody, 2018). Moreover, they also report higher levels of emotion dysregulation (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2008), a known risk factor for TDV perpetration. Therefore, they may be more likely to engage in TDV in dual roles, as both victims and perpetrators.

Second, the devaluing of non-heterosexual identities and same-sex attraction might also contribute to a dynamic of interpersonal violence. In qualitative interviews, sexual minority youth report a lack of dating role models, a lack of support or resources for learning about and dealing with TDV, and the normalization, minimization, and dismissal of TDV in their relationships as a function of society's treatment of sexual minority persons (Gillum & DiFulvio, 2012). For example, one youth reported, "you're never going to be considered equal and that goes all the way down to physical violence. Your physically violent relationship is not the equal of a heterosexual physically violent relationship" (p. 733). Furthermore, youth also spoke about how managing internalized feelings of homonegativity and the "stakes" (e.g., coming out processes) within same-sex partnerships could lead to patterns of TDV in their relationships, with participants explaining how "keeping a lot of stuff in" can lead a partner to "lash out" with violence (p. 733) or try to control a partner's outward gender expression or openness. One participant explained how in contrast to heterosexual relationships, same-sex partnerships were by definition a reflection of their identities, noting "that's a big, big part of you" (p. 734). Therefore, the centrality of these relationships to identity formation, negotiation, and expression may predict higher rates of engagement in both TDV victimization and perpetration during this developmental period.

Yet, the limited research and inconclusive findings on directionality of partner violence based on sexual orientation prohibit clear hypotheses. In a systematic review of IPV directionality among adults (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2012), the authors identified only three studies that examined sexual orientation, two of which analyzed only gay and bisexual men. In their systematic review, Edwards and Neal (2015) found inconsistent results regarding directionality, with some research suggesting that bidirectional IPV was more common than unidirectional IPV among sexual minority samples but other research finding the opposite. Importantly, nearly all research focused only on sexual minority individuals without a comparative heterosexual group, limiting our understanding of whether or how sexual minority individuals' experiences differ from heterosexual individuals' experiences of IPV.

Only one study has examined patterns of adolescent TDV as a function of sexual orientation (Messinger et al., 2021). Messinger et al. (2021) compared TDV among sexual minority youth (defined as youth reporting any same-sex attraction) to TDV among heterosexual youth. Of note, the authors described this pattern of TDV as "bidirectional," although youth

did not report TDV within a single relationship but instead across their relationships in the last year. Therefore, youth might have been victimized in one relationship and perpetrated in another, suggesting unidirectional violence. Therefore, for clarity, we refer to the pattern of violence an individual exhibits as either unidirectional (i.e., they report only victimization or perpetration) or dual-role (i.e., they enact both victimization and perpetration). The authors found that same sex-attracted youth reported similar rates of dual-role TDV compared with heterosexual youth, and that the majority of TDV was unidirectional rather than dual-role. However, rates of particular types of TDV, such as psychological, were more evenly split, with nearly half of sexual minority youth (46%) and of heterosexual youth (44%) reporting dual-role psychological TDV or any TDV. And yet, in their study on physical TDV, Hipwell et al. (2013) found that a similar proportion of sexual minority girls reported victimization (31%) and perpetration (36%), whereas heterosexual girls report lower rates of victimization (34%) than perpetration (18%). Although the authors did not measure bidirectional TDV, instead only examining victimization and perpetration separately, they suggested that sexual minority girls might therefore be more likely to be engaging in TDV as both perpetrators and victims.

It is also important to examine associations between profiles of TDV and health risk correlates, such as substance use, for several reasons. First, substance use is associated with both TDV victimization and perpetration in general (e.g., Epstein-Ngo et al., 2013; Exner-Cortens et al., 2013; Rothman et al., 2011; Temple et al., 2013). However, research is mixed on associations between TDV and substance use among sexual minority youth specifically. More work is needed to inform this area of research given differences in methodology (e.g., some studies collapse boys and girls into one category) and operationalization of constructs (e.g., types of TDV, types of substance use). For example, in a within-person, longitudinal analysis of TDV (Whitton et al., 2019), marijuana use and physical TDV co-occurred, with sexual minority youth being more likely to experience physical TDV during times they were using more marijuana. Furthermore, marijuana use increased following sexual and physical TDV experiences, but alcohol use did not. However, it is unclear whether these correlates and processes differ as a function of sexual orientation among youth. Second, sexual minority adolescents' higher rates of substance use compared with heterosexual youth do appear to contribute to some of the increased risk for TDV victimization specifically (Rostad et al., 2020).

