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"To Love or To Loathe": The Impact of Childhood Bullying on The Quality of Adult Romantic Relationships

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“TO LOVE OR TO LOATHE”: THE IMPACT OF CHILDHOOD BULLYING
ON THE QUALITY OF ADULT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

by

RICHELLE CRUZ QUETELL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Psychology
in the College of Sciences
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ABSTRACT

The current study explored whether childhood bullying has a lasting impact on the quality of adult romantic relationships. A complete case analysis of 86 participant responses examined the association between bullying, insecure attachment, romantic relationship satisfaction, and trust. The findings partially supported study hypotheses. Specifically, a significant positive correlation between social manipulation, a type of bullying, and avoidant attachment was found. Physical victimization was also positively correlated with trust. However, no significant association between bullying and relationship satisfaction was found. Exploratory multiple regression analysis showed that both physical victimization and romantic relationship satisfaction predict the level of trust experienced in a romantic relationship. Additional research is warranted in this area of interpersonal functioning.

Keywords: bullying, insecure attachment, relationship satisfaction, trust, relationship quality

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Bullying	1
Romantic Relationships, Satisfaction, and Trust.....	4
Attachment Style	8
Present Study	11
METHOD	12
Participants	12
Procedure.....	12
Materials.....	13
RESULTS	15
Data Analysis	15
Hypothesis Testing.....	15
Exploratory Analyses	17
DISCUSSION.....	19
Limitations and Future Directions.....	22
Conclusion.....	23
APPENDICES	25
APPENDIX A: THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL PEER-VICTIMIZATION SCALE	26
APPENDIX B: THE EXPERIENCES IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIP SCALE-SHORT FORM	28
APPENDIX C: THE RELATIONSHIP ASSESSMENT SCALE	30
APPENDIX D: TRUST SCALE	32
APPENDIX E: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS	35
APPENDIX F: LIKERT SCALE	38
APPENDIX G: IRB APPROVAL.....	40
REFERENCES	43

INTRODUCTION

There has been increasing national attention and concern about bullying. This is particularly true in relation to bullying in adolescence. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2019), 20% of students in 2017 reported being bullied at school. Those students ranged between the ages of twelve and eighteen. The experience of bullying can have a number of psychological effects. Of the students who reported being bullied at school, 27% indicated that bullying negatively affected how they felt about themselves; 19% indicated that bullying had negative effects on their schoolwork and their relationships with friends or family; and 14% reported that bullying negatively affected their physical health (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019). Bullying affects many students no matter their size, financial status, or institution (Töcu, 2017). Due to the significant psychological impact that bullying can have, this study explored the long-term psychosocial consequences of bullying on interpersonal relationships.

Bullying

Bullying is an umbrella term for a series of diverse attitudes and behaviors ranging from “using words (ironizing, teasing, labeling, threatening, blackmailing, slandering) to physical actions (bumping, shoving) or to more subtle actions such as social exclusion” (Töcu, 2017, p. 212). This definition includes two common types of bullying: verbal bullying and physical bullying. However, these are not the only two. Mynard and Joseph (2000), identified two more

types of bullying, social manipulation, which involves using manipulation to cause harm; and attacks on property, such as stealing or breaking an item purposely. Such acts involve targeted intimidation or humiliation. To make victims feel powerless, bullies can resort to a number of aggressive behaviors. This power imbalance distinguishes bullying from conflict. While an isolated event is enough to cause fear of persistent abuse, numerous definitions of bullying require more than just one incidence (Juvonen & Graham, 2014). However, even one instance of aggressive behavior or targeting should be taken seriously, as a single event is enough to impact a person's life.

Unfortunately, many adults view bullying either as a normal stage in a child's development or as a "character strengthening" process (Tocu, 2017). Some even believe that verbal bullying is harmless, since words are thought to cause no harm. According to Tocu (2017), these beliefs and attitudes prevent the development of proper intervention strategies that would encourage the demise of this behavior. Consequently, victims of bullying may experience low self-compassion and increased shame (Beduna & Perrone-McGovern, 2019). In order to reduce feelings of guilt and shame, parents are encouraged to express empathy and understanding in response to a child who is the target of bullying (Beduna & Perrone-McGovern, 2019). Parents can help their children to better understand and process the emotional fallout from bullying by mirroring compassion.

