

Do bullies have more sex?

December 14 2017



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Adolescents who are willing to exploit others for personal gain are more likely to bully and have sex than those who score higher on a measure of honesty and humility. This is according to a study in Springer's journal *Evolutionary Psychological Science* which was led by Daniel Provenzano of the University of Windsor in Canada.

Researchers believe that bullying might be more than just objectionable behaviour. It might, in fact, have evolved as a way for men to show dominance and strength, and to signal to women that they are good breeding stock, able to protect their offspring and provide for their needs. From an evolutionary perspective, a man's dominance may make him more attractive to his potential [sexual partners](#), as well as scaring off potential rivals.

Provenzano and his colleagues investigated individual personality differences that might make one person more willing and able to use bullying tactics when competing for sexual partners than others. Two sets of participants were recruited: 144 older adolescents (with a mean age of 18.3) and 396 younger adolescents (with a mean age of 14.6). Participants had to fill in questionnaires about their sex life and number of sexual partners, as well as frequency of bullying perpetration.

Through another questionnaire, the researchers learnt more about six different aspects of the participants' personality, such as their willingness to cooperate with others, or to exploit and antagonise others. The latter is measured by looking at how agreeable and emotionally in tune someone is, as well as how honest and humble they are. Those who do not score high in these latter measures tend to display antisocial personality traits and to subsequently be bullies.

Provenzano's team found that younger people who scored lower in "Honesty-Humility" were more likely to use bullying tactics to pursue more sexual partners than others.

"Younger adolescents lower in 'Honesty-Humility' may therefore strategically manipulate others in a variety of ways to obtain more sexual partners," says Provenzano. "Our findings indirectly suggest that exploitative adolescents may have more sexual partners if they are able to strategically use exploitative behaviour like bullying to target weaker

individuals."

According to Provenzano, adolescents lower in "Honesty-Humility" may also use bullying as an intersexual strategy to display traits such as strength and dominance to attract the opposite sex. They might also use bullying to put their rivals in a bad light, or to threaten rivals into withdrawing from intra-sexual competition in order to gain advantage when it comes to potential sexual partners.

"Our results suggest that both research and intervention efforts with older and younger adolescents need to recognize and respond to the relationships between [personality](#), sex and bullying," explains Provenzano.

More information: Provenzano, D.A. et al (2017). Do Bullies Have More Sex? The Role of Personality, *Evolutionary Psychological Science* DOI: [10.1007/s40806-017-0126-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40806-017-0126-4)

Provided by Springer

Citation: Do bullies have more sex? (2017, December 14) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-12-bullies-sex.html>

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