

Adolescent Conceptualizations of Dating Problems:

Bullying, Sexual Harassment, and Dating Violence

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Abstract

Studies of heterosexual adolescent dating violence often apply adult-based frameworks or merely quantify abusive acts, thereby missing the context of the violence. This study addresses these limitations by seeking to understand how teens themselves conceptualize dating problems. I conducted interviews with 15 high school students to examine which dating behaviors they find problematic; how their perceptions of dating problems compare to scholarly perceptions; how gender influences their perceptions; and the role of communication technologies in abuse. Dating violence behaviors that teens found problematic included sexual coercion, jealousy, controlling behaviors, and cheating—acts that many national studies ignored or inadequately addressed. Teens emphasized a number of other negative behaviors distinct from dating violence: sexual harassment and bullying. Additionally, trends involving communication technologies and gender differences suggest generational shifts that have not been accounted for by studies on adult dating violence.

Keywords: adolescent dating violence, sexual harassment, bullying, dating problems

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Adolescent dating violence is a growing concern in high schools across the United States. Data published from the 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey shows that approximately 9.2% of adolescents have experienced physical abuse at the hands of an intimate partner (CDC, 2005). This statistic is conservative in that it does not consider other forms of dating violence, such as verbal, psychological, sexual or emotional abuse. Other studies that use a more comprehensive definition of adolescent dating violence estimated that one third of teenagers have experience with dating violence (Black et al., 2008; Halpern et al., 2001; Levy, 1998). As evidenced by these numbers, adolescent dating violence deserves the attention of further research and analysis. A particular focus on adolescent perceptions of dating problems is necessary to understand teens' experiences of dating violence, as they likely differ from adult experiences. In order to do so, research must address the context within which the violence occurs.

People often visualize dating violence as the physical assault of an intimate partner spurred by a fit of rage. Many feminist coalitions and survivor support organizations contend this is simply not the case. Rather, they state that dating violence is about getting power and control over another person, not about losing control (Levy, 1991; Sousa, 1999; Sanders, 2003). Existing data on dating violence suggests that it affects every demographic to a certain extent, including race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender, and ethnicity (Levy, 1998; Sanders, 2003). Previous studies have also shown that the violence generally follows a cyclical pattern, in which it can take on a variety of forms—physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal (Levy, 1998; Sanders, 2003; Sousa, 1999).

In a personal account of adolescent dating violence titled “He Only Wants to Help Me,” an anonymous author recounts the experience of her abuse, thereby raising implications as to what constitutes abusive behavior—

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At first things were great. The first six months or so, I thought things could not be better. But slowly he started becoming extremely jealous and began pushing or grabbing me harder than normal. I thought nothing of it. I figured I did wear too much makeup, or maybe my skirt was too high cut, or maybe I really was a “stupid fucking bitch.” Maybe I did look like a whore or maybe I shouldn’t have gone out for dinner with a girlfriend. He used any excuse to pick a fight with me and try (I feel now) to isolate me totally from my friends. I was being constantly put down, but since I loved him I figured why would he lie to me. He loves me. He only wants to help me (Levy, 1998).

This passage highlights key components of adolescent dating violence and permits individuals a glimpse into the often hidden and denied abuse experienced by many victims and survivors, especially emotional and verbal abuse.¹ Emotional abuse can happen in a variety of ways. In this scenario, the anonymous survivor was the recipient of constant criticism, jealousy, possessiveness, extremely controlling behavior, and isolation—characteristics that scholars commonly associate with dating violence. Verbal abuse, a subset of emotional abuse, is also present in the narrative, evidenced by the badgering, name-calling, and yelling, (Levy et al., 1997; Close, 2005; Follingstad et al., 2005). Arguably the most commonly recognized form of abuse, physical violence, surfaced in the story when the survivor described how she was shoved.

Scholarly literature addresses these four main types of dating violence—physical, sexual, psychological, and verbal. Barrie Levy describes physical abuse as a means to, “control, restrict, to intimidate and frighten” (Levy, 1997). When most people think of physical aggression, “pushing, shoving, slapping, punching, scratching, biting, hair-pulling, choking, [and] physical restraint” (James et al., 2000), are acts of abuse that often come to mind. It is important to note that physical violence sometimes includes threats of violence (Sousa, 1999), but this can also be included under psychological abuse. Threats of violence are not always verbal; body language and movements can be used to intimidate partners. For example, abusers often invade partner’s personal spaces while yelling and making angry gestures. Sometimes perpetrators of physical

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violence will displace their violence onto objects in the near vicinity of the victims; this is a means for abusers to display their strength and power, which acts as an implied threat (Sanders, 2003; Levy, 1998).

Physical abuse is often used in conjunction with sexual abuse. Sexual abuse in dating relationships can take on a variety of forms, all of which are detrimental to victims. Sexual violence within the context of dating violence can be described as, “mistreatment by sexual acts, demands or insults” (Levy, 1997). Sexual abuse can be the result of physical force or coercion. Adolescents are coerced into sexual acts when they feel like they cannot say no to perpetrators’ demands, either for fear of being humiliated, rejected, or physically assaulted (Levy, 1997; Sanders, 2003) A prime example of this occurs when abusers threaten to leave their partners unless they participate in certain sexual acts. In situations such as this, many victims fear being deserted by their abusers for reasons that can include love, economic support, or insecurities about being alone.

The last two forms of abuse are psychological and verbal abuse, which are often intertwined. Sharron M. Close states that, “Verbal/emotional abuse is comprised of the use of words or gestures intended to denigrate, humiliate, or threaten the safety of an individual”. Some examples that she provides include: “making the victim feel jealous, damaging possessions, hurting their feelings, insulting them in front of others, blaming them for the aggression, and bringing something up from the past to hurt them” (Close, 2005). Frequently referring to an intimate partner through the use of derogatory terms, such as bitch, slut, or whore, are obvious signs of verbal and psychological abuse that often go undetected, most likely because this behavior of name-calling is so prevalent in our society. Perpetrators of verbal and physical abuse are also adept at verbally putting down their partners and making them feel worthless and

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undesirable. Extreme displays of jealousy and possessiveness are also indicative of a controlling partner. Victims are commonly punished (verbally, emotionally, sexually, and/or physically) for spending time with anyone other than the perpetrator, which can result in their isolation from friends and family (Sousa, 1999; Levy, 1997; Close, 2005). Threats of suicide or violence are also ways in which an abuser can control the actions of his/her partner (Close, 2005). Abusers are more likely to threaten to commit suicide or actually attempt suicide when the victim is trying to leave the abuser, which is a period in which the likelihood of physical violence increases (Levy et al., 1997; Close, 2005; Follingstad et al., 2005).

Dating violence is a societal concern because there is a wide body of research suggesting that it has severe physical and psychological effects on adolescents (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; for a review, see Banyard & Cross, 2008). The experience of violence can be extremely detrimental to adolescent victims because “teenagers by nature are extremely narcissistic, which means that they ascribe casualty to themselves” (Gallers & Lawrence, 1991; Sousa, 1999). In other words, adolescents are much more likely than adults to internalize the abuse, thereby placing the blame on themselves instead of on the perpetrator. This not only creates issues with self-esteem but also complicates the healing process for the survivor. The isolating component of adolescent dating violence can also permanently ruin or alter relationships with friends and family, sometimes minimizing or removing the survivor’s support network directly after the relationship and into the rest of his/her life.

In addition, adolescent survivors’ developmental capacities are often reduced. “The stress and confusion of an abusive relationship can leave the victim with a diminished capacity to think, learn, and plan for the future” (Sousa, 1999, p. 360). When adolescents are battered, their critical developmental work can be interrupted; whereas, the same is not true for adults. This

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interruption can leave teens with a reduced ability to use cognition, acquire knowledge, and plan for the future. Banyard and Cross' (2008) review of adolescent dating violence literature found that survivors of dating violence reported higher mental health concerns and negative educational outcomes. In addition, they found that dating violence resulted in increased eating disorders, depression, suicidal thoughts, and substance abuse.

It is also important to remember the severe, and sometimes fatal, physical injuries that victims can sustain. Some scholars argue that there is actually more physical aggression in adolescent dating violence than in adult dating violence (Sousa, 1999; Feiring et al., 2002), which could result in more physical injuries among adolescents. Due to these severe physical and psychological effects of dating violence, studies are designed to assess each aspect of adolescent dating violence in order to construct and implement dating violence prevention programs.

There are numerous large probability surveys that have assessed the prevalence of adolescent dating violence (e.g., the Youth Risk Behavior Survey; CDC, 2005; Halpern et al., 2001; Roberts, 2006; the Youth Dating Violence Survey; James et al., 2000). However, these surveys address adolescent dating violence either in a very limited sense that excludes many facets of the definition, or in a manner that fails to tailor the questions to the age-specific experiences of adolescents.

Over the past decade more comprehensive studies have been conducted on adolescent dating violence, but these too fall short. Foshee et al. (2007) recognize that, "More than 90% of approximately 110 published studies of adolescent dating violence that measured perpetration...rely on acts scales derived from asking respondents whether or how often they used specific acts (e.g., hit, push, assault with a weapon) against a partner" (p. 499). The

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majority of this research merely quantifies, or scales these acts, and therefore misses the context of the violence. This can lead to misinterpretation of the data, which changes the valence of the information obtained in the studies. For instance, a survey that uses acts scales can determine that a female hit her partner, but not necessarily that she did so as a means of self-defense. Qualitative research is needed to determine the context within which these violent acts (physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional) take place.

Therefore, the majority of large-scale surveys inadequately address physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal abuse because they fail to use comprehensive definitions of adolescent dating violence when constructing the surveys. Yet, literature concerning these types of abuse exists. Consequently, there is a disconnect between scholarly literatures that provide comprehensive constructions of dating violence and the surveys that examine teenagers' experiences. This gap prohibits adolescents from sharing the full spectrum of experiences of violence. Using a comprehensive definition of adolescent dating violence when asking teens about their experiences will not only determine teens' actual experiences of violence, but will also identify which types of violence they emphasize and which types they ignore.