According to Wolke et al. (2013), bullying victims have a greater risk of adverse outcomes in childhood, including physical, emotional and psychological problems. This is particularly true for children who experienced more frequent bullying. Usually children who are withdrawn, physically weak, prone to react, have poor social understanding and no one to stand

up for them become targets of bullying at school. Conversely, bullies are often strong, healthy children who have social understanding and effectively manipulate others (Wolke et al., 2013). Furthermore, students who view aggressive behavior as a suitable and efficient way to treat others have a higher chance of bullying or encouraging bullying behaviors among their peers (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009). When aggression becomes normalized, adolescents believe that conflict resolution consists of violent behavior (Ellis & Wolfe, 2015). This is especially troubling because behaviors that exhibit violence or bullying are known to have adverse effects on the victims experiencing them.

Some of the immediate adverse effects include experiencing anxiety, depression, suicide ideation, and truancy (deLara, 2019). Long term effects involve victims having a harder time maintaining jobs and being more at risk of living in poor conditions during young adulthood. Additionally, Wolke et al. (2013), found that victims of chronic bullying have significantly higher levels of social problems and greater financial problems than victims less frequently bullied. Childhood experiences of bullying have also been linked to negative mental health outcomes years later (Hesapcioglu et al., 2018). Some mental health problems related to bullying or victimization include stuttering, social anxiety, low self-esteem, low body satisfaction, feelings of helplessness, depression, suicide ideation, and alcohol and substance abuse (Hesapcioglu et al., 2018; Tocu, 2017). Victims of bullying are also at risk of developing eating disorders if their bullying is based on their weight, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) if they are repeatedly being alarmed (deLara, 2019). According to Wolke et al. (2013), bullying victims are more likely to become consistent smokers, to recover slower from illnesses, and to be diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder. Therefore, victims of prolonged bullying are at a greater risk of

suffering adverse outcomes later in life. The effects of bullying that have been explored allow us to view its impacts on the victim. Since bullying negatively impacts a person's psyche and their relationship with themselves, researchers expected that it would also affect how they view their interpersonal relationships. In the current study, researchers explored how bullying affects romantic relationships in terms of satisfaction, trust and level of attachment experienced within.

Romantic Relationships, Satisfaction, and Trust

According to Forenza et al. (2018), children learn how to behave by viewing those around them. Moreover, they learn how to behave in romantic relationships from significant others and their surroundings. This is especially important considering that forming suitable romantic relationships is a major part of shifting from adolescence to adulthood (Hadiwijaya et al., 2020). Throughout this shift, adolescents acquire skills that can benefit and improve the quality of their relationships later on (Forenza et al., 2018). If children are exposed to bullying behaviors during this time, this can impact how they may act in future romantic relationships. As a result, bullied victims could become more withdrawn in their romantic relationships.

When it comes to close bonds, romantic relationships are usually the closest relationships people have (Machia & Proulx, 2020). Consequently, romantic relationships are of utmost significance in an adult's life (Van den Brink et al., 2018). That being said, some individuals might become more dependent on their relationships in order to hold on to them or distance themselves to avoid being hurt. According to Machia and Proulx (2020), relationships are created and preserved because they fulfill the need to belong and feel secure. For many couples,

their relationship serves as their main source of need fulfillment. This can be a result of insecure attachment, that can be affected by bullying experiences. Healthy romantic relationships are linked to decreased stress and enhanced physical health (Beeney et al., 2019). Some of the characteristics of healthy relationships include happiness, mutual respect, trust, support, honesty, compromise, understanding, and individuality (Shiple et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017). Moreover, healthy relationships are characterized by no threats or presence of any type of abuse, including emotional, physical or sexual (Hertzog & Rowley, 2014). However, experiences of bullying are known to affect levels of stress and anxiety, which may disrupt these healthy relationships and lead to dissatisfaction within them.

The effects bullying has on the victim's perceptions of themselves may affect how they experience romantic relationships. As covered earlier, bullying can lead to lower self-esteem and feelings of helplessness. Having negative views about themselves could affect the romantic relationships of bullying victims since they might think they are not worthy of being in the relationship or worthy of their partner's love. These thoughts could impact how they act around their romantic partner in that victims of bullying might become overly anxious to get their partner's approval and seek their validation or they may keep their distance to protect themselves.

Some unhealthy or "toxic" behaviors can mistakenly be perceived as healthy and normal behaviors within a romantic relationship. This is partly because people who are in a romantic relationship seek to believe that they are with the right person. However, overlooking unhealthy behaviors like extreme jealousy, clinginess, and guilt-tripping can eventually harm the relationship (Gala & Ghadiyali, 2020). Whether an individual is able to recognize unhealthy

behaviors in their relationship may relate to the parenting they received during their childhood and any bullying experiences that affected them while growing up.