Although there is very limited research comparing associations between TDV and substance use as a function of sexual orientation, it is possible that these associations will differ for sexual minority youth. Substance use and TDV can be viewed as distinct outcomes of the same risk factors (e.g., adverse childhood experiences, exposure to violence), all of which sexual minority youth are more likely to experience. It is possible that the distress and emotional dysregulation sexual minority youth experience as a function of their minority status and victimization could contribute directly to dualrole TDV, but also indirectly to this pattern of TDV via using substances to cope with distress. Although dating violence and coping processes differ between adolescents and adults, research with sexual minority adults is important given the dearth of research in this area with sexual minority youth. In samples of adult sexual minority women, greater emotional distress is indeed associated with both drinking alcohol to cope as well as bidirectional partner violence (Lewis et al.,

2015). If this pattern holds among youth, higher levels of distress and using substances to cope with distress among sexual minority youth (Bos et al., 2016; Kalb et al., 2018), coupled with minority stress processes (e.g., devaluing of same-sex attractions due to internalized heterosexism: Gillum & DiFulvio, 2012), might also be associated with greater engagement in dual-role TDV. In other words, sexual minority youth's substance use might be more strongly associated with dual-role TDV.

Purpose of the Current Study

Sexual minority youth report greater rates of dating conflict in their intimate relationships (Edwards & Neal, 2015; Goldberg & Meyer, 2013; Martin-Storey, 2015; Reuter et al., 2015). However, little is known about the context and nature of this conflict and whether it differs from that of their heterosexual peers. One key aspect of dating conflict that is important for prevention efforts is the directionality of violence. Only one study has examined directionality using a sample of both heterosexual and sexual minority youth (Messinger et al., 2021), although it collapsed analyses across male and female gender. Given that the directionality of IPV, as well as risk factors for IPV victimization and perpetration, vary by gender among young adults (Renner & Whitney, 2011), it is imperative to examine the context of dating conflict among sexual minority girls and boys. The following hypotheses were examined:

Hypothesis 1:

Sexual minority youth will report higher rates of TDV than heterosexual youth, regardless of gender.

Hypothesis 2:

Directionality of violence (i.e., unidirectional vs. dual-role) will not differ as a function of sexual orientation and gender. In line with one study in this area (Messinger et al., 2021), we anticipated that dualrole will not differ as a function of sexual orientation. However, this hypothesis is exploratory given the lack of research in this area.

Hypothesis 3:

Among those reporting TDV, we hypothesized that bidirectional TDV will be more strongly associated with substance use than unidirectional TDV. Differences based on sexual orientation were exploratory given a lack of research in this area.

Methods

Participants

Participants in the present study were recruited as a part of a larger study examining the effectiveness of sexual assault prevention programming in high schools. The study sample included a total of 2,766 10th-grade students who completed a baseline assessment. The average age of students was 15.4 years ($SD = 0.5$). Local review boards did not permit the assessment of race or ethnicity in the current study, as it was believed that this information might be utilized to identify students who participated in the study in smaller study sites.

Based on publicly available data documenting the race and ethnicity of students in schools included in the study sample, it is estimated that 33.5% of the participants in the present study would identify as a racial or ethnic minority, if the study sample is representative of school. Approximately 33% of the sample reported receiving a free or reduced-price lunch ($n = 766$). Regarding gender, 46% of the sample identified as male ($n = 1,273$), 51% identified as female ($n = 1,415$), 1% identified as transgender ($n = 21$), 2% reported that they did not want to identify their gender ($N = 50$) and less than 1% did not provide a response ($n = 7$). Regarding sexual orientation, 85% identified as heterosexual ($n = 2,337$), 2% identified as gay/lesbian ($n = 61$), 7% identified as bisexual ($n = 190$), 1% identified as queer ($n = 35$), and 4% indicated that they did not want to identify their sexual orientation ($n = 119$). Given the small number of transgender students, particularly at the intersection of gender and sexual orientation, only students who identified as a boy or girl were retained for these analyses. The analytic sample is restricted to those youth reporting a dating relationship in the past year, which consisted of 64% of respondents ($n = 1,727$). Therefore, the final analytic sample consisted of the 1,622 students who were in a dating relationship and reported on their sexual orientation. Of these 1,622 students, 54% identified as a girl and 46% as a boy, and reported sexual orientation as follows: 89% heterosexual ($n = 1,444$), 2% gay/lesbian ($n = 39$), 8% as bisexual ($n = 128$), 1% queer ($n = 11$). The mean age of these 1,622 participants was 15.39 ($SD = 0.55$).