In addition, it is erroneous to assume that scholarly literature fully captures teens' experiences of dating violence. Teenagers likely experience other forms of abuse that are unknown to scholars, but nonetheless significantly impact teens' lives. In order to accommodate these possibly unfamiliar aspects of adolescent dating violence, research needs to ask how teens themselves conceptualize dating problems, thereby providing them with the opportunity to discuss different forms of abuse in addition to scholarly recognized components. By asking teens about their own conceptualizations of dating problems, scholars can determine which

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behaviors teens find problematic. This information can then be used to identify important aspects of dating violence that need to be addressed by future research.

Before introducing the current study, an analysis of how scholarly research develops the concept of adolescent dating violence, which lies within the already constructed framework of dating violence among adults, is necessary. To do this, a critique of some existing public health surveys that are cited in more recent scholarly research about adolescent dating violence illustrates the disjunction between scholarly literature and public health research surveys that gather data about adolescents' experiences of dating violence. The next part of the literature review addresses some existing qualitative approaches to studying teen dating violence. These include survey, interview, and focus group methodologies, which are often more successful in obtaining a comprehensive account of adolescents' experiences. A final summary of limitations of past methodological approaches leads into the specifics of the current study.

Literature Review

While scientific studies have been conducted to analyze adolescents' experiences of dating violence, they often ignore many aspects of dating violence among teens. Analyzing these gaps in knowledge requires a shift from the analysis of well-documented and acknowledged aspects of dating violence to more recent scientific surveys that question adolescents about their experiences. When sifting through these newer studies it became evident that the majority of researchers use specific definitions of dating violence within their survey questions that are unrepresentative of the scholarly literature concerning the topic. This becomes visible through an analysis of a few major public health/survey-based studies.

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Public Health/Survey-Based Research

Questions regarding dating violence are often included in large-scale nationally representative studies of adolescents; however, these studies give minimal attention to dating violence and can only provide a cursory picture of the problem (e.g., the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2005); the Youth Dating Violence Survey (1996); and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (1994)). First, many of the national public health surveys are not designed according to comprehensive definitions of adolescent dating violence, and therefore do not provide an accurate account of teens' actual experiences of dating violence.

A prime example of this occurs in the YRBSS (2005), which was designed to assess high-risk health behaviors of adolescents. *The United States High School Survey Users Manual*, which can be acquired from the CDC website, contains each question that was administered to the students and their corresponding response rates. The YRBSS contains two questions that relate to dating violence: "During the past 12 months, did your boyfriend or girlfriend ever hit, slap, or physically hurt you on purpose?" and "Have you ever been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when you did not want to?" with the response options of "Yes" and "No." As evidenced by these questions, the YRBSS excludes any forms of psychological and verbal violence. The questions, while specific, are also extremely vague in nature. For instance, the physical aggression question explicitly addresses physical violence and it specifies hitting, slapping, and being physically hurt. While the meanings of the first two are obvious, the third option, "physically hurt you on purpose," is unclear. Without more concrete examples of physical violence, such as pushing, hair-pulling, pinching, et cetera, some people may not realize that they are experiencing physical abuse. In addition, the second question stipulates that the respondent must be "physically forced" to have sexual intercourse. This definition blatantly

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ignores sexual coercion, which scholarly literature has acknowledged to be a key component of sexual violence within dating violence. The lack of comprehensive questions designed to target adolescent dating violence is a significant weakness of the survey.

The Youth Dating Violence Survey (1996) includes more comprehensive definitions of dating violence, but it does not fully address sexual violence since it includes being forced to have sexual relations but does not specifically address other aspects of sexual coercion. That is, the study does not incorporate any questions dealing with pressure to have sex for fear of being rejected, humiliated, or punished in some other psychologically damaging way. By indicating force as the only method of sexual abuse, this study essentially disregards other forms of sexual abuse. Doing so divides victims' experiences into hierarchical categories, thereby identifying some as significant and excluding others.

A second dilemma with public health surveys is that they use a restrictive research format that limits adolescents' experiences of violence (e.g., Youth Dating Violence Survey (1996); National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (1994); and YRBSS (2005)). The questions are designed to address preconceived categories of dating violence that are deemed to be important without allowing teens to share other accounts of violence that fall outside of these bounds. Consequently, public health surveys often seek the *known* while ignoring the *unknown*.

This is one limitation of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (1994) since it includes five questions from the Conflict Tactics Scales to determine levels of verbal and physical abuse experienced by respondents. Respondents were asked how often their partners: "call you names, insult you, or treat you disrespectfully in front of others"; "swear at you"; "threaten you with violence"; "push or shove you"; "throw something at you that could hurt you" (Halpern et al., 2001; Roberts, 2006). Affirmation of the first three questions and negation

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of the second two questions signifies verbal abuse; positive responses to the last two questions, regardless of the answers to the first three, indicates the presence of physical abuse. While at first glance the survey appears to address a more comprehensive account of teen dating violence by broadening the categories of behaviors representative of verbal and physical abuse, the closed-answer format disregards any experiences that do not fall within the five listed behaviors.

A closed-ended answer format also was used in the Youth Dating Violence Survey (1996). An example of a series of questions that were used to address teens' experiences of dating violence victimization is: "How often has anyone that you have ever been on a date with done the following things to you. Did something just to make me jealous. Blamed me for bad things they did." A question that was used to address adolescents' perceptions of dating violence is: "Boys sometimes deserve to be hit by the girls they date" (response categories: strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or strongly disagree) (James et al., 2000). By using response categories, participants were limited to selecting one category without the option of clarification or expansion. This constrains the ability of the survey to capture teens' experiences.

Quantitative research that seeks to understand only one or a few overarching behaviors, rather than an array of different categories of behaviors, as national surveys frequently do, are often better able to obtain comprehensive accounts of those behaviors. One example of this is the study conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited, which looked at how new modes of communication have developed in recent years due to advances in technology and how they significantly affect teens' experiences of dating violence. They discovered that, "Teens believe that dating abuse via technology is a serious problem across a broad array of everyday tech activities – emailing, texting, IMing, phoning, and community networking" (Liz Claiborne,

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2007, p. 2). Furthermore, new forms of technology are being used to monitor, coerce, intimidate, harass and embarrass victims. Research found that a shocking 68% of teenagers shared private or embarrassing photos and/or video of their partner (Liz Claiborne, 2007). With this endless trend towards new, more accessible forms of technology, it is crucial that scholars stay up-to-date on the role that communication plays in dating violence. Promotion of more narrow-focused studies such as this one will help to increase scholars understanding of the complexities of dating violence, including the role that technology plays. Qualitative studies also offer a means to understand adolescent dating violence.

Qualitative Studies

Other studies using smaller, nonrepresentative samples, however, provide a more comprehensive understanding of teen dating violence (Sanders, 2003; Prospero, 2006; Feiring et al., 2002; Feiring & Wolfe, 2000; Cercone et al., 2005; Sousa, 1999; Levy et al., 1997; Liz Clairborne, 2007). For instance, recent qualitative studies have found significant differences between adolescent and adult relationships that correspond to dissimilarities within experiences of dating violence (Connolly et al., 2004; Foshee et al., 2007; Feiring et al., 2002; Connolly et al., 1999; Feiring & Wolfe, 2000). Adolescents typically experience a developmental pattern of relationships that moves from same-gender relationships, to mixed gender affiliations, to group dating, and ultimately, to dyadic romantic relationships (Connolly et al., 2004). As a result, dating occurs during adolescence along a spectrum, with younger adolescents mostly participating in group dating scenes or having little social contact with the other sex, while older adolescents begin to move from group dating to dyadic dating and relationships. Research that considers age differences when analyzing teen dating violence suggests that younger teens

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experience violence differently from older teens (Connolly et al., 1999; Feiring et al., 2002; Feiring & Wolfe, 2000; Fredland, 2008).

Connolly et al. (1999) state that younger teens' relationships (11 to 14 years) typically display less passion, intimacy, and commitment, most likely because they have yet to develop a capacity to experience or sustain these complex feelings. Passion in younger adolescent relationships is mostly due to infatuation and sexual contact rather than developing an emotional and intellectual connection. Differences between younger teens and older teens such as these suggest adolescent dating violence is different from adult dating violence. Some scholars have found data that point towards these differences. For instance, Feiring et al. (2002) discovered a higher incidence of relationship aggression in younger students but higher emotional abuse in older students. Other research found that most adult domestic violence is perpetrated by males against females, whereas teen dating violence shows higher levels of cross-perpetration (Feiring & Wolfe, 2000).

Newer studies also delve into the role that gender plays in adolescent dating violence, although findings are often contradictory. Cercone and colleagues (2005) conducted a study in which they examined gender asymmetry in the experience and perpetration of physical intimate partner violence. Their findings suggest that men and women have similar rates of perpetration, but that men endorse more instrumental types of violence while females endorse more expressive forms of violence. This means that women are more likely to react with violence due to a loss of control, while men are more likely to use violence as a means of control (Cercone et al., 2005). This finding suggests that dating violence is not always an expression of power and control but can include outbursts of emotion, which would be caused by a loss of control.

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Hegemonic gender norms are pinpointed by scholars as explanations for the perceived differences in perpetration and experience of teen dating violence. For instance, people often have stronger negative reactions when a man hits a woman rather than when a woman hits a man. Many people adhere to the social code that women and children are to be protected. In contrast, men are supposed to be women's protectors, partially because men tend to be bigger and stronger physically. This is one possible explanation for why male violence is unacceptable, but female violence is sometimes accepted (Sousa, 1999, p. 361-62). Additionally, Carole Sousa (1999) argues that gender norms teach boys to be sexually forceful, exhibit aggressive behavior, and exert control over the decisions made in relationships, while girls are expected to be supportive of their partners and to care for the maintenance of the relationship. In this context, victims sometimes view expressions of possession and jealousy by male partners as displays of love and devotion, rather than as negative and controlling actions (Sousa, 1999; Levy et al., 1997). This theory is largely based on the statistics that show that men are more often perpetrators of dating violence.

Feiring and colleagues (2002) found that girls attending high school were more likely to be perpetrators of mild physical aggression, but that emotional abuse was experienced by both genders in over half of the sample. Feiring et al. consider that younger students might be more aggressive in relationships because they have not yet developed the maturity to handle their intensifying feelings for romantic partners. They suggest that mildly rough physical interaction is a means of teasing or flirting that is intended to express a romantic interest, not to harm one's partner. In addition, they question whether the higher aggression perpetrated by females is a result of reporting bias since females were more likely to assume responsibility for relationship

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problems. Furthermore, girls were more likely to use aggression as a means of self-defense (Feiring et al., 2002).