Unhealthy behaviors such as the anxious and avoidant traits of individuals with insecure attachment styles can affect the level of satisfaction they experience within romantic relationships (Meyer et al., 2015). The term *satisfaction*, along with *closeness* and *happiness* are interchangeable with the term *relationship quality* (Rogge et al., 2017). Despite the broadness of this term, Cotter and Kerschner (2018) define relationship quality as the “satisfaction and intimacy within a romantic relationship” (p. 41). Furthermore, individuals who experience high relationship quality exhibit higher levels of satisfaction and trust (Van den Brink et al., 2018).

Satisfaction in one’s romantic relationship involves being pleased with the exchanges and events within the relationship. The difference between happy and unhappy couples lies in how satisfied the partners are within their romantic relationship. Additionally, the more satisfied couples are within their relationships, the more likely they are to be in a steady relationship and the least likely they are to split up (Cahill et al., 2020). Couples in satisfying and steady romantic relationships exhibit less adverse mental and physical health consequences than those who are displeased with their relationships (Van den Brink et al., 2018; Cahill et al., 2020). Despite romantic relationship satisfaction being a preventive factor of mental health consequences, previous mental health issues can impact the level of satisfaction experienced in a relationship.

Mental health has been found to negatively impact romantic relationship satisfaction. Specifically, depressed individuals lack social responsiveness towards their romantic partners (Meyer et al., 2019). This implies that individuals diagnosed with depression provide fewer social cues to their significant other, resulting in dissatisfaction with the relationship. Mental

health issues can be a result of childhood bullying, as seen in the earlier research (Hesapcioglu et al., 2018; Țocu, 2017; deLara, 2019). Due to the fact that bullying may negatively impact mental health, and mental health issues affect romantic relationship satisfaction, this study aimed to find a connection between childhood bullying and romantic relationship quality.

The quality of romantic relationships can also be affected by the level of trust within the relationship. Evidently, trust is a major predictor of how satisfied couples are within their romantic relationship. Trust is measured by the extent of compassion and sincerity a person perceives that his or her romantic partner expresses toward him or her (Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017). Trust can also be evaluated by how much partners depend on each other, and how genuine they are in their relationship (Moore & Woodcock, 2017).

Romantic partners who are more trusting separate their day-to-day relationship problems from their overall relationship assessments. In doing so, trusting partners view their relationship as more satisfying over time. Conversely, romantic partners who lack trust combine both positive and negative views about their partners rather than separating and assessing them independently. Doing so causes a strain in the relationship since less trusting individuals will give less recognition to the positive actions done by their partners and will also make their partners feel guilty for their wrongdoings (Fletcher et al., 2010). This behavior can easily become problematic and lead to toxic relationships.

Trust can be affected by levels of bullying during childhood. Victims of bullying have a higher chance of becoming less trusting of others. Their previous bullying experiences influence how they react to social exchanges. For example, they become more anxious in public settings, and may grow to dislike school more than children who have not experienced bullying (Betts et

al., 2017). Similarly, greater intensities of bullying result in poorer amounts of friendship satisfaction (Jantzer, et al., 2006). Conclusively, bullying decreases the overall life satisfaction among adolescents and adults (Valois et al., 2012). Due to these findings, the current research predicted that bullying would also decrease romantic relationship satisfaction.

The adverse impact bullying has on trust could also explain why victims might experience romantic relationships differently. Because bullying affects how anxious a person feels around others, it could also impact how sincere that person is with their partner since this anxiety could restrict these bullying victims from being honest with their significant others and trusting them fully. Hence, the satisfaction experienced in that relationship may diminish just how trust diminishes when there is a history of bullying. Thus, researchers in the present study predicted that the presence of childhood bullying would result in lower levels of trust among the relationship. Since bullying impacts overall trust in others then it would most likely have an effect on how much partners trust each other and the dynamic among that romantic relationship.

Attachment Style

The quality of romantic relationships increases when adolescents and adults grow up with understanding and “hands on” parents. Adolescents who grew up with loving, “hands on” parents exhibit more warmth and supportiveness in their later relationships. Differentially, those who grow up with uninvolved and rejecting parents go on to exhibit these traits in their future romantic relationships (Walper & Wendt, 2015). These findings contribute to the notion that the relationship between parents and adolescents predicts quality of later romantic relationships. An

explanation for this dynamic can be found in the attachment theoretical perspective

(Hadiwijaya et al., 2020).