Measures

Sexual orientation.—A single item was utilized to assess sexual orientation. Specifically, participants were asked “Would you describe yourself as . . .” and were provided with five response choices: (a) heterosexual; (b) gay/lesbian; (c) queer; (d) bisexual; and (e) prefer not to answer. In the present study, a dichotomous variable was created to classify students who described their sexual orientation as either gay/lesbian, queer or bisexual as a sexual minority and heterosexual-identified students as heterosexual. Students who indicated that they did not want to identify their sexual orientation were excluded from the study.

Dating violence victimization and perpetration.—Experience and perpetration of various forms of dating violence were assessed using three subscales from the Conflicts in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI; Wolfe et al., 2001). Participants completed the scale relating to their dating relationships in the prior year. The subscale assessing threatening behavior included three items (victimization: $\alpha = 0.77$, perpetration: $\alpha = 0.68$), the subscale assessing physical abuse included four items (victimization: $\alpha = 0.85$, perpetration: $\alpha = 0.83$), and the subscale assessing sexual abuse also included four items (victimization: $\alpha = 0.76$, perpetration: $\alpha = 0.63$) (full scale perpetration, $\alpha = 0.88$, and victimization, $\alpha = 0.84$). Each subscale was administered separately, once to assess victimization and once to reflect perpetration. For example, assessment of victimization experiences was assessed with “He/she destroyed or threatened to destroy something I valued” and assessment of the perpetration experience was assessed with “I destroyed or threatened to destroy something he/she valued”). Questions were responded to along on a 4-point Likert-type scale, where 0 = *Never: this has never happened in your relationship*, 1 = *Seldom: this has happened only 1–2 times in your relationship*, 2 = *Sometimes: this has happened about 3–5 times in your relationship*, and 3 = *Often: this has happened 6 or more*

times in your relationship. Although responses were provided along a continuous scale to assess the frequency of abuse, analysis of the measure suggested that the subscales were zero-inflated. As a result, scores on each subscale were dichotomized to reflect whether there was the presence or absence of threatening behavior, physical abuse, or sexual abuse in the adolescents dating relationships in the past year. This analytic approach to determining rates of TDV using this measure is consistent with prior work using the CADRI (e.g., Fernández-González et al., 2012). For the purpose of study analyses (Hypothesis 2), among those reporting TDV, dating conflict victimization and perpetration was recoded to create a summative dichotomous variable reflecting either unidirectional or bidirectional TDV (i.e., victimization/perpetration only, both victimization and perpetration). Prior research examining the CADRI suggests that the scale possesses adequate validity (Wolfe et al., 2001).

Substance use.—The survey included single items adapted from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (see Brener et al., 2013, for a review of survey and methodology) to assess heavy drinking and marijuana use in the past month. The following item assessed heavy drinking:

During the past MONTH (30 days), on how many days did you have 4 or more (if you are female) or 5 or more (if you are male) drinks of alcohol in a row within a couple of hours? A drink of alcohol is a 12-ounce beer, a 5-ounce glass of wine, or a 1.5 ounce shot of liquor.

The following item assessed marijuana use: During the past MONTH (30 days), how many days did you use marijuana to get high? For both items, answer options included: I have never drunk alcohol (or used marijuana); 0 days; 1 or 2 days; 3 to 9 days; 10 to 19 days; or 20 to 31 days. Given significantly skewed data, as most students reporting zero days of use in the last month, substance use variables were dichotomized to represent use/non-use in the last month.

Procedures

Tenth-grade students enrolled in urban, suburban, and rural high schools in the Northeastern United States were offered the opportunity to participate in a study focused on healthy dating and sexual relationships. Parents were provided with an opt-out form via mail or email from the school and given an opportunity to meet with the study staff and review the study questionnaires. Students were given the opportunity to participate if an opt-out form was not returned by their parent. Surveys were administered to groups of students in homeroom classrooms, health classes or physical education classes within the schools. Survey sessions began with an overview of the survey and explanation of consent for research participation. Students were informed that the research was voluntary and were provided with an adolescent assent form. Students who opted to not participate after hearing an explanation of the study, and students whose parents opted them out of the research were provided with alternative activities to complete if desired. Students completed the survey via pencil and paper or via a laptop computer, where available. Students were given ample space to complete the survey to protect their privacy. The survey was not connected with any identifying information and students were informed that the school would not have access to their responses. All survey administration sessions were conducted by a trained

Research Assistant in conjunction with staff from the local rape crisis center. Students were informed that staff would be available following the session to answer questions or to talk if they experienced distress. The survey was designed to be completed in 30 min, and included other items assessing constructs relating to sexual and dating relationships. All study procedures were approved by the local Department of Education, and the local Institutional Review Board. The study was provided with a Certificate of Confidentiality from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Data Analysis Plan