While qualitative research has made huge strides in developing a more comprehensive account of teens' experiences with dating violence, limitations regarding sample size and demographics, as well as question format and wording, exist. For instance, in his research, Mosés Próspero sought to understand teens' perceptions of common dating behaviors through focus groups, rather than just analyzing rates of perpetration and victimization. His questions and scenarios addressed issues such as jealousy and possessiveness, but in a subtler manner that invited more discussion. In addition, Próspero acknowledged gender differences when he noted that while men and women are just as likely to perceive events as negative, men are more likely to state that aggressive behavior is the correct response to the situations. However, Próspero spoke with only 25 adolescents, all of whom were enrolled in middle school and most of whom identified as Hispanic. This small, homogenous sample restricts the applicability of his findings to the experiences of teens in general.

Unfortunately, many qualitative studies, especially ones that utilize survey methodologies, also continue to conduct research through a preconceived scope of dating violence that limits responses (Sanders, 2003; Prospero, 2006; Windle & Mrug, 2009; Foshee et al., 2007; Feiring et al., 2002; Banyard & Cross, 2008). For example, Sanders' (2002) survey methodology included seven sets of questions, in which responses were formatted according to a Likert scale that indicated the frequency of the occurrence or the strength of the opinion, in addition to an open-ended format. Some characteristics of physical abuse that were included in the survey were being kicked, punched, pulled by the hair, shoved, held down by the shoulders, bruised or bitten, wrestled with roughly, driven fast to scare, or physically stopped. While these

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descriptions are adequate for obtaining a comprehensive account of teens' opinions and experiences, especially since she combines both a closed- and open-ended format, her questions were still structured according to pre-conceived categories of abuse. This constraint had the potential to exclude some teens' experiences. Additionally, these survey questions did not address the context within which abuse takes place. For instance, if a participant was shoved because she attacked her partner, the researcher might only know that the participant was shoved and not why she was shoved. Sanders also limited her sample population to female, heterosexual adolescents, which ignores gender differences in the conceptualization of dating violence because she only considered male against female abuse. Clearly additional research is needed to determine whether contextual factors (e.g. topic of disagreement) or personal factors (e.g. age and gender of perpetrator or victim) can explain these conflicting findings.

In summary, several gaps exist between scholarly research on adolescent dating violence and teens' actual experiences of dating violence. Public health/survey-based research often addresses limited aspects of dating violence and uses closed-answer response formats that constrain teens' accounts of abuse. Conversely, qualitative studies often utilize more comprehensive definitions of dating violence, but they are generally constricted by smaller sample sizes and homogenous demographics, and they typically use a preconceived scope of dating violence that continues to limit teens' discussions of violence and often ignores the context of the abuse.

Current Study

The previous literature review illustrates that there are several gaps between scholarly research on adolescent dating violence and teens' actual experiences of dating violence. First and foremost, much of the research conducted on dating violence either focuses on the

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experiences of adults rather than on those of adolescents, or it analyzes the experiences of adolescents through a framework that was largely developed from the analysis of adult dating violence. For example, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2005) addressed dating violence through the inclusion of two questions about physical violence and sexual violence that explicitly use force even though scholarly literature acknowledges other forms of abuse characteristic of adolescent dating violence. Similarly, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (1994) does not use questions that target teens' experiences of sexual coercion.

Furthermore, surveys that address teen dating violence are often structured poorly, limiting their ability to gather a comprehensive account of teens' experiences of dating violence. In particular, the majority of this research merely quantifies, or scales these acts, and therefore misses the context of the violence. For instance, the Youth Dating Violence Survey (1996) used response categories, which limited respondents' answers because they did not have the option to clarify or expand. Additionally, Sanders' (2002) survey methodology included seven sets of questions, in which responses were formatted according to a Likert scale that indicated the frequency of the occurrence or the strength, which missed the context of the violence. This can lead to misinterpretation of the data, which changes the valence of the information obtained in the studies. As a result, it is unclear what dating behaviors teens recognize as problematic and germane to their daily lives, and how gender and communication technologies play a role in those problems.

The current study addresses these limitations by asking teens which dating behaviors they perceive to be problematic. An interview format was chosen to facilitate discussion and to provide investigators with the opportunity to clarify any ambiguities that arise from question wording. Questions were designed according to a comprehensive definition of adolescent dating

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violence in order to determine teens' actual experiences of violence, in addition to which types of violence teens emphasized and which types they ignored. The first and last questions of the interview were purposely designed to be broad in the hope of identifying any behaviors not recognized by scholarly research.

The research questions that guided the current study include:

1. Which dating behaviors do teens find problematic and germane, and how do they compare to scholarly research about adolescent dating violence?
2. How does gender influence perceptions of dating problems?
3. How do communication technologies influence or facilitate abusive behaviors?

Methodology

The current study consists of fifteen interviews with adolescents, from the ages of 15 to 18-years-of-age at a public high school in Southeastern Michigan and addresses how they perceive different components of dating violence and the meanings behind those perceptions. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1, which can be compared to the demographics of all students enrolled in the high school (Public School Profile), which is displayed in Table 2. While the primary investigator interviewed the female participants, a male colleague interviewed the male participants. This separation of the sexes was designed to ensure that participants felt comfortable disclosing thoughts and feelings without having to worry about being judged by peers or adults of the opposite gender.

Prior to conducting the research, approval was obtained from the Behavior Sciences Institutional Review Board. Active parental consent and participant assent were obtained for those participants who were under the age of 18; participant consent was obtained for those 18

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years of age and older. Participants were recruited by posting flyers in the school and by mentioning the research study in the school's morning announcements and afterschool programs. Participants received a \$10 gift certificate for participation.

Any mention of "dating violence" was excluded throughout all points of the research process to avoid activating any social desirability bias. As was evidenced throughout the literature review, scholarly research already exists which outlines key components of dating violence, such as physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal abuse. The current study does not forgo these aspects of dating violence because they are important structures of violence that affect people's experiences. For this reason, the interview consisted of seven main questions that dealt with jealousy, sexual coercion, physical violence, control, and isolation, as well as follow up queries for each of these topics (Appendix A). At the same time though, the study was designed to accommodate the experiences of adolescents that are unknown to scholars. By only asking teens questions about dating violence that are pre-coded to find certain types of violence, the research would be potentially limited to those types of violence, thereby placing a bias onto the findings. In order to avoid doing so, the first question is purposefully designed to be general in that it asks, "What are some 'teen dating problems' that your peers face?" Through the use of this prompt, the interviews will collect information on adolescent dating violence that is less influenced by the investigators' own beliefs and perceptions and more rooted in the actual experiences of teenagers.

Given the sensitivity of the questions, participants were not asked about their own experiences, but rather about their knowledge of the experiences of friends and peers, although in several instances teens references their own experiences. The interview component was designed to determine how adolescents conceptualize dating violence by analyzing what

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behaviors they perceive to be harmful as well as how common they think these behaviors are. The length of the interviews spanned 15 to 40 minutes depending upon how detailed the responses were. During and after each interview, a school counselor was present to speak with any participants in case of emotional/psychological distress as a result of the discussion. Fortunately, this precautionary measure was never used.

Interviews were conducted from November of 2009 through mid January of 2010 in an office at the high school. Prior to the interviews, participants were reminded of the purpose of the study and were informed about the basics of the interviews, including the approximate length, consent forms, incentives, and the option to halt the interview if they felt uncomfortable or upset by any of the discussion. Participants were required to submit a signed consent/assent form, in addition to a parental consent form when necessary, prior to the start of each interview. The interviews were recorded through the use of a digital audio recorder in order to remember the important details of the conversation. The entirety of each interview was then transcribed in order to attain a text version of the conversations, which were analyzed. Upon completion of the thesis, these tapes and files were destroyed to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

The process of qualitative content analysis followed the collection of initial data from interviews. Conventional content analysis and direct content analysis, as described by Hsieh & Shannon (2005), were used to analyze the interview data. Conventional content analysis avoids using preconceived categories, and instead allows the categories to emerge from the data; in contrast, directed content analysis seeks to broaden the existent framework or theory through the use of initial coding schemes and variables (Hsieh, 2005). Both types of content analysis were used to develop priori categories of physical, sexual, emotional and verbal abuse based off of scholarly research and to identify further themes that emerged as the interviews transpired. This

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allowed a view of both scholarly recognized behaviors in addition to other potentially abusive behaviors that the teens noted. With the help of the second author, I identified emerging themes, and then I met with her to discuss the categories and establish the importance of the findings. Each transcription was then reanalyzed to seek which relevant quotations best epitomized the themes.

When looking through the data, specific attention was paid to people's perceptions of how common different behaviors are, which suggests whether they are perceived to be widely accepted, rejected or controversial. This information was then used to determine how adolescents conceptualize dating violence and to see if any scholarly acknowledged components of dating violence are observed, ignored, absent, or normalized by adolescents. In addition, the text was examined to determine whether gender and communication technologies influenced teens' perceptions of dating problems.

Results

Findings from this study are discussed in terms of the specific research questions presented earlier in the "Current Study" section. While much of the data was directly applicable to these questions, additional unanticipated themes emerged from the data. Thus, following the discussion of the research questions, these additional themes are presented and discussed.

Research Question #1: Which dating behaviors do teens find problematic and germane, and how do they compare to scholarly research about adolescent dating violence?

Throughout the interview process, I noticed that some recurring aspects of dating violence were emphasized and expounded upon by participants while others were recognized as being infrequent or irrelevant to their daily lives. In particular, I heard extensive accounts of

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jealousy, sexual coercion, controlling behavior, and cheating, but I heard almost nothing of verbal or physical abuse between dating partners. This is not to say that these infrequent behaviors do not occur, but just that they were not perceived as being openly experienced by a significant portion of adolescents whom I interviewed. For this reason, I focus my attention on the behaviors that participants conceptualized as visible, problematic and germane to their lives. Below, the most commonly reported experiences are described in detail with examples from the transcripts.