According to Meyer et al. (2015), there are four attachment styles. The first one, *secure attachment style*, is characterized by a positive ego and self-appreciation. People with secure attachment styles can depend and be close to others (Paquette et al., 2020). By this definition, we can infer that people with this style of attachment are in healthier romantic relationships. The remaining three attachment styles are *fearful, dismissive and preoccupied*. These three are indicative of insecure attachment, which consists of anxious and avoidant components. The fearful attachment style is characterized by high anxiety combined with high avoidance. The dismissive style is defined by high avoidance combined with low anxiety. Lastly, the preoccupied style is marked by high anxiety combined with low avoidance (Meyer et al., 2015). For the purposes of this study, insecure attachment was measured solely in terms of avoidance and anxiety.

As mentioned previously, these attachment styles are formed during a child's upbringing. Secure attachment styles are formed by understanding and involved parenting in childhood. Those who experience a secure attachment with their parents have a higher chance of adopting positive relationships with others (Forenza et al., 2018). On the other hand, the insecure attachment styles are a product of inconsistent or unresponsive figures in childhood (Nosko et al., 2011). Individuals who grow up with insecure attachment styles cultivate low or unrealistic expectations of their relationships (Einav, 2014). In turn, important figures in our life shape our attachment styles, which could predict the likelihood of being bullied (Innamorati et al., 2018).

Since bullying victims tend to be more withdrawn in social situations, the current research investigated whether bullying impacted insecure attachment within a romantic relationship.

Attachment plays a key role in the expectations we have on others, and is critical in romantic relationships (Einav, 2014). Romantic partners with different attachment styles vary in the way they cope with their emotions. Those with insecure attachment styles may experience more difficulty regulating their emotions. Individuals with anxious attachment styles tend to overreact when their partner is indifferent to their desires and may allow their distress to disturb their relationships among other aspects of their life. On the contrary, those with avoidant attachment styles separate themselves from their distress to evade undesirable interactions with their partner. By doing so, avoidant individuals guard their emotions and underestimate the importance of their relationships (Meyer et al., 2015). Overacting or being indifferent towards a romantic partner will most likely cause more harm in the relationship than it will benefit. If it results that bullying affects attachment in a romantic relationship, and insecure attachment can harm it as well, then it could be expected that bullying would result in lower levels of satisfaction between romantic partners.

The literature previously discussed presents a connection between bullying and trust among friends, bullying and overall satisfaction, and bullying and attachment. The research between attachment and bullying reveals that children with insecure attachment styles are more prone to become victims of bullying (Beduna & Perrone-McGovern, 2019). Moreover, previous research has examined the connection between the different attachment styles that are formed in childhood and the likelihood of being bullied depending on which attachment style was formed (Innamorati et al., 2018). Research also shows that bullying reduces trust, friendship satisfaction,

and overall life satisfaction. Furthermore, the reviewed research focuses on the effects bullying has on children's mental and physical health as well as their relationship with their parents and peers. Since the victim's mental health affects romantic relationship satisfaction, the present study proposed that bullying would have an impact on the quality of adult romantic relationships. Despite the research conducted, there is a paucity of research on the long-term consequences that bullying has on adult romantic relationships.

Present Study

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the long-term consequences of bullying on romantic relationships. Specifically, this study investigated how adults become attached within their interpersonal romantic relationships as well as the satisfaction and trust experienced in those relationships. While bullying is known to have adverse outcomes on a child's life, little is known about its effects on adults. This study explored whether bullying has a lasting impact on adult romantic relationships, specifically attachment style, satisfaction and trust in those relationships. The following hypotheses were generated:

Hypothesis 1: Higher levels of bullying experienced in childhood are related to insecure attachment within the romantic relationship.

Hypothesis 2: Higher levels of bullying experienced in childhood are related to lower levels of romantic relationship satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3: Higher levels of bullying experienced in childhood are related to lower levels of trust within the romantic relationship.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 124 participants took part in the study between September 2020 and March 2021. However, only 86 participants had complete data for the variables of interest. Thus, those who had missing data were not analyzed. The participants varied in age, gender, race, and ethnicity. The final sample consisted of 78 females, 7 males, and 1 transgender person between the ages of 18 and 50 ($M=24.43$, $SD=7.42$). The majority of the participants (53.5%) identified as Caucasian or White, 20.9% identified as Bi-racial or Multi-racial, 12.8% as Black or African American, 3.5% as Asian, 2.3% as Native American, and the remaining 5.8% as Other.