All analyses were performed in Stata 14.2 (StataCorp, 2015). First, data were examined to assess for patterns of missing data. There was only one case missing all data on the dating violence measure (<0.1% of cases). Three percent of boys and 4.5% of girls were missing data on at least one item on the TDV scale; most of these (50%) were missing a response on only one item. As participants' scores on measures of TDV were dichotomized, an affirmative response to any item on one of the TDV subscales was sufficient to be included in the data analyses. Therefore, any affirmative response was coded as a positive exposure to that type of dating conflict. Given that sexual orientation and substance use items were single items, individuals not reporting on these variables were excluded via listwise deletion.

The following data analyses were conducted to address each hypothesis. All analyses were restricted only to those youth reporting they had a dating relationship in the last year. First, to understand the scope of victimization and perpetration as a function of sexual orientation (Hypothesis 1), we examined rates of dating conflict involvement based on sexual identity for boys and girls. We performed Fisher's exact tests (for boys, given some cell counts were zero) to determine whether the overall rates of TDV involvement (i.e., none, victimization-only, perpetration-only, dual-role) differed by sexual orientation. Second, to get a clearer understanding of the pattern of TDV within dating relationships, a second series of analyses were restricted only to those youth reporting TDV engagement. These analyses were performed because we hypothesized that overall rates of engagement would be higher among sexual minority youth, and this series of analyses would specifically clarify the rates of unidirectional versus dual-role TDV (Hypothesis 2). Given low numbers of sexual minority boys after these restrictions to the sample, we performed exact logistic regressions, controlling for age (and Fisher's exact test is reported in Table 2 as well). The final series of analyses (Hypothesis 3) modeled directionality of TDV (uni- vs. dual-role) as a predictor of substance use (past 30-day heavy episodic drinking; past 30-day marijuana use) in logistic regression analyses. For this hypothesis, we wished to understand specifically how substance use and directionality of TDV were associated for sexual minority and heterosexual youth by gender. Therefore, these analyses were performed separately for each group.

Results

Hypothesis 1: Overall Rates of Engagement in TDV

Among all boys who reported a romantic relationship in the past year, experiences of dating conflict differed based on sexual orientation. Substantially more sexual minority boys were victims of TDV than heterosexual boys (Fisher's exact $p = .01$). Specifically,

when examined as all-inclusive rates (i.e., those who were victimized-only plus those reporting dual-role victimization), more than one third reported victimization by any type of TDV (36%) compared with only 10% who perpetrated some form of TDV (Table 1). Furthermore, sexual minority boys were only involved in dual-role perpetration and none reported perpetrating-only. Similar patterns were observed for each type of TDV, including threatening behavior (26% victimized, 8% perpetrated), physical TDV (18% victimized, 3% perpetrated), and sexual TDV (23% victimized, 8% perpetrated). In contrast, heterosexual boys perpetrated and were victimized at similar rates, with 22% reporting victimization and 17% perpetrated some form of TDV. Similar rates were observed for threatening TDV (14% victimized, 8% perpetrated), physical TDV (13% victimized, 8% perpetrated), and sexual TDV (7% victimized, 8% perpetrated).

When examined exclusively based on those who were victimized-only, perpetrators-only, or mutually engaged (Table 1), sexual minority boys were significantly more likely than heterosexual boys to be victimized-only overall, as well as specifically via threatening behavior and unwanted sexual contact. In other words, heterosexual boys were more likely to experience dual-role TDV or no TDV than sexual minority boys.

Among all girls who reported a romantic relationship in the past year, experiences of dating conflict were similar by sexual orientation. Girls reported higher rates of TDV than did boys, with both heterosexual and sexual minority girls reporting slightly higher rates of victimization (51% of sexual minority girls, 34% of heterosexual girls) than TDV perpetration (41% of sexual minority girls, 26% of heterosexual girls). Both sexual minority girls and heterosexual girls reported higher rates of sexual and threatening TDV victimization than perpetration. Regarding sexual TDV, 27% of sexual minority girls and 21% of heterosexual girls were victimized, whereas only 12% of sexual minority and 7% of heterosexual girls perpetrated. Similarly, 38% of sexual minority girls experienced threatening behavior but only 24% perpetrated, and 18% of heterosexual girls were victimized but 12% perpetrated. Girls of both sexual orientations reported similar rates of physical TDV perpetration and victimization. Among sexual minority girls, 27% were victimized and 29% perpetrated physical TDV. Heterosexual girls reported lower overall rates, but they were also similar, with 15% reporting victimization and 19% perpetration of physical TDV.