Jealousy

One theme that I was not surprised to see emerge is the role that jealousy, a commonly recognized component of emotional abuse, plays in teen dating relationships. Although individuals had slightly different perceptions of jealousy, the majority of participants felt that it was a very common component of dating in high school. When asked to expand upon the role that jealousy plays in dating and relationships, one female participant responded,

Participant #3: Like flirting. Um...everyone has their own opinions of what flirting is. Someone may think flirting is a really tight hug, and someone else might think it's just a simple, "hi." Um...it's really crazy...um...but I think flirting is like the number one thing as far as jealousy. Um...when a girl or a guy sees their girlfriend or boyfriend...um...hugging another guy tight or looking at a guy or girl the way that they look at them.

The above quote illustrates the role that flirting plays in creating jealousy and how different interpretations of what constitutes flirting can cause individuals to experience jealousy in different situations. Many participants recounted tales of both boys and girls experiencing jealousy over trivial matters, such as talking to or hugging someone of the opposite gender, as was described above. The quote makes jealousy seem inevitable or

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reasonable – like it's located in the partner's behavior rather than the observer's interpretation of it.

Pressure to Change Behavior

Another aspect of dating violence that I sought to understand in my research was the control exerted by one partner over another to change behavior, which is another known component of emotional abuse. I found that this control occurred in three different ways—pressure to hang out more often with partners and less with friends, pressure to end friendships, and control of other behavioral actions.

When questioned about how peers' behaviors change once they start to date someone, almost everyone responded that people start to spend more time with their partners. This increased interaction is captured in the following quote:

Participant #1: Cuz like...um, like you talk on the phone until like 3 o'clock in the morning, and you're texting while you're doing work and stuff like that. And like the time, basically the time you don't spend with each other, you're on the phone texting and stuff like that.

Participant #1 acknowledged how phones are used to stay in almost-constant contact with one's partner, which not only suggests an expectation that dating partners should be communicating often, but also introduces the role that technology can play in relationships.

The majority of participants also recounted stories of someone they knew who was pressured by a dating partner to spend more time with him/her and less time with friends. Pressure was evidenced in the majority of these accounts by implicit and/or explicit repercussions for refusing to spend more time with one's partner, most often by eliciting anger. Another way in which adolescents pressure their partners to change their behaviors is by pressuring them to end friendships. For instance, a male participant stated that,

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Participant #10: If you're a girl with guy friends and then you get a boyfriend, and you're trying to be serious about that relationship, that guy is going to have jealousy problems just because she is always around guys. So she might want to try to change up a little bit, or not even change it, but just watch how much she's hanging with guys all the time. Same goes if it's reverse.

Several of the participants made similar comments suggesting that a significant pressure is exerted to curtail or sever friendships with the opposite gender in order to address current and/or future jealousies in the relationship. Another scenario in which one partner pressures the other to end a friendship was described by Participant #8,

Participant #8: It's more sort of who they talk to on a daily basis. I guess...more likely if a male or a female doesn't like the person that the other girl or guy is talking to, then they'll be like, "Okay, well I don't like him, you have to change your friend."

This female participant discussed how some teens exert pressure on their partners to end friendships with people that s/he dislikes. Other participants also discussed a pressure to change additional behaviors, as illustrated by the following quotation from a female student,

Participant #4: Uh huh...Um, I can't say on the guys' side cuz I haven't seen it, but girls, you know, if they have really close friends, they'll stop talking to them or stop hanging out with them...they'll do like...if the guy says they can't do something, they will actually not do it. Or like if the um...boyfriend doesn't like one of the friends, she'll kind of be distant, you know?

Interviewer: So why do you think girls are so likely to listen to all of these rules that their boyfriend is setting for them?

Participant #4: I think cuz they want to keep them, and cuz they like having that person to, you know, be with.

This excerpt not only addresses how girls in dating relationships change whom they "hang out" with, but also what they can and cannot do if they want to maintain the relationship. In addition, the theme of girls trying to maintain the relationship appears.

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This sense of responsibility for women to keep the relationship going is one gendered dynamic of behavioral control. This same participant spoke of a couple of other peers she knows who are similarly controlled by their partners:

Participant #4: Like I know this one girl; she just totally can't go to the mall. She can't go out with her friends, none of that. And then there's like my other friend; her boyfriend doesn't like me so she says "hi" and stuff, but you know, like texting isn't happening or like actually talking doesn't happen anymore.

In this situation, her friend is controlled to the point where she can't go to the mall or even say "hi" to her friends when she encounters them. When asked how common control such as this is in adolescent relationships, she guessed that one in four of her peers experience some type of relationship control.

One participant discussed her perception that teens are sometimes punished by their partners for disobeying their demands,

Participant #4: Um...yeah, I would say punish. Like, they might say, "I might break up with you," or they will, and they won't speak to them. Or they'll get really mad and they don't know what's going on. Or um...they'll say, "I'm going to go hug this other girl, and we'll see how you like it," and they'll try to make the girl mad.

Here, it is evident that some girls are "obeying" the rules that their partners set in order to maintain the relationship. In some scenarios, they are explicitly warned that if they do not follow the rules, their partner will break up with them. This is blatant control of another through coercive actions. None of the participants perceived this form of control as being used by females against their male partners, but this is not to say that it does not occur.

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Sexual Coercion

Sexual coercion is another previously recognized component of adolescent dating violence that I hypothesized I would find in the experiences of teens prior to the study. The majority of the interviews acknowledged adolescents' experiences of sexual coercion. In particular, teens discussed sexual coercion in two different scenarios—pressure to have sexual intercourse and pressure to send sexually explicit photos. I will address each of these pressures individually and in comparison to the gender differences that were presented because gender is such an integral component of these behaviors.

The majority of participants discussed sexual coercion in relation to boys pressuring girls to have sex. Participant #1 described one such common scenario:

Participant #1: There's still pressure, and they might say like, "I'm not gonna pressure you, but they'll ask you like, "Why did you do that?" And, "Blah, blah, blah," and then they start to make you feel guilty about it. Like, "Everybody else does it," or like, "If you really love me, then you'd do it," and all that kind of stuff.

In this scenario, the boy pressured the girl to have sex by implying that she ought to follow through on her supposed unspoken promises to do so. He also tried to invoke the sense that everyone else is having sex to create a strong feeling of peer pressure. Lastly, he tried to use guilt to persuade his partner to have sex by saying that she did not love him. His evidence for her lack of love was the argument that if she did, then she would have sex with him; since she was not engaging in sexual intercourse with him, she must not have loved him.

Another participant addressed how boys sometimes pressure girls to have sex from the male perspective:

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Participant #10: They say no, and you keep asking. Then that's when the pressure kicks in. This will be like...it will be like, that person really likes the other person, but then it's like, they're not ready. And they don't want to lose that person just because of something like that, so I see it sometimes.

Here, he addressed how some boys repetitively ask their partners to have sex despite their partners having said no. He also spoke to how girls often do not want to lose their partners, and they sometimes feel as though sex is the only way to keep them. This is a prime example of sexual coercion. Sometimes boys will even ignore their partners' wishes to abstain from sexual intercourse, and instead continue to escalate the level of sexual interaction:

Participant #8: Um. I guess, I guess its more like...say you're on a date, and the male will kind of just be all touchy-feely on the female, and the female will mostly say stop whatever, then they'll just get a little bit more pushy about it.

If sex is consensual, in the event that any party decides that they do not want to continue the sexual activity any further, then the other person *must* stop. In this scenario though, the male ignores the female's explicit request for him to stop. By proceeding further, the male initiates sexual intercourse without the consent of his partner. This constitutes rape, although no participants ever referred to the term.

When asked how common it is for boys to use some tactic to pressure girls to have sex, the majority of participants stated that it was extremely common. One girl's interview expressed how normalized sexual coercion can be,

Participant #8: It is. It [intercourse] will happen eventually. That's our state of mind. It will happen eventually, but whether you want to or not is the main deal.

This participant believes that it is inevitable for females to be pressured to have sex. In her words, "it will happen eventually. That's our state of mind," and this is the case whether or not the girl desires intercourse.

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According to participants, pressure to send explicit, sexual photographs, particularly via text message, is also very common. Unfortunately, participants did not indicate in detail the content of the photographs, but they did imply, and in some cases stated, that pictures contained nudity. In terms of gender differences, I was surprised to hear that both genders participate relatively equally, possibly with boys sending slightly more. However, the majority of participants felt that boys pressure girls to send pictures much more often than visa versa.

Similar to sexual coercion regarding sexual intercourse, some boys pressure girls to send pictures by constantly asking over and over again for a picture:

Participant #8: If they'll keep on asking you for it, and then you just don't want to do it, then they'll just keep on saying, "Come on, come on. Just send me one." Then one will turn into two, two will turn into three, and the next thing you know...

Constantly asking for a picture over and over again, knowing that one's partner does not wish to have sex, is coercive. Another participants tells a similar story:

Participant #4: Yeah, cuz like you can take somebody's phone and say send me a picture, of like this or whatever, so like why do you want a picture, and they'll just keep asking, like they'll go to another subject, and then they'll ask again, they'll continuously ask, probably until they send one, or they'll send one to make them send one back.

Girls who do not want to send pictures are feeling pressured by being asked over and over again to send one until they finally do. The latter participant actually felt that about half of all of her peers at school are sending sexually explicit pictures, and that many of the girls are at some point pressured to do so.

Pressure to send pictures also comes into play when males send pictures to females first.

Participant #10 describes how this happens:

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Interviewer: So if a guy sends a girl a picture, is it expected that the girl should send one back?

Participant #10: Yeah, it's expected; I'm sending you a picture, let me get one back.

Interviewer: What happens if she still doesn't send one?

Participant #10: There's nothing you can do. Just be mad you didn't get your picture. Try again tomorrow.

This expectation to send a picture back when girls receive one proposes a new source of pressure. A girl has no control over whether a picture is received in the first place; yet if she is given one, she is expected to send one back regardless of whether she desires to or not. In addition, the quote suggests that she might also face anger from her partner if she refuses to reciprocate, which is yet another form of pressure.

Sometimes sending pictures is also seen as a necessary alternative to having sexual relations. If a girl chooses not to have sex despite the fact that her partner wants to, then she is sometimes expected to at least send sexually explicit pictures. One participant describes this when she says, "They'll be like, 'Since we can't do it, will you send me a picture of you or something like that?'" (Participant #1). This same participant also estimated that as many as 80% of teens in relationships are sending sexually explicit pictures and about 75% of guys in relationships are pressuring girls to send pictures.