Procedure

Non-experimental, survey design measures were employed to explore the topic of interest. To partake in this study, all participants were required to be over the age of 18 and be or have been in a romantic relationship while having experienced some form of bullying during childhood. Study materials were accessed via on-line link serviced by Qualtrics- an online recruitment software, where individuals were informed that they were going to participate in a research study regarding bullying and romantic relationships. Participants were also recruited through social media websites such as Instagram and Facebook. Once consent was affirmed, participants completed the Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale, the Experiences in Close

Relationship Scale-Short Form, the Relationship Assessment Scale, and the Trust Scale. Finally, participants were directed to complete the demographic questionnaire. UCF students received course credit or extra credit for their participation. Community residents were volunteers only and were not compensated. The survey was available for students at the University of Central Florida (UCF) and the wider community. UCF students received course credit or extra credit for their participation. Community residents were volunteers only and were not compensated.

Materials

The *Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale* (MPVS; Mynard & Joseph, 2000), is a 16-item measure with four subscales assessing physical and verbal victimization, social manipulation, and property attacks. This scale uses a 3-point Likert scale, where 0 pertains to “*not at all*”, 1 pertains to “*once*” and 2 pertains to “*more than once*.” An example of an item is “Made fun of me for some reason.” In this study, the Cronbach’s Alpha was .83 for physical victimization, .81 for verbal victimization, .89 for social manipulation, and .87 for attacks on property. The MPVS uses a summation score. Scores on this scale can range from 0-32 for the overall score of bullying and from 0-8 for each subscale. The scale is provided in Appendix A.

The *Experiences in Close Relationship Scale-Short Form* (ECR-S; Wei et al., 2007), is an abbreviated version of Brennan et al.’s (1998) scale. The original scale consists of 36 items that measure adult attachment in close relationships. In the current study researchers used the short version, which consists of 12 items, 6 of which measure anxiety and the other 6 measure avoidance. In this study, the Cronbach’s Alpha was .68 for the anxiety subscale (not significant)

and .78 for the avoidance subscale. Responses were solicited on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). This scale uses a summation score for anxiety and another one for avoidance. Scores for each subscale range from 7-42. The scale is provided in Appendix B.

The *Relationship Assessment Scale* (RAS; Hendrick, 1988), measures relationship satisfaction. This 7-item scale had a Cronbach's Alpha of .86 in this study. The RAS includes items like "In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?" Responses were solicited on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1: *strongly disagree*" to "5: *strongly agree*." The RAS also uses a summation score. The scores can range from 7-35. The scale is provided in Appendix C.

The *Trust Scale* (Rempel et al., 1985), measures levels of trust in one's relationship partner. This 17-item scale includes items like "My partner behaves in a very consistent manner." Responses were solicited on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "-3: *strongly disagree*" to "3: *strongly agree*." This scale uses a summation score. Scores range from -51 to 51. In this study, the overall Cronbach's Alpha was .76. The scale is provided in Appendix D.

RESULTS

Data Analysis

To account for missing data, researchers deleted all participants who did not have a total score for all measures. By doing so, the number of participants reduced, going from 124 to 86. This allowed researchers to achieve an equal sample size for each measure and analyses. Post hoc power analyses were run after data analysis to determine power achieved. From the twenty-four bivariate correlations performed, three achieved sufficient power at the .05 level. The correlation between avoidant attachment and romantic relationship satisfaction has a beta equal to .85; the correlation between trust and romantic relationship satisfaction has a beta equal to 1.00; and the correlation between trust and avoidant attachment has a beta over .99. However, because most of our correlations had a power less than .80, we concluded that most of our research was underpowered.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: Childhood Bullying v Insecure Attachment

It was hypothesized that higher levels of bullying during childhood would be correlated to higher levels of insecure attachment in a romantic relationship. There was a significant positive correlation between social manipulation and avoidant insecure attachment ($r(84) = .24, p = .025$). However, no other significant associations with bullying subscales and attachment were

found in this data. The non-significant correlations with attachment were as follows, overall bullying with anxious attachment ($r(84)=.10, p=.340$); overall bullying with avoidant attachment ($r(84)=.15, p=.184$); physical victimization with anxious attachment ($r(84)=-.09, p=.433$); physical victimization with avoidant attachment ($r(84)=-.08, p=.440$); verbal victimization with anxious attachment ($r(84)=.18, p=.091$); verbal victimization with avoidant attachment ($r(84)=.14, p=.187$); social manipulation with anxious attachment ($r(84)=.17, p=.114$); attacks on property with anxious attachment ($r(84)=-.01, p=.923$); and attacks on property with avoidant attachment ($r(84)=.06, p=.560$). The findings suggest that as social manipulation, a type of bullying, increased, avoidant attachment style increased as well.

