

Self- and Other-Directed Aggression and Borderline Personality Traits in Daily Life

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Background

One of Kernberg's defining features of an individual with borderline personality organization is the presence of pathological aggression predominating over libidinal strivings (Kernberg, 2004), yet aggression is poorly understood within the field. Anger, self-esteem, and identity have all been proposed as potential mechanisms in aggressive behavior, however a notable gap in the literature exists when combining these factors to investigate proximal factors of both self-directed and other-directed aggression in borderline personality disorder.

Study Aims & Hypotheses

The current study aimed to examine associations between EMA data and STIPO aggression scores to predict borderline traits. **Hypothesis 1:** It was hypothesized that there will be a significant positive association of variability in identity, anger, and self-esteem with borderline traits. **Hypothesis 2:** It was hypothesized that there will be a significant positive association of STIPO aggression scores with borderline traits. **Hypothesis 3:** It was hypothesized that there will be a significant positive association of variability in identity, anger, and self-esteem with STIPO aggression scores. **Hypothesis 4:** It was hypothesized that EMA items measuring variability in identity, anger and self-esteem will predict borderline traits over and above that predicted by STIPO aggression scores.

Methods

Sample: A community sample of students from a multicultural, urban university ($N = 192$) were recruited that was 73.2% female, 33.5 % African American, 19.4% Latino/a, 18.1% Asian, 7.9% Caucasian & 18-49 years old ($M = 21.42$, $SD = 5.95$).

Inclusion Criteria: All participants were 18 years or older, able to provide informed consent, and possess a smartphone.

Measures: Baseline- Personality Assessment Inventory, Borderline Scale (PAI-BOR; Morey, 1991); Structured Interview for Personality Organization (STIPO; Clarkin, Caligor, Stern & Kernberg, 2004).

Daily- 3x/day experience sampling of interpersonal/affect for 14 days (~ 42 per participant, = ~ 8000 observations total).

Procedure: Participants were engaged in a two-part data collection design. For part 1, participants attended an in-person appointment where baseline measures were administered as well as the STIPO interview conducted. Participants then completed a very brief set of questions 3x/day for 14 days. All study procedures were approved by Long Island University Internal Review Board. All missing data analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS. All other analyses were conducted using Jamovi Software.

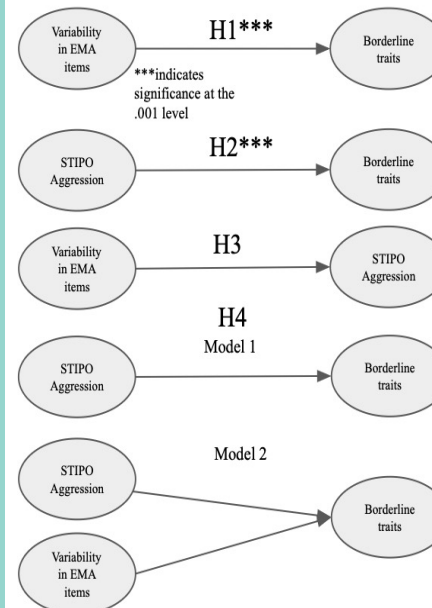
Results

Hypothesis 1 was supported, variability in anger $r(190) = 0.30$, $p < .001$, self-esteem $r(188) = 0.25$, $p < .001$, and identity $r(192) = 0.23$, $p < .001$, was significantly and positively associated with borderline traits.

Hypothesis 2 was supported, overall aggression was significantly and positively associated with borderline traits $r(190) = 0.54$, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 3 was not supported, variability in anger $r(190) = 0.13$, $p = .065$, self-esteem $r(188) = 0.09$, $p = .231$, and identity $r(192) = -0.05$, $p = 0.515$ were not significantly associated with overall aggression.

Hypothesis 4 was not supported, as both variability in anger ($R^2 = .37$, $F(1, 185) = 4.39$, $p < .001$) and identity ($R^2 = .37$, $F(1, 185) = 4.91$, $p < .001$) as well as overall aggression ($R^2 = .29$, $F(1, 185) = 77.59$, $p < .001$) predicted borderline traits independently of each other, however variability in self-esteem was not a significant predictor of borderline traits.



Discussion

- These results indicate that aggressive pathology in BPD is a complex construct that encompasses how aggression is represented in the context of one's identity as well as enacted in daily experience (Kernberg, 2004).
- An important implication of these findings is that individuals' self-conceptualizations of aggression toward themselves and others, as assessed by the STIPO, appear to be distinct from day-to-day fluctuations in anger toward others and self-esteem. Despite representing different aspects of functioning, both constructs accounted for significant variance in borderline personality pathology.
- Method variance may be a possible explanation for these discrepancies as it has been found that self-report measures are better able to predict other self-report measures than using other methods of collecting data (Bornstein, 2011).
- Limitations:** Aggression was only assessed by a self-report interview measure, rather than captured on the daily level. Sample was recruited from a university, borderline traits might not have risen to the level to capture enough variance to test hypotheses.
- Future Directions:** This study should be replicated using multiple methods of assessing for both self- and other-directed aggressive behavior (i.e. EMA protocol).

Selected References

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