A couple of participants felt that it was more common to send these pictures at younger ages, specifically from 7th grade to 10th grade. Participant #10 described this when he said:

Participant #10: Middle school through sophomore year.

Interviewer: So you think it's more common with the younger teens?

Participant #10: Cuz it's...when you're young, it's a tease. It's like, "Oh yeah, I got that picture on my phone." When you're older, you can actually go out and do what you want to do cuz...with text messages it's like a tease; it's a sneak because you're not really gonna do nothing. It's just showing you, it's a tease.

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This suggests that sexually explicit pictures are the lead-up to sexual relations, and therefore, that sending these pictures should be more prevalent among younger adolescents.

Some of the participants also discussed the role that seduction can play in pressuring a girl to have sexual relations. The following quote illustrates this,

Participant #10: Um..we've come a long way. Haha! I used to be that mac. I used to have them; I could talk any girl into anything I wanted. But I don't do that no more. I've gone and settled down; I'm not on that level anymore. So it's more face-to-face with me. I could talk a girl out of her shoes though...Send a text: "what you doing tonight?" I mean it's just a flirting, just whatever. You know what to say then you know what to say. I mean, some people, they got that.

The above quote evokes a sense of conquest, particularly from the phrase, "I could talk a girl into anything I wanted." Instead of being equitable, sharing, and loving, this sounds more like a one-sided triumph. He purposefully misrepresented his intentions to get what he wanted—sex.

It appears that while many adolescent women are almost obsessively focused on maintaining relationships, adolescent boys are more interested in being able to "hit it and quit it."

This mentality is described below:

Participant #9: You know, sometimes you might get in, or many girls that I know, have gotten into relationships to [where] all the guys want to do is, you know, hit it and quit. And that's what they would do, you know, they want to have sexual relations or get to, you know, get to know you, not as a person, but just, you know, as what you can give me instead of you just, "Okay, I wanna know you. I wanna be with you." Not just to get with you and then leave you.

A couple other male participants mentioned how a lot of teen boys just want to "hit it and quit it." The boys who were discussed were not interested in maintaining a relationship, or even in sincerely getting to know the girl; they were interested in sex.

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Cheating

When conducting the interviews, many of the participants mentioned cheating as a common dating problem, which is a behavior that is not often discussed with regards to dating violence. Although, several participants described how cheating is commonly used to get-back-at one's partner. This use of cheating as retribution, although not unheard of, was surprising and disconcerting. After deconstructing the participants' responses, I have come to the conclusion that cheating is a new form of emotional abuse. One quote from a male student that epitomizes the accounts of cheating by several of the participants is:

Participant #10: Some people they cheat and they get away with it because they keep their stuff to their selves. Some people...I used to be a cheater, haha! I'll put it out there. I used to be a *CHEATER*. I could...I'm telling you, I was a mac.

Haha! Like for real. But, I mean, like I said, you grow out of it. That's...

Interviewer: Do you see one gender cheating more than another?

Participant #10: I would say it's the same.

Interviewer: Do you ever see cheating used as a way to get back at people?

Participant #10: Uh huh. Somebody get jealous because they see their dude hanging with or they see their girl hanging with another person; it's like ok, I'm gonna get me a friend to hang with. And then sometimes they can accidentally mess around...it just happened—one of those. Or if somebody get fed up with their mate and they say forget it, they're gonna do what they do. So I'm gonna do what I do.

According to this account, some adolescents cheat to get back at their partners. The action appears to be planned and methodical, rather than an accident. Since cheating is designed to get back at one's partners, the explicit goal is to hurt him/her, which characterizes abusive behavior. When another participant was asked what the main dating problems are that peers face, she responded, "Um. Most of them are like...cheating" (Participant #1). This illustrates how common cheating is perceived to be. Similar responses to this one were frequent throughout the interviews.

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Research Question #2: How does gender influence perceptions of dating problems?

As previously mentioned, behaviors that teens characterized as dating problems, including jealousy, pressure to change behavior, sexual coercion, and cheating, were often perceived differently based on gender.

Jealousy

When asked particularly about whether one gender experiences jealousy more often than another, the majority of respondents either felt that jealousy is equal between boys and girls or that girls are slightly more jealous. In addition, the majority believed that the expression of jealousy is influenced by gender. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

Interviewer: Who would you say is more jealous?

Participant #4: Girls.

Interviewer: Are there any differences in how they react?

Participant #4: I think when boys get jealous, they try to get more attention from their girl, but if a girl is jealous, she'll probably let you know, get offensive with them, try to argue...

This participant touched on two common trends that several participants expressed—that females are more jealous and that females will directly confront their partners more often when they become jealous. Conversely, she perceived men as more likely to hide their jealousy and to rather indirectly express their dissatisfaction. For instance, she describes how men, in her opinion, are more likely to seek extra attention from their partners as a response to jealousy instead of confronting their partners about what made them jealous. Another quote that suggests a similar response to jealousy is:

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Participant #1: [Girls will] talk to their friends like...“he was talking to that girl,” or “blah blah blah,” or they’ll question their boyfriends or something like that. Like, “who was that?” But the boys—they don’t say anything. You won’t even know unless you ask. Some don’t show...like...that they’re jealous.

This supports the belief that men are less likely to directly express their jealousy than women are. Another participant recounted comparable experiences,

Participant #2: I think girls are quicker, you know, noticeable. You know, it’s more easily noticeable with girls, but with boys it’s there. Like I think the girlfriend would notice it more than, you know, say...than the girl’s friends. Like, she’d be like, “He wouldn’t like that,” but like, we wouldn’t know that he was jealous, but he is.

Interviewer: So it’s more hidden?

Participant #2: Yeah because like, with girls, they will like seriously fight over it... jealousy at Ypsi...but boys like, they would probably tell their girlfriend like, “Don’t do that,” but they wouldn’t like, you know, show it as much. You know what I’m saying?

This quote highlights how girls are more likely to blatantly express their jealousy to their partners and to others around them. She also notes that even though men might express jealousy differently, their partners are often still aware of their displeasure. Although, one might begin to wonder—why do men seem to act differently from women? One individual explained her reasoning behind these perceived gender differences in behavior:

Participant #3: I see...I actually see girls more jealous than guys...um...and I guess it’s because...um...I think guys like freedom so if they have a girlfriend then they’re...[if their girlfriend’s are] flirtatious or talking to other guys, they might not think of it as [bad]...whereas girls I think have more insecurities as far as guys cheating, and so they may be like, “Oh, he’s talking to her a lot. I think he likes her.” So I think girls are more jealous.

This participant perceived women to be more jealous than men because women desire less freedom in relationships and are more insecure in relationships. Her reasoning points to a possible belief that women are more often jealous because they care more about their relationships than men do.

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A male participant similarly touched on the role that insecurity plays in female jealousy,

Participant #9: [Girls] might be, you know, a lot insecure, but it can get to the point where, you know, they get overprotective, and they get crazy. You know, as for a girl, it might be, you know... To me, what I've seen is like, you know, every move, I have to know where they are every minute of every day—who they're with. Or if I see you hugging on somebody, "Why are you hugging my person?" You know?

He clearly acknowledged how insecurity can arguably cause females to become suspicious and jealous to the extent where they monitor and scrutinize their partners' whereabouts and interactions with others.

While many of the participants felt that girls were more expressive of their jealousy, not everyone expressed the same sentiments. A few male respondents actually described how boys are very expressive of their jealousy, especially when responding with physical violence towards someone other than their partner. Here is an example:

Participant #10: I think with guys, guys get jealous quicker than girls. I would say they get jealous the same, but it's like, girls are going to hold it in a little longer than a guy. So if I see my girl with another dude, I'm gonna flip out whether...but, I mean, if you put in the girl's shoes, she's, "Okay, what do I do next? I can't believe you just did that," [but] they go think it through. Guys are short-fused; they don't want to hear that so they're going straight for violence or "How am I gonna attack him?" Or something like that.

This male participant highlighted his perception that men, when jealous, are more likely to react spontaneously, with less reflection, and to more often resort to violence. Male participants were much more likely to highlight physical violence as a means by which men express their jealousy.

Pressure to Change Behavior

I unexpectedly found that some participants felt that girls were more controlling of their partners' behaviors. This sentiment is described in the following quotation:

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Participant #2: Haha. I think it's more the boys feeling pressure to hang out with the girlfriends, because like, the girlfriend always wants to be with the boyfriend, you know. But it happens both ways, but I think it's more the boy [who is pressured] because like, the boy will want to go hang out with his friends, and the girl will like, "You should hang out with me and..."

Investigator: What will she do?

Participant #2: Like..haha! She will just be like, "I'm you're girlfriend, and we need to spend time together and..."

Here, the female participant discussed her perception that girls pressure boys more to hang out. She felt that girls more often want to spend time with their partners, and so when their partners desire to hang out with friends, they pressure their partners to instead spend time with them. A male participant also addressed this pressure in relation to his own experience,

Participant #10: Um, basically [girls] just telling them that they want them. If I'm about to go out, and my girl don't want me to go, she'll probably give me some sob story about how she's been missing me or that she wants to see me, and I mean, sometimes it works, sometimes it don't. It's just...it's a little pressure because you don't want them to be mad at you for going out and partying anyway when you could have been hanging with them and keeping them company.

Investigator: How would you see girls typically react if they get upset or angry because their boyfriend is going when she was trying to pressure him to hang out with her?

Participant #10: My girlfriend pouts. She'll pout. She'll do a little puppy-dog face until I feel bad about it.

This response introduces the roles that anger and guilt play in pressure, and particularly, how purposefully invoking guilt is a tactic used by some women to pressure their partners to spend more time with them. The sense that women want to spend more time with men is again present in this quote. One plausible explanation for this gender difference is discussed by a female student:

Participant #3: I know like the guys like to hang with the guys, and like... sort of comes with the insecurities going back to the insecurities. Um...they might feel

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like, “Well if I hang with my girl so much then what are the guys going to think?” And the girls don’t really think that much about it cuz it’s just like, “Oh, I’m hanging with my boyfriend,” and their friends will think like, “Okay, girl.” But with the guys, I think it’s a little more like “Oh my god, they think I’m soft,” you know? But um...I think...I don’t think it changes that much, I think they hang with their boys as...maybe as much as they did before.

Peer pressure relating to hegemonic gender norms is introduced here in my research findings.