Hypothesis 2: Childhood Bullying v Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

Researchers expected to find a negative correlation between perceived childhood bullying and satisfaction within the romantic relationship. The bivariate correlation analysis indicated no association between overall bullying and romantic relationship satisfaction ($r(84)=.05, p=.665$). Correspondingly, there were no statistically significant associations between romantic relationship satisfaction and the bullying subscales, physical victimization ($r(84)=.12, p=.291$); verbal victimization ($r(84)=.09, p=.426$); social manipulation ($r(84)=-.07, p=.521$); and attacks on property ($r(84)=.07, p=.534$).

Hypothesis 3: Childhood Bullying v Trust

It was hypothesized that higher levels of bullying during childhood would be correlated to lower levels of trust within the romantic relationship. Researchers found a positive correlation

between overall bullying and trust, although inconclusive and not statistically significant ($r(84)=.07, p= .550$). However, there was a significant positive correlation between physical victimization and trust ($r(84)=.28, p= .009$). No other bullying subscales produced a significant association with trust, verbal victimization ($r(84)= .08, p= .453$); social manipulation ($r(84)= -.09, p= .422$); and attacks on property ($r(84)= .04, p= .714$). The findings imply that as physical victimization, another type of bullying, increased, trust also increased.

Exploratory Analyses

Insecure Attachment v Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

Although an association among insecure attachment and romantic relationship satisfaction was not hypothesized, a correlation analysis uncovered a significant negative association between avoidant attachment and romantic relationship satisfaction ($r(84)= -.32, p= .003$). This suggests that as avoidant attachment style increased, relationship satisfaction decreased.

Trust v Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

While an association between trust and romantic relationship satisfaction was not hypothesized, a correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between trust and romantic relationship satisfaction ($r(84)= .72, p< .001$). This implies that as trust increased, relationship satisfaction increased as well.

Trust v Insecure Attachment

Once more, although an association among trust and insecure attachment was not hypothesized, a correlation analysis uncovered a significant negative association between trust and avoidant attachment ($r(84) = -.47, p < .001$). This insinuates that as trust increased, avoidant attachment style decreased.

Childhood Bullying, Romantic Relationship Satisfaction, and Trust

Because researchers found a significant correlation between physical victimization and trust, and among romantic relationship satisfaction and trust, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to see whether physical victimization and romantic relationship satisfaction significantly predicted trust. The R^2 value of .55 revealed that the predictors explained 55% variance in the outcome variable with $F(2, 83) = 51.12, p < .001$. The findings revealed that physical victimization significantly and positively predicted trust ($\beta = .20, t(83) = 2.71, p = .008$). Likewise, romantic relationship satisfaction significantly and positively predicted trust ($\beta = .69, t(83) = 9.36, p < .001$). The results of this analysis indicate that both physical victimization and romantic relationship satisfaction predict the level of trust experienced in a romantic relationship.

DISCUSSION

The current study examined the impact bullying has on adult romantic relationships. More specifically, this study explored the effect bullying has on the attachment, trust, and satisfaction within those romantic relationships. The results provided partial support of our hypotheses; however, further research with a larger sample size and sufficient statistical power is needed to confirm the findings.

For the first hypothesis, researchers predicted that childhood bullying would be positively correlated with insecure attachment. This hypothesis was partially supported since one aspect of bullying, social manipulation, had a significant positive correlation with one style of insecure attachment, which was the avoidant style. This finding suggests that social aspects of bullying such as being humiliated and being socially rejected have a significant impact on the attachment style experienced in a romantic relationship. This means that participants who experienced bullying in childhood, specifically social manipulation, exhibit an avoidant attachment style within their romantic relationships. This finding is essential because it suggests that romantic relationship quality can be affected by a specific type of bullying. Moreover, it suggests that being socially reject during childhood can lead to increased distancing between romantic partners or can even prevent them from getting too close. Despite the rest of the types of bullying not being significantly correlated with either style of insecure attachment, findings revealed a positive, not statistically significant correlation between overall bullying and both insecure attachment types. This means that as overall bullying increased, so did avoidant and insecure

attachment. However, these findings were not significant and replicating this study with a larger sample could provide the data to fully support this hypothesis.

The researcher's second hypothesis that childhood bullying would be negatively correlated with romantic relationship satisfaction was not supported by the research findings. There was no association between romantic relationship satisfaction and any type of bullying. Although nonsignificant, there was a negative relationship between social manipulation and romantic relationship satisfaction. This means that as social manipulation increased, romantic relationship satisfaction decreased, which is partially what we predicted. However, these findings were inconclusive since no statistically significant connections were found. The results of this hypothesis imply that bullying does not affect romantic relationship satisfaction, however from previous research we know that bullying affects friendship satisfaction and overall life satisfaction (Jantzer, et al., 2006; Valois et al., 2012). Consequently, additional research should be completed to confirm that there is no association.