When examined exclusively based on those who were victimized-only, perpetrators-only, or mutually engaged (Table 1), sexual minority girls were significantly more likely to experience TDV than heterosexual girls, just as for boys, but specifically threatening and physical TDV. Sexual minority girls evidenced higher overall rates of threatening and physical dual-role TDV compared with heterosexual girls.

Hypothesis 2: Directionality of TDV Among Those Reporting Engagement in TDV

Due to anticipated differences in rates (e.g., sexual minority youth reporting higher rates of TDV involvement), the overall rates presented in Hypothesis 1 mask our understanding of the proportion of TDV that is dualrole versus unidirectional as a function of sexual orientation. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 examined unidirectional versus dual-role TDV specifically among youth reporting some TDV engagement to understand the profiles

of TDV. Among boys who experienced any TDV, sexual minority boys were less likely to be engaged in mutual violence compared with heterosexual boys. Compared with heterosexual boys, sexual minority boys did not significantly differ, as evidenced by exact logistic regression odds ratios that include 1, in any form of TDV directionality. However, sexual minority boys were less likely to report dual-role TDV of all kinds compared with heterosexual boys, including physical TDV (odds ratio [OR] = 0.14, 95% confidence interval [CI] [0.00, 1.26]) and threatening TDV (OR = 0.14, 95% CI [0.00, 1.02]), as indicated by medium-to-large effect sizes (Chen et al., 2010). In contrast, the results for TDV overall (OR = 0.33, 95% CI [0.07, 1.20]) and sexual TDV (OR = 0.53, 95% CI [0.08, 2.76]) revealed only small effect sizes. For example, whereas the large majority of sexual minority boys reported unidirectional TDV (71%), the majority of heterosexual boys reported dual-role TDV (55%) (Table 2). Of note, the small number of sexual minority boys in the sample, particularly when limited to those engaged in past-year TDV, limits the power of these analyses and should be interpreted with caution.

Across most forms of dating conflict, logistic regression analyses revealed that the directionality of heterosexual and sexual minority girls' dating conflict was similar. Compared with heterosexual girls, sexual minority girls did not differ in odds of reporting dual-role TDV overall (OR = 1.03, 95% CI [0.62, 1.70]), threatening TDV (OR = 1.02, 95% CI [0.56, 1.86]), or sexual TDV (OR = 1.27, 95% CI [0.61, 2.65]). Only the directionality of physical dating conflict differed based on girls' sexual orientation (OR = 2.23, 95% CI [1.07, 4.66]), such that sexual minority girls were more likely to engage in dual-role physical violence than heterosexual girls (73% vs. 56%) (Table 2).

Hypothesis 3: Substance Use and Directionality

As is clear in Table 2, there were too few sexual minority boys (i.e., 1 boy per cell) reporting dual-role TDV to conduct meaningful analyses of their substance use using this variable as a predictor. Therefore, analyses are presented for heterosexual boys, heterosexual girls, and sexual minority girls. For all significant associations, dual-role TDV was associated with greater odds of past-month heavy drinking and marijuana use.

Among heterosexual boys, there was a significant association between directionality of TDV and alcohol use for total TDV (OR = 3.19, 95% CI [1.40, 7.27]) and threatening behavior (OR = 4.52, 95% CI [1.66, 12.29]), but not physical TDV (OR = 1.13, 95% CI [0.47, 2.71]) or sexual TDV (OR = 1.84, 95% CI [0.62, 5.42]). Regarding marijuana use, there were significant associations between past-month use and total TDV (OR = 2.82, 95% CI [1.38, 5.76]) and sexual TDV (OR = 3.34, 95% CI [1.16, 9.59]), but not physical (OR = 1.41, 95% CI [0.60, 3.32]) or threatening TDV (OR = 2.10, 95% CI [0.91, 4.85]).

Among heterosexual girls, directionality of TDV was not significantly associated with substance use for any outcome, including TDV overall (alcohol: OR = 1.43, 95% CI [0.79, 2.58]; marijuana: OR = 1.40, 95% CI [0.79, 2.47]) or any of the subscales: threatening (alcohol: OR = 1.03, 95% CI [0.50, 2.12]; marijuana: OR = 1.23, 95% CI [0.62, 2.47]), physical (alcohol: OR = 1.22, 95% CI [0.59, 2.54]; marijuana: OR = 0.87, 95% CI [0.43, 1.74]), and sexual (alcohol: OR = 0.67, 95% CI [0.30, 1.53]; marijuana: OR = 0.82, 95% CI [0.37, 1.81]).