This female participant feels that boys are socially pressured to spend less time with their partners because doing otherwise could elicit negative judgments by their male friends of being “too soft.” This suggests that to be a man—or to be perceived as being a man by peers—males need to spend time with other men and not spend too much time with women. If this is the case, men and women might actually want to spend similar amounts of time together, but men feel pressured to hide their desire to spend time with their partners. It is important to consider though that this belief was expressed by a female, and is therefore just a perception of males’ feelings of peer pressure, rather than a male’s own account of having experienced peer pressure.

In addition, this quote does not say that boys do not pressure their partners to spend more time with them, just that some participants did not perceive it to be as common. One participant recounted boys pressuring girls when she said, “Um, maybe like she’ll want to see one of her best friends but her boyfriend wants to see her so she’ll go with him or something” (Participant #2). Another similar scenario is described below:

Participant #3: Um. They would hang, like we would hang out more or talk more even outside of school, or whatever it was. And then, when they got in relationships, it was like, “Oh, I’m hanging with him today or um... like...or even in school, if they’re with their boyfriend or girlfriend um they may not speak as to when they’re with them.

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This quote captures how some girls feel that they have to curtail their interaction with friends, both in and outside of school. In this particular instance, the female partner began to interact considerably less frequently with her female friend (Participant #2).

Sexual Coercion

As previously discussed, participants perceived sexual coercion to be an extremely gendered form of abuse. Boys were perceived to both pressure girls to have sexual relations and to send sexually explicit pictures significantly more often than visa versa.

While not many participants believed that girls pressure boys to have sexual relations, one exception was described where girls try to get boys to cheat on their partners with them. For instance,

Participant #2: Girls, firstly like if the boy's in a relationships and the girl wants the boy, she's not in it, then she'll be like pressuring him when she knows he has a girlfriend, and they'll wind up cheating.

Interviewer: So pressuring him to do stuff with her?

Participant #2: Yeah and she knows he's got a girlfriend, he knows he's got a girlfriend. Haha. Ypsi, yeah...

Interviewer: So how do you think she pressures him?

Participant #2: She pressures him... like calling him, saying "we best friends," you know, but everybody knows you're not best friends, you just want to be with him, or um...texting, you know, saying like, "Okay, we're gonna do a project together," you know, they're in the same class or something like that, little stuff.

This appears similar to the pressure that boys sometimes exert on girls through seduction. It sounds as if some girls view boys in relationships as conquests. This too, is manipulative and untrustworthy.

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Cheating

Participants were often hesitant to indicate whether they perceived one gender to cheat more often than another, but females were more likely to indicate that males cheat more often, while males were more likely to perceive a gender-equal representation with regards to cheating. Despite explicit references to any possible gendering of cheating, several participants began to discuss gendered priorities within relationships when questioned about cheating. A quote from a male participant that addresses this concept is,

Participant #10: I think girls are a little more emotional so you see some relationship in high school, it's like the girl she be so stuck into the guy, but then the guy can be telling her that, but I mean you don't. A guy is a guy; they're doing their own thing sometime. They're not always honest with that. So I think some girls wear their heart on the their sleeve more than the guy does in a relationship.

This excerpt highlights the perception that girls are committed to making the relationship work while boys are less committed and often cheating on their partners. This suggests that boys partake in cheating behaviors more often than girls.

Another instance of this is highlighted below:

Participant #10: I know this personal case, where I've seen somebody say no over and over again, and the...and it was the guy that kept asking for it but the girl kept saying no, but so eventually she was like, "Well you can get it from somebody else even though were together, go get it from somebody else cuz I'm not ready for that so..."

This male participant described a scenario of extreme sexual coercion in addition to how the girl and boy had vastly different priorities. In this case, the girl wanted to maintain the relationship, whereas the boy wanted sex and resorted to cheating as a means to obtain it. This again hints to a more gendered reality of cheating than participants explicitly indicated.

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Research Question #3: How do communication technologies influence or facilitate abusive behaviors?

New forms of communication technologies, including texting, social networking sites, email, and other Internet-based chat forums, played a significant role in teens' perceptions of jealousy, pressure to change behaviors, and sexual coercion, all of which were constructed as dating problems.

Jealousy

I found that communication technologies have resulted in a perceived increase in jealousy. I do not know whether actual rates of jealousy have increased or whether expanding modes of communication simply increase the variety of circumstances in which adolescents can act out their jealousy. One such circumstance is described below:

Participant #2: Yes. I just deleted my MySpace, Facebook...I don't have either. But um...because like, it wasn't mature but like, people would be mad about the tops. Like if you're going with someone, you expect to be number one on their top or...

Investigator: What's a top?

Participant #2: Like top 8—top friends—and if the girl was like not number one, or the boy, it would be a problem. Or when you're talking to somebody and you don't even go out, it's just drama, that's what I feel. It was a big deal because you read people's stuff on Facebook; I don't have one, but you know, I'll hear stories about so and so put this about...it's just a mess.

This situation highlights how networking sites have created new issues for dating partners to be jealous about, such as being in one another's top eight friends on MySpace. Another participant described a different technological innovation that has sparked jealousy recently:

Participant #10: Um...that's funny...haha! It was a joke I heard, like poke her...because with Facebook you poke people so my girl's like, "Why you keep

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poking her like that?” I’m like, “It’s just a game on Facebook,” but um...it can play a role cuz my girlfriend, she checks my text messages. It’s not like she’s like, “Oh, who are you texting?” But if she has my phone, she just goes through it sometimes. So if she sees a message that she doesn’t like then you can go technologying there. She’ll go be texting the other girl, but I mean, it happens.

In this scenario, the participant described how poking someone on Facebook can increase actual or perceived flirting, thereby increasing jealousy. He also mentioned the role that cell phones and texting plays in relationships. He addressed how his girlfriend checks his text messages. When questioned about whether males also check females’ phone messages, he responded, “I did that earlier. Haha!” His ease in responding and the humor evident in his response are important indicators of how normalized these actions of checking partners’ messages and becoming jealous over trivial matters are in teens’ everyday lives. These unintentional cues are perhaps even more telling than participants’ verbal recognition of the behaviors as common.

Pressure to Change Behaviors

Many adolescents mentioned how communication technologies are often used as a means to monitor and control partners’ actions. One female student commented on the role that this technology plays in control of partners, specifically in relation to social networking sites,

Participant #4: Um...like if they have a picture then guys will leave a comment, like “Why do you have this on here?” Like they get mad, or like if some other guy comments on something that you have, they get mad at that. Or um...they won’t let them have one at all. Yeah, I’ve seen that...so...they’ll get upset with stuff that is said.

This quote not only introduces the idea that teens control what their partners post on social networking sites, but also that this control is partnered with anger, which foreshadows punishment, or repercussions.

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As mentioned previously, many participants also discussed how cell phones are commonly used to stay in almost-constant contact with dating partners. In some cases, teens discussed how cell phones and texting were used to monitor partners' actions.

Sexual Coercion

Teens discussed sexual coercion with regards to pressure to have sexual relations and pressure to send sexually explicit pictures. The latter is clearly facilitated by communication technologies, considering photographs are often sent via cell phones or email. In addition, pressure was often exerted by asking repeatedly for sexual relations or explicit photographs, often via phone, text, email, and chat conversations.

Summary of Findings

Adolescents perceived jealousy, pressure to change behaviors, sexual coercion, and cheating as problematic to their daily lives. While the previous three are often discussed with regards to dating violence, the last behavior—cheating—is not often discussed with regards to emotional abuse. Participants also discussed the role that gender plays in these behaviors, particularly with regards to perceptions of prevalence rates. For instance, males were more often associated with perpetrating sexual coercion, whereas females were more often linked to jealousy. Additionally, communication technologies were described as facilitators of many of these abusive behaviors. A prime example of this is how cell phones and email are commonly used to send sexually explicit pictures and to pressure partners to send them. Gender and communication technologies were also integrated into teens' perceptions of dating problems that are not categorized under dating violence.

Secondary Analysis of Transcriptions

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I also noticed some different behaviors that were commonly discussed with regards to dating problems, but are largely absent from current dating violence literature and do not conceptually fit within the category of dating violence. After carefully considering these recurring themes, I decided that they were relevant because teens described them as germane and problematic. The behaviors include derogatory comments, general roughness, sexual grabbing, and leaking of sexually explicit pictures. Additionally, teens often discussed the roles that gender and communication technologies play in these behaviors.

Derogatory Comments

When I asked participants whether they ever heard peers saying mean comments to their partners, I heard an array of responses. All in all, the consensus was that it is not uncommon for mean comments to be said during and after school, but that these comments are *not* relegated to dating situations. Rather, everyone is participating in the verbal abuse. From the responses, I was able to pull out a general theme of cross-gender verbal victimization that occurs within school, sometimes between dating partners, but usually between non-committed individuals. One female participant highlighted some of the common statements that are said between genders,

Participant #1: Yeah, about their weight or like...just, it is basically about them or like, or about their like...like their school. Like you're dumb; you're failing; like you can't even pass...

This quote highlights the emphasis on physical appearance and intelligence as qualities that are targeted in mean statements. When asked about gender differences, participants responded that both males and females participate in the comments, although some suggested that boys might partake in the activity more often:

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Participant #2: Like just people—people hair, people dress, the way girls dress. They'll do it to boys and girls. It's the males though—they're worse. But the girls, you know, they're catty. Groups of girls [are] catty, but the males...it's just, they don't care. They'll say it to anybody, to a teacher, like they don't care.

This female student felt strongly that boys participate in verbal abuse more frequently and often without a care for the consequences. She again highlighted the focus on physical appearance, or attractiveness, in the mean comments. Many participants felt that comments such as these are an ordinary, every-day occurrence in their lives. This sentiment is captured in the following quote:

Participant #4: It's pretty much an everyday thing, you know? It's not like you see someone saying it, and it's like, "Oh my goodness!" It's, you know, it's normal. It happens enough to know that.

Here, she acknowledged that derogatory comments are extremely normalized in teens' lives. Instead of being shocked by such negative statements, adolescents often perceive them to be normal. New communication technologies also increase the avenues through which teens can verbally harass others, further normalizing the problem. When asked about these technologies and the role that they play in verbal abuse, one participant responded,

Participant #1: Yeah because it's less...it's not that hard to say it. Like when you're not face-to-face, but when you have to see how the person looks, you have to walk away from them—you have to be with them—but if you're on the phone, you can just say it and not see how they feel...like see it on their face or anything...Yeah, you can just hang up or stop writing.