The third hypothesis researchers formulated predicted that childhood bullying would be negatively correlated with the levels of trust within a romantic relationship. Findings partially supported this hypothesis since a statistically significant correlation was found between trust and bullying, more specifically physical victimization. However, researchers found a positive correlation among these two variables, rather than a negative one. This finding suggests that those who experienced more physical victimization type of bullying were more trusting in their romantic relationships. This is a novel finding which is counter to our expectations, but possible explanations for this finding may be related to the fact that the sample was mostly women. Thus, women's reactions to physical bullying may be different than expected. Alternatively, social

manipulation shares a nonsignificant negative relationship with trust, which is the direction we expected this hypothesis to take. This means that as social manipulation increased, trust decreased. However, this finding was not significant and further research could provide the data to fully support this hypothesis.

Exploratory analyses revealed statistically significant correlations among insecure attachment and romantic relationship satisfaction, trust and romantic relationship satisfaction, and trust and avoidant attachment. The negative correlation between insecure attachment and romantic relationship satisfaction found in the current study confirms the conclusions Meyer et al. (2015), reached regarding the possible adverse effects insecure attachment, more specifically, anxious and avoidant traits can have on romantic relationship satisfaction. The positive correlation found between trust and romantic relationship satisfaction in this study strengthens previous research that discussed how partners who have more trust in their relationship would be more satisfied with that relationship over time (Fletcher et al., 2010). The negative correlation found between trust and avoidant attachment implies that as trust increased, avoidant attachment style decreased. Despite this not being hypothesized, it is a finding that we expected to occur since usually, the more trust an individual experiences in a relationship, the less far apart couples tend to feel. In closing, the multiple regression analysis done in the current study implies that both physical victimization and romantic relationship satisfaction predict trust in a romantic relationship. Previous research suggests that trust is a predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction (Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017). Our findings, however, suggest that romantic relationship satisfaction is a predictor of trust. Further research is suggested to confirm these results and explore if romantic relationship satisfaction and trust predict each other. Additional

research is recommended to investigate the nature of these results and to more definitively determine how these variables affect each other.

Limitations and Future Directions

The statistical power of the study was compromised by its low sample size. Most of the data did not meet the .80 power it needed to reach in order to detect significant effects if one existed. The amount of missing data and small sample size most likely contributed to the statistically insignificant findings. For this reason, future researchers are advised to use more social media platforms and include physical recruitment to reach more participants and maximize sample size.

Another limitation in this study was the lack of significant reliability in the anxious attachment subscale. Scale reliabilities must be between .7-.9 to be considered acceptable, and the reliability of the anxious attachment subscale was .68, which is close but not within the stated range. To avoid any data analysis issues, future researchers are advised to verify the items related to the lower reliability and only include the ones that produce a reliable subscale.

Generalizability was another limitation in this study. The data was comprised primarily of young, female, and White participants. Future researchers can explore whether there is a relationship between the constructs in this study with the participant's age, race and gender. Lastly, future researchers are encouraged to explore any mediation effects taking place. The relationship avoidant attachment had between social manipulation, and romantic relationship satisfaction should be explored to determine if one of these variables mediates the relationship between the three.

Conclusion

Recently, the effects of bullying have been a topic of concern for parents, schools, and the general public. What used to be seen as a normal stage in life that most people overcome has been taken seriously because of the known adverse effects associated with bullying like lower self-esteem, depression, and suicide ideation, to name a few (Hesapcioglu et al., 2018; Tocu, 2017). Despite the increasing research on this topic, there are many avenues yet to be explored which inspired the making of this study.

The research question that this study investigated (i.e., “What is the impact of childhood bullying on the quality of adult romantic relationships?”) served as a guide to explore the different aspects of romantic relationship quality and how they are affected by previous bullying experiences. Following a non-experimental survey design, researchers intended to detect an association between bullying in childhood and lower romantic relationship quality. To measure relationship quality, researchers used the romantic relationship satisfaction and trust scales. Additionally, insecure attachment was measured to observe any anxious and avoidant traits within the relationship.

Despite the lack of statistical power throughout the study, researchers found significant correlations between physical victimization with trust and social manipulation with avoidant attachment. These partially support the idea that there is an effect between bullying and romantic relationship quality. However, further research is needed to explore if there is a causal relationship between bullying and dissatisfaction with the romantic relationship and the magnitude of this effect. Because this is one of the first studies conducted to view the effects

childhood bullying has on adult romantic relationships, further research is needed to confirm the findings of this study and expand the knowledge of the impact of childhood bullying on adults.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL PEER-VICTIMIZATION SCALE

01. Called me names.
02. Tried to get me into trouble with my friends.
03. Took something of mine without my permission.
04. Made fun of me because of my appearance.
05. Made fun of me for some reason.
06. Punched me.
07. Kicked me.
08. Hurt me physically in some way.
09. Beat me up.
10. Tried to break something of mine.
11. Tried to make my friends turn against me.
12. Stole something from me.
13. Refused to talk to me.
14. Made other people not talk to me.
15. Deliberately damaged some property of mine.
16. Swore at me.