Among sexual minority girls, directionality of physical TDV was associated with heavy drinking (OR = 7.02, 95% CI [1.14, 43.23]), such that sexual minority girls with dual-role physical TDV were more likely to engage in past-month heavy drinking. There were no significant associations for overall TDV (OR = 1.69, 95% CI [0.65, 4.40]), sexual TDV (OR = 1.28, 95% CI [0.32, 5.12]), or threatening behavior (OR = 2.66, 95% CI [0.91, 7.79]). Sexual minority girls' marijuana use was also associated with dual-role threatening TDV (OR = 3.14, 95% CI [1.01, 9.78]) and marginally with physical TDV (OR = 4.03, 95% CI [0.95, 17.08]), but not sexual TDV (OR = 2.15, 95% CI [0.50, 9.17]) or total TDV (OR = 1.82, 95% CI [0.72, 4.58]).

Discussion

Research on TDV often focuses on single forms of victimization and perpetration separately as unique processes; however, in line with conceptual theories of adolescent dating violence, dating violence in adolescence is often characterized as a dynamic of aggression involving enactment of both perpetrator and victim roles (cf. Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). Indeed, consistent with prior findings on the rates of dual-role TDV, we found that the majority of boys and girls reporting past-year TDV both enacted and were targets of aggression. However, these patterns of TDV differ at the intersections of gender and sexual orientation. Sexual minority boys evinced different patterns of TDV compared with heterosexual boys, whereas sexual minority girls' substance use differed as a function of TDV involvement compared with heterosexual girls. Specifically, sexual minority boys appear particularly vulnerable to being targeted with aggression in their dating relationships compared with heterosexual boys, whereas heterosexual and sexual minority girls evince similar patterns of engagement in TDV. Yet sexual minority girls who engaged in specific forms of dual-role TDV were more likely to use substances, whereas heterosexual girls did not evidence a pattern of differential associations by directionality. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of contextualizing dating violence not only as a function of youth's sexual orientation, but also gender.

Rates of TDV Directionality

In support of Hypothesis 1, sexual minority youth did report higher rates of TDV than heterosexual youth. In fact, the majority of sexual minority girls (58%) had experienced TDV within a relationship in the past year. These higher rates of TDV involvement among sexual minority youth highlight the scope of this issue and the need for targeted support for these youth. However, when directionality was specifically examined (Hypothesis 2), notable gender differences also emerged. Among boys, there was a clear pattern of targeted victimization, such that one-quarter of sexual minority boys who were in a dating relationship were victimized-only. In contrast, although sexual minority girls were also more likely to experience TDV than heterosexual girls, sexual minority girls were no more likely to be victimized-only in relationships with TDV compared with heterosexual girls. Instead, substantial proportions of heterosexual and sexual minority girls reported victimization-only and dual-role TDV. Across every type of TDV, except physical TDV, heterosexual and sexual minority girls demonstrated similar patterns of directionality of conflict. Therefore, these results are inconsistent with the findings of Messinger et al. (2021) who found that same-sex

attracted youth did not significantly differ from heterosexual youth in the directionality of TDV.

The current findings suggest that gender is an important consideration when examining TDV involvement among sexual minority samples, consistent with prior research on IPV more broadly (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010). Moreover, differences in directionality by gender might be explained by differences in physical and social maturity among boys and girls (Celio et al., 2006). Girls tend to physically mature at an earlier age and as a result are expected to be more socially mature, despite not necessarily being equipped to handle these increased stressors and demands. The earlier that girls physically mature the more turmoil it causes, and this is often associated with some aggressive behavior (Celio et al., 2006). Furthermore, some research suggests that adolescent girls are more likely to perpetrate physical violence and psychological aggression in a dating relationship relative to boys (Swahn et al., 2008), which might account for the different patterns for sexual minority girls and boys.

The current study also highlights the importance of specifically examining the co-occurrence of victimization and perpetration, rather than relying on a comparison of rates of each separately. For example, the rates of victimization and perpetration of physical TDV were similar for sexual minority girls, with nearly one third of sexual minority girls reporting physical victimization and almost one third reporting physical perpetration. These results are notably consistent with the rates observed by Hipwell et al. (2013). In this study, although heterosexual girls reported lower overall rates, their overall rates of perpetration (18%) and victimization (15%) were similar, just as they were for sexual minority girls. However, when broken down by TDV directionality, sexual minority girls were significantly more likely to be engaged in dualrole physical TDV than were heterosexual girls.