Participant #1, in addition to several others, emphasized how newer communication technologies, such as instant messages, texts, and cell phones, have made it easier to say mean comments to others. Their reasoning is that there are no visual repercussions (i.e. facial cues) and there is an easy end to the conversation that exists (i.e. hang up the phone or sign out of the chat conversation). This suggests that technology allows the appearance of distance, and thus

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some depersonalization, thereby making it easier to say mean comments. Another participant echoed this idea,

Participant #3: Um, I think it has a huge part. I know like, when you're face-to-face there's a lot of things that you won't say that you will say over computers. Um...texting... as far as like chat lines or on the Internet and texting on the Internet. There's a lot of people that are, um, scared to, or not really scared, but shy to say certain things face-to-face that they would be comfortable saying over text messaging, if that makes sense?

This illustrates how newer forms of communication sometimes embolden people to verbally abuse others. Some participants also recognized that technology adds an element of uncertainty to conversations—sometimes comments are perceived to be mean, but they are really meant as a joke. For instance,

Participant #2: I mean, I think if it's said over instant message it's hard to interpret, you know? Whether when it's in person, you know, it goes in both. But I think when you're in person, you know they're joking because they're smiling, but over message it might be taken the wrong way. But it's said both ways, but it might be taken the wrong way.

Another participant addressed how technology can lead to miscommunication regarding social networking sites,

Participant #10: You see people fighting on Facebook every day over petty stuff, especially in relationships. So, I mean, I think when you texting somebody, you don't get the emotions from what they're saying. So you can take things differently and when you're texting, it can just change up the whole way you look at what the message is, and that can start arguments.

Evidently, newer forms of communication sometimes create miscommunication, which can lead to arguments and interpersonal problems. In general though, technology increases the avenues through which teens can participate in verbal bullying, particularly directed at the opposite gender.

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General Roughness

Some of the participants discussed physical abuse that is characteristic of dating violence, but always in relation to one couple that they know of (aka the prototype of dating violence). They never discussed severe physical abuse as a prevalent experience of their peers, and actually mentioned that while it happens occasionally, it is very personal and hidden. With a lack of information on this severe form of physical violence, my attention turned to the less severe forms that were described as very common throughout the school day—the shoving, grabbing and slapping. These behaviors, like verbal abuse, are not relegated to the realm of relationships, but rather largely affect the unattached adolescents.

In general, I found that the physical contact discussed by participants is usually spurred by two motives—flirtation and anger. Here, a female participant recounted the role that flirtation plays in physical bullying:

Participant #8: YES! Um. I guess, like a male will be playing with a female and the female will shove him. Then the male will push her, and then she'll shove back of course. And then it will just turn into a very rough type of situation where probably the female may get hurt.

In this story, both genders were involved in the physical interaction. Interestingly though, the participant mentioned how females are often injured, whereas men are often not. This speaks to the differences in physical size and strength with respect to different sexes, and it also highlights how neither gender seems to know when enough is enough, or when to end the interaction on good terms. Another description of this rough interaction is described below:

Participant #3: Yeah, I see that a lot. Um even...I don't even know. A lot of times they're not even in a relationship, yea dating in some sense. I see it, um a push or a...even girls hitting the guys—often more so than you would see a guy really hitting a girl, at least in public. Um, but yeah, it happens a lot, more than it probably should.

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Interviewer: How common would it be to see a girl slapping a guy or hitting or shoving him?

Participant #3: Um. On a scale of 1 to 10, I would say like a 6. Haha!

Interviewer: And do you see it mostly like in the school hallways or is it in other situations too?

Participant #3: Yeah, usually like in school, but I don't think it's like really serious. It will be like a slap and then like a laugh and run. You know? And not really like a slap and like, "I hate you," you know? I don't know... Well usually I think it's just like a joking matter, but I think that...um, sort of gives them the idea that abuse is okay, if that makes sense? Like even if you're just playing the first couple of times, it might get serious. Um...with the guys, like, "Well you hit me all these times, so I can hit you," so I think it sort of like gives them the level to make it okay.

This participant acknowledged not only how common this behavior is, but also some of the negative repercussions—that it normalizes lower levels of violence, making escalated violence more acceptable. She mentioned how the roughness is typically perceived as joking or flirtatious though, indicating that the motive behind the roughness is not usually mean-spirited.

The other motive for violence—anger—describes a physical interaction that is more aligned with dating violence. This behavior though, is still not relegated to relationships. Here is an example of how anger can turn into physical bullying:

Participant #1: It's because he's angry about something, I don't know...I don't know. I feel like when boys beat up on girls, they want...they just like want to pick on and have more power over them. But sometimes, in some cases, they get pushed a certain way and they do snap. I'm not saying that's okay, but it happens.

Interviewer: And then when the girl is slapping the guy, why do you think that happens?

Participant #1: Usually because he did something and she didn't know how to handle her anger any other way, so she slapped him.

This type of violent interaction is described in a much more gendered way. Here, the participant addressed two types of male violence—one that is about gaining or maintaining power over his

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partner (dating violence) and one that is more reactive, or triggered by anger. The latter is similar to accounts of female violence, in which girls hit or slap their partners when they are angry or upset. It appears that girls' violence is more often reactionary while boys' violence is both pre-meditated and reactionary, according to participants' accounts.

Another participant addressed the role that anger plays in physical roughness and how it differs depending upon gender. She stated, "Yeah. I don't think the girls will be as rough as the guy can get. I think it's two different anger levels, because a guy can get way more rough than the girl" (Participant #4). This again suggests that physical roughness, even if under similar circumstances, varies according to gender due to size and strength differences.

Sexual Grabbing

Another type of physical interaction that I observed, I classified as sexual grabbing. The following quote fully captures what sexual grabbing is:

Participant #3: Um, really I see it a lot. Um, they may not expect it, but then they may not take it serious like, "Oh, he's just touching me. He didn't really mean anything by it"... Yeah. Chest, grabbing butts, chest, and then girls do it sometimes to the guys.

Interviewer: What would girls be more likely to do?

Participant #3: Grab their butts, their genitals, haha! Yeah, it happens. I mean, I wouldn't say that it happens as common of course as guys touching girls' butts or smacking it or whatever, but it happens. I see it.

I define sexual grabbing as the purposeful touching of the intimate body parts of another individual without their explicit consent. Both genders participate in sexual grabbing, although the majority of participants felt that boys grab girls more often than vice versa. This gendered quality, in addition to the normalization of sexual grabbing, is captured in the following quote:

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Participant #8: She'll think it's cute.

Interviewer: And what about the other way around—girls grabbing guys?

Participant #8: I really don't see that a lot. It's more common for the guys.

Interviewer: And it's pretty accepted?

Participant #8: It's just a way of life basically.

The last line of that excerpt clearly identifies that sexual grabbing is normalized at the high school. In addition, she believed that men participate in sexual grabbing much more often than women. Another participant echoed the prevalence of the behavior when she said, "You probably see it every day. At least once a day" (Participant #4).

An additional characteristic of sexual grabbing was pointed out by a few of the participants—sexual grabbing is more common in the younger grades, similar to sending sexually explicit pictures. Below, Participant #10 discussed the age differences in acceptability:

Participant #10: Haha! Um, I don't know...it's like, when you...as you get older, people grow out of that. It's like...umm...each year in school, it's like you learning something new sexually. So it's like you're mind is getting to a higher level. Sometimes you're little and you're young, and you're like, "Oh, I just smacked her butt," and you can brag about that to your friends. But when you're older, that's not something you can brag about. So I feel like the younger you are, not younger, but late middle school when you actually start thinking about sex and try to do a lot of all that freaky stuff, you do it a lot more than you would do it now in public because at my age—I'm about to be 18—I'm not trying to...I'm not on the little kid stuff anymore. I'm more mature. So I guess...I'm around a lot of people in my grade also so I don't see it as much. But 9th through 11th, I've seen a lot of stuff like that.

Here, he identified that it is less acceptable to sexually grab somebody if you are older.

Leaking Sexually Explicit Pictures

Another behavior that was emphasized by participants was leaking sexually explicit pictures depicting another individual. In these scenarios, I found that the intent

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for showing the picture(s) does not appear to deal with power and control over one's partner, which is characteristic of dating violence. Rather, the person who is depicted, or the victim of this act, is largely disregarded. The offender brags about the pictures in order to elevate his/her social status.

The following quote illustrates one student's experiences of being shown sexually explicit pictures of other girls,

Participant #2: Like these crazy boys just talk about them. Like I'm friends with a lot of boys and they like just show pictures, and I'm like, "I don't want to see pictures of just like girls," and I'm like, "that's despicable," but like, they don't care.

Here, the males were clearly aware of how their actions are wrong and hurtful to others, but yet they continued to show the pictures. Not only is this likely to negatively effect the girl, but it also raises the issue of distributing sexually explicit (often naked) pictures of girls, who are usually under the age-of-consent, without their permission. This is not only harmful to the girls, but it is illegal. Another participant discussed how boys show sexually explicit pictures,

Participant #10: I mean, some guys...most guys...they like to brag on what they got. So they get a good picture, they gonna let you know who this, or, you know, stuff like that.

Interviewer: So it's usually a way to brag about it?

Participant #10: Yeah.

Interviewer: And what about the other way around, do you ever hear of girls leaking pictures to guys?

Participant #10: Uh huh, but I would say, guys do it just to brag, girls are...well I guess you can say girls do it to brag too, girls just don't trip about it as much, well not girls, a guy wouldn't trip about it as much if his picture got leaked, but I think a girl would because she feels that her privacy has been invaded. But if a guy, I mean, you not gonna send nobody no pictures if you ain't proud of that picture, but some girls, I mean they respect their bodies more than what a guy would. Guys don't really care as much.

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This quote illustrates how showing pictures is often a way to brag about one's sexual conquests, both for boys and girls. Although, he addressed how girls are often more upset when their pictures are shown than boys are. With regards to this gender difference, several participants mentioned that girls usually leak less explicit pictures of boys, which can minimize the social repercussions for males. One participant discussed the social repercussions faced by many girls when their pictures are leaked:

Participant #10: The girl gonna be embarrassed. She can be mad but, I mean, you let somebody take a picture of you doing this or doing that, or you send somebody a picture, I mean, you set yourself up, if you don't trust that person, why are you sending them a picture?