APPENDIX B: THE EXPERIENCES IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIP SCALE-SHORT FORM

01. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
02. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.
03. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.
04. I find that my partner doesn't want to get as close as I would like.
05. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.
06. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
07. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.
08. I don't worry about being abandoned.
09. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
10. I get frustrated if my partner is not available when I need them.
11. I am nervous when my partner gets too close to me.
12. I worry that a romantic partner won't care about me as much as I care about them.

APPENDIX C: THE RELATIONSHIP ASSESSMENT SCALE

01. How well does your partner meet your needs?
02. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?
03. How good is your relationship compared to most?
04. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?
05. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?
06. How much do you love your partner?
07. How many problems are there in your relationship?

APPENDIX D: TRUST SCALE

01. My partner has proven to be trustworthy, and I am willing to let him/her engage in activities which other partners find too threatening.
02. Even when I don't know how my partner will react, I feel comfortable telling him/her anything about myself, even those things of which I am ashamed.
03. Though times may change and the future is uncertain, I know my partner will always be ready and willing to offer me strength and support.
04. I am never certain that my partner won't do something that I dislike or will embarrass me.
05. My partner is very unpredictable. I never know how he/she is going to act from one day to the next.
06. I feel very uncomfortable when my partner has to make decisions which will affect me personally.
07. I have found that my partner is unusually dependable, especially when it comes to things which are important to me.
08. My partner behaves in a very consistent manner.
09. Whenever we have to make an important decision in a situation we have never encountered before, I know my partner will be concerned about my welfare.
10. Even if I have no reason to expect my partner to share things with me, I still feel certain that he/she will.
11. I can rely on my partner to react in a positive way when I expose my weaknesses to him/her.

12. When I share my problems with my partner, I know he/she will respond in a loving way even before I say anything.
13. I am certain that my partner would not cheat on me, even if the opportunity arose and there was no chance that he/she would get caught.
14. I sometimes avoid my partner because he/she is unpredictable and I fear saying or doing something which might create conflict.
15. I can rely on my partner to keep the promises he/she makes to me.
16. When I am with my partner, I feel secure in facing unknown new situations.
17. Even when my partner makes excuses which sound rather unlikely, I am confident that he/she is telling the truth.

APPENDIX E: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Transgender

Other ____

What is your age? ____

What is your ethnicity?

Hispanic/Latino(a)

Non-Hispanic/Latino(a)

Other ____

What is your race?

African-American/Black

Asian-Pacific Islander

Caucasian/White

Native American

Bi-racial or Multi-racial

Other ____

Prefer not to answer

APPENDIX F: LIKERT SCALE

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Agree | Strongly agree

APPENDIX G: IRB APPROVAL



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board

FWA00000351
IRB00001138, IRB00012110
Office of Research
12201 Research Parkway
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

September 21, 2020

Dear Grace White:

On 9/21/2020, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	"To Love or To Loathe": The impact of childhood bullying on the quality of adult romantic relationships
Investigator:	Grace White
IRB ID:	STUDY00002245
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic Questions.docx, Category: Survey / Questionnaire; • HIM Flyer with Arrow.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • IRB White 2245 HRP-254-FORM Explanation of Research_RichelleCruz.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • IRB White 2245-HRP-255-FORM- Request for Exemption-CruzQuetell.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • Relationship Assessment Scale.docx, Category: Survey / Questionnaire; • The Experiences in Close Relationship Scale.docx, Category: Survey / Questionnaire; • The Multidimensional Peer-Victimization Scale.docx, Category: Survey / Questionnaire; • Trust Scale.docx, Category: Survey / Questionnaire;

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

Due to current COVID-19 restrictions, in-person research is not permitted to begin unless you are able to follow the COVID-19 Human Subject Research (HSR) Standard Safety Plan with permission from your Dean of Research or submitted your Study-Specific Safety Plan and received IRB and EH&S approval. Be sure to monitor correspondence from the Office of Research, as they will communicate when restrictions are lifted, and all in-person research can resume.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kamille C. Birkbeck".

Kamille Birkbeck
Designated Reviewer

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