Although similar minority stress processes (e.g., victimization, distress, emotion dysregulation, internalized homophobia) likely contribute to the higher rates of TDV involvement for both sexual minority girls and boys, additional processes might explain the observed gender differences. More research is needed given this study did not assess for partner characteristics (e.g., partner gender, age, physicality). In adult samples, however, IPV victimization against sexual minority women and men tends to occur within relationships or hookups with male partners (Goldberg & Meyer, 2013; Jaffe et al., 2020). If the same pattern holds for sexual minority youth, then perhaps sexual minority boys in same-sex partnerships face unique challenges that differ from those of sexual minority girls partnered with males. Prior research demonstrates that many sexual minority boys experience their sexual debut with an older male partner (Nelson et al., 2016). Qualitative research demonstrates that sexual minority men pursue sexual relationships with older men for a number of reasons, including to learn about same-sex sexual activity and gain connection to the gay community (Arrington-Sanders et al., 2013). Therefore, these age discrepancies, which would also be associated with differences in physicality and resources, might make it less likely for sexual minority boys to mutually engage in violence, particularly given their dependence on their partner for support and access to the gay community. In contrast, some sexual minority girls report willingness to engage in retaliatory physical aggression if a partner is female, because

they are “at the same physical level,” whereas with a male partner “you might be afraid to hit him back” (Gillum & DiFulvio, 2012, pp. 730–731).

TDV Directionality and Substance Use

The correlates of directionality of TDV differed as a function of girls’ sexual orientation. Particular forms of dual-role TDV were more strongly associated with substance use than unidirectional TDV, but only for heterosexual boys and sexual minority girls, not heterosexual girls. Too few sexual minority boys were engaging in bidirectional violence for contrasts to be computed. The same minority stress processes that underlie engagement in TDV might also explain why sexual minority girls exhibited these stronger associations between dual-role TDV and substance use. Research has not examined these correlates within adolescent samples. Nevertheless, the findings could reflect similar patterns to those observed among adult sexual minority women. Specifically, Lewis et al. (2015) found that sexual minority women who experienced more emotional distress were more likely to drink to cope with this distress, which was associated with more alcohol consumption and greater engagement in bidirectional IPV. Given that internalized homophobia and minority stress underlie substance use engagement (Marshall et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2016) and IPV (Lewis et al., 2015), these findings might suggest there are shared risk factors for these outcomes. Given that this study is cross-sectional, more research is needed to understand whether these outcomes share a prior risk factor or whether there is a more causal pathway (e.g., is early violence exposure associated with greater substance use, which then increases risk of future dual-role aggression?).

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is not without limitations. After restricting the sample to those youth reporting a dating relationship, the sample size of sexual minority boys was relatively small. As a result, we had insufficient power to run hypothesized models. This limited the ability to conduct more advanced statistical analyses. In addition, due to small sample size, all youth reporting non-heterosexual identities (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer) were collapsed into one sexual minority group for boys and for girls, potentially obscuring differences within these sexual minority identities. However, it is not uncommon for sexual minority groups, particularly in youth, to be collapsed due to small sample sizes as well as evidence of substantial identity fluidity during this developmental period (Diamond, 2008). The schools that agreed to offer this research study to their students were also not randomly selected. Nonetheless, the sample of study sites included good representation of study sites located in urban, suburban, and rural areas; schools with large, medium and small enrollment; as well as public, private, and charter schools. Despite these limitations, this study is an important step toward further understanding TDV in sexual minority youth. Collecting information on demographics of teens’ partners would also help researchers further understand the context in which the TDV is occurring.

Violence toward sexual minorities continues to be a major public health concern, and although this study provided an understanding of directionality of TDV in sexual minority youth, more research needs to be done with this population. It would be useful to have larger sample sizes that would allow for more sexual minority boys and also to allow

to examine sexual orientations separately (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual). Differentiating sexual orientations is essential because there are differences in rates of substance use and victimization among youth who identify as bisexual versus exclusively heterosexual or homosexual (Marshall et al., 2009; Sterzing et al., 2019). Given these discrepancies, it would be useful to utilize more nuanced measures of substance use. Recent works highlight disparities across many indicators of alcohol use (e.g., high-intensity binge drinking) in lesbian and bisexual women (Fish et al., 2018).

Our assessment of TDV measured youth's experiences in the past year without assessing partner characteristics. Therefore, youth in this sample may have been victimized in one relationship but then perpetrating in another. As we did not measure partner characteristics, we cannot determine whether youth experienced TDV in multiple partnerships. Therefore, it is possible that some of our measures of "bidirectional" TDV were in fact not occurring bidirectionally within the same relationship. Furthermore, we are unable to assess for age differences between youth and their partners, which might have important implications for understanding the experience of some subgroups studied (e.g., adolescent girls: Volpe et al., 2013).

Diversity Implications

It should also be noted that the present study did not collect information on race or ethnicity among participants, as these questions were not permitted by regulatory boards for fear that responses could be used to identify students in the data. Researchers can consider using intersectionality framework (Crenshaw, 1989) to further understand how different minority identities (i.e., race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, etc.) can interlock to further marginalize members of society. Ensuring that these research questions are also explored among youth is an important next step.

Conclusion

As TDV may also be a stepping stone for IPV later in life (Wolfe et al., 2003), including among sexual minorities specifically (Shorey et al., 2018), understanding the context of TDV among sexual minority youth is vital to the development of effective prevention strategies (Niolon et al., 2017). These results highlight that the rates of unidirectional versus bidirectional TDV are similar for girls but discrepant for boys based on their sexual orientation, with sexual minority boys being particularly likely to be victimized. These findings highlight the need for targeted support for (a) sexual minority youth experiencing TDV, such as direct support for victims as well as psychoeducation about healthy relationships. Furthermore, despite similar rates of engagement in dual-role TDV, sexual minority girls displayed a significant association between TDV directionality and substance use that heterosexual girls did not. This finding demands programming to concurrently target the co-occurring nature of sexual minority girls' TDV and substance use.

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Table 1.

Rates of Dating Conflict and Directionality of Conflict Among Heterosexual and Sexual Minority Youth Reporting a Dating Relationship in the Past Year.

Dating Conflict	None	Victim Only	Perpetrator Only	Dual-Role	Fisher's Exact <i>p</i>
Boys					
Threatening					
Heterosexual	84% (590)	8% (56)	2% (12)	6% (45)	.005**
Sexual minority	69% (27)	23% (9)	5% (2)	3% (1)	
Physical					
Heterosexual	86% (601)	6% (40)	1% (6)	8% (53)	.111
Sexual minority	82% (32)	15% (6)	0% (0)	3% (1)	
Sexual					
Heterosexual	90% (628)	2% (17)	3% (20)	5% (34)	.002**
Sexual minority	77% (30)	15% (6)	0% (0)	8% (3)	
Total					
Heterosexual	75% (525)	8% (58)	3% (23)	14% (97)	.010**
Sexual minority	64% (25)	26% (10)	0% (0)	10% (4)	
Girls					
Threatening					
Heterosexual	78% (579)	10% (71)	3% (25)	9% (66)	.000***
Sexual minority	56% (78)	20% (28)	6% (8)	18% (25)	
Physical					
Heterosexual	78% (579)	3% (22)	7% (49)	12% (89)	.005**
Sexual minority	68% (94)	4% (5)	5% (7)	24% (33)	
Sexual					
Heterosexual	78% (576)	15% (109)	1% (4)	7% (48)	.144
Sexual minority	71% (99)	17% (24)	1% (2)	10% (14)	
Total					
Heterosexual	62% (462)	12% (90)	4% (28)	22% (161)	.000***
Sexual minority	42% (58)	17% (24)	7% (10)	34% (47)	

[†] *p* < .06.

* *p* < .05.

** *p* < .01.

*** *p* < .001.

Table 2.

Rates of Directionality of Conflict Among Heterosexual and Sexual Minority Boys Reporting Dating Conflict in the Past Year.

Boys	Unidirectional	Dual Roles	Fisher's Exact <i>p</i>
Threatening			
Heterosexual	60% (68)	40% (45)	.054 [†]
Sexual minority	92% (11)	8% (1)	
Physical			
Heterosexual	47% (46)	54% (53)	.058 [†]
Sexual minority	86% (6)	14% (1)	
Sexual			
Heterosexual	52% (37)	48% (34)	.49
Sexual minority	67% (6)	33% (3)	
Total			
Heterosexual	46% (81)	55% (97)	.09
Sexual minority	71% (10)	29% (4)	
<hr/>			
Girls	Unidirectional	Dual Roles	χ^2
Threatening			
Heterosexual	59% (96)	41% (66)	0.00
Sexual minority	59% (36)	41% (25)	
Physical			
Heterosexual	44% (71)	56% (89)	4.57 [*]
Sexual minority	27% (12)	73% (33)	
Sexual			
Heterosexual	70% (113)	30% (48)	0.40
Sexual minority	65% (26)	35% (14)	
Total			
Heterosexual	42% (118)	58% (161)	0.00
Sexual minority	42% (34)	58% (47)	

[†]*p* < .06.

^{*}*p* .05.

^{**}*p* .01.

^{***}*p* < .001.