Not only does this mention the mental repercussions that can affect the girl if her picture is leaked, but it also attributes the blame to her. This is commonly referred to as victim blaming. She sent a picture of herself to someone that she trusted; he leaked the picture, thereby breaking her trust; yet she was still blamed for it. This quote does not do justice to the severe social repercussions that can follow a leaked picture, such as social ostracism, severe gossip, outright harassment, and depression.

Summary of Secondary Findings

Teens addressed several findings that were not specific to dating partners and are not adequately characterized according to dating violence. Nonetheless, adolescents perceived these behaviors to be problematic and therefore deserving of further attention. These include derogatory comments, general roughness, sexual grabbing, and leaking of sexually explicit photographs. Teens discussed these behaviors in relation to gender differences, often indicating how gender influences perceptions of acceptability. For instance, physical bullying by boys

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against girls was typically perceived to inflict more harm, and was therefore viewed as less acceptable. Communication technologies were also noted with regards to derogatory comments and leaking of sexually explicit photographs.

Discussion

Growing concerns about adolescent dating violence have prompted many scholars to study the issue. Unfortunately though, much of the research is limited in scope. The current study addressed teens' perceptions of common dating problems in order to gather a comprehensive account of adolescent dating violence. My findings were two-fold. First, I expectedly found a number of common behaviors characteristic of dating violence that were expounded upon by participants, especially sexual coercion, jealousy, control, and other forms of emotional abuse. For these behaviors, teens discussed the integral role that gender played in different perceptions. For instance, girls were perceived as more jealous while boys were perceived as more sexually coercive. Communication technologies were also mentioned as facilitators of abusive behavior (e.g. how texting contributes to jealousy and control). These trends involving communication technologies and gender differences suggest generational shifts that have not been found in studies on adult dating violence.

Second, a number of unexpected behaviors were emphasized by teens that do not fall under dating violence, such as sexual grabbing, slapping and pinching, derogatory comments, and leaking of sexually explicit photographs—all behaviors that are not specific to dating partners but also occur largely between unattached individuals. While these behaviors do not constitute dating violence, they merit attention because teens identified them as problematic. After completing the interviews, I began to analyze these behaviors and came to the conclusion

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that they characterize bullying and sexual harassment. Gender differences and communication technologies were similarly associated with these behaviors.

With regards to dating violence, participants largely affirmed my expectations that teens often encounter less severe forms of abuse, such as control, jealousy, sexual coercion, isolation, and cheating and that these behaviors are largely normalized. Conversely, they often regarded the stereotypically severe forms of abuse, such as physical violence, as largely inconsequential to their daily lives. While I expected teens to discuss gender differences, I was surprised by how behaviors were perceived according to gender. Some actions that are stereotypically portrayed as being exercised by men were actually discussed more in terms of women. For instance, jealousy and control of a partner's actions were more strongly associated with females. Conversely, sexual coercion was still highly associated with males. These findings support cross-gender perpetration of dating abuse, which is reminiscent of Feiring and Wolfe's discussion of the mutually violent profiles of males and females, with both genders perpetrating and experiencing physical and emotional abuse (2000). Additionally, male participants were much more likely to highlight physical violence as a means by which men express their jealousy, which coincides with Prospero's (2006) finding that males are more likely to refer to aggressive behaviors.

Another gendered theme that appeared was the tendency for girls to continually strive to maintain their romantic relationships, a concept noted by Sousa (1999). This perceived responsibility of girls to maintain relationships is likely instrumental in girls' reactions to other abusive behaviors, especially sexual coercion. Many participants mentioned instances in which girls submitted to sexual coercion because they did not want their partners to break up with them. Other participants mentioned how their female friends often changed their behaviors to abide by

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the rules set by their boyfriends. This perceived pressure for women to maintain relationships is aligned with hegemonic gender norms that women should satisfy men (Sousa, 1999).

Conversely, one participant noted how boys feel pressure from their male peers to spend less time with their partners or risk being labeled less masculine, or “girly.” As evidenced by these examples, gender norms and compulsive masculinity and femininity contribute to controlling behaviors, or the absence therefore.

While participants mentioned each type of dating violence—physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal—they frequently stressed emotional abuse and sexual coercion while only briefly touching on other forms. With regards to physical violence, the few references often identified one commonly known couple that is physically violent (aka the prototype, or visible example, of dating violence in school), but rejected applicability of physical violence to their own lives or those of their friends. Although, when asked how gender played a role in physical violence, they perceived male violence as both premeditated and reactive, while female violence tends to be solely reactive. This differs from Cercone et al.’s (2005) research, which found that male violence is instrumental, meaning that male violence is designed to control or exert power over another. Rather, my findings suggest that male violence is both instrumental and expressive because teens described how boys will react violently towards girls both to control and exert power over girls, which is instrumental, and to express their anger in the moment, which is expressive, or reactionary.

For sexual abuse, teens highlighted sexual coercion, including pressure to have sexual relations and pressure to send sexually explicit photographs, as highly problematic. Teens largely ignored the more commonly discussed forms of sexual abuse, such as rape and sexual assault. Verbal abuse was also considered less relevant to teens’ lives. With regards to other

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forms of emotional abuse besides verbal abuse, teens discussed jealousy, controlling behaviors, and isolation—all of which have been noted by previous scholarly research. One behavior that was commonly mentioned at the start of interviews, which is not often discussed by scholars in relation to emotional abuse, is cheating. Not only did participants mention that the rates of cheating appear to be extremely high between their peers, but they also noted how cheating is commonly used as a form of punishment. A few participants explicitly noted how cheating is used as means to get-back-at one's partner, which clearly identifies the intention of gaining power and control over another individual.

New forms of communication technologies, such as text, Instant Message, Facebook and MySpace, were also integrated into teens' discussions of dating violence. For instance, the capability of teens to text each other on cell phones plays a huge role in permitting almost-constant communication. This easy-access can further exacerbate dating pressure and isolation by creating heightened expectations about the amount of time that partners should spend communicating. In addition, the social networking sites were discussed on a number of occasions as a prime factor in teenage jealousy, particularly with regards to the posting of pictures and establishing "top eights," which refers to an application in MySpace that allows people to identify and post who their top eight friends are. Arguably the most shocking form of abuse dealing with communication technologies is the pressure to send sexually explicit photographs via cell phones or the Internet. Participants noted that while both genders send sexually explicit photos, females are almost exclusively pressured by males to send the pictures rather than vice versa.

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Before I discuss behaviors characteristic of sexual harassment and bullying, I will briefly define each term and establish my guidelines for labeling behaviors as such. The American Association for Undergraduate Women (1993) outlines sexual harassment as:

“unwanted or unwelcome behaviors, such as making sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks; showing sexual pictures photographs, illustrations, messages, or notes; writing sexual messages or graffiti on bathroom walls or locker rooms; spreading sexual rumors; calling someone gay or lesbian in a malicious manner; spying on someone dressing or showering at school; flashing or mooning someone; touching, grabbing, or pinching in a sexual way; intentionally brushing against someone in a sexual way; pulling clothing off our down; blocking or cornering in a sexual way; and forcing a kiss or other unwelcome sexual behavior other than kissing”

Bullying is often defined as:

“a specific type of aggression in which (1) the behavior is intended to harm or disturb, (2) the behavior occurs repeatedly over time, and (3) the imbalance of power, with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one. The asymmetry of power may be physical or psychological, and the aggressive behavior may be verbal (e.g., name calling, threats), physical (e.g., hitting), or psychological (e.g., rumors, shunning/exclusion)”
(Nansel et al., 2001, p. 2094; Gruber & Fineran, 2007).

Typically, bullying studies look at intragender aggression rather than cross-gender aggression, as my study happened to do. The key factors that I use to distinguish these categories of abuse are that bullying is (1) intended to cause harm; (2) ongoing; and (3) facilitated by a power differential; whereas sexual harassment is (1) perceived as *unwanted* or *unwelcome* behavior of a sexual nature and (2) causes sufficient stress or harm.

Behaviors mentioned by teens that I classify according to bullying include: derogatory comments and sexual touching, grabbing, and pinching. With regards to derogatory comments as abuse, teens recounted a number of instances in which peers verbally degraded others on the basis of their physical appearance, intelligence, sexual activity, et cetera. While these comments were sometimes meant in a joking manner, they were often designed to inflict pain. The same is

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true of sexual touching in the hallways in that the grabbing was sometimes intended to annoy and to display a sense of power over another individual. Both of these actions were described as frequent, ongoing, and normalized throughout high school. Within this context, these behaviors constitute bullying, but they are not always characteristic of bullying.

In many cases sexual touching and derogatory comments, as well as general roughness, are intended to be playful and flirtatious, but contrary to their intent, their reception is unwanted or causes harm. Petersen and Hyde (2009) describe this unintentional sexual harassment as a means by which teens develop their sexualities and experiment with expressing their sexual attraction, oftentimes through physical teasing. Cases of sexual harassment seemed to be perceived by participants as more common for older adolescent girls, possibly because they learned that boys should not be able to touch them without their consent. With regards to derogatory comments, teens often noted how communication technologies lead to uncertainty about the intent or meaning of comments. In some situations, comments are said jokingly via telephone or the Internet, but without visual or sometimes even verbal cues, recipients take the comments seriously, which inflicts unintended harm.

Sexual coercion and involuntary exposure are two additional behaviors characteristic of sexual harassment. While sexual coercion is most often perceived to occur between dating individuals, it can also occur between unattached individuals. One example of this occurred when a participant discussed how girls sometimes try to coerce boys who are in relationships into having sexual activity with them. This behavior appears to stem from the concept of sexual conquest because the girls seem interested in getting the boys to cheat, thereby proving their sexual desirability to others, rather than in the boys themselves. Conversely, many boys discussed the mentality, "hit it and quit it," which means to simply engage in sexual behaviors

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without any long-term commitment, as a perception that is pervasive in high school. In these scenarios, boys will try to coerce girls into having sexual relations with them in order to elevate their social status amongst their male peers, often by asking repeatedly or through the use of seduction. This compares to Duncan's discussion of how girls fall victim to sexual rumors, or in this case, sexual conquest, as a part of boys' intragender competition for dominance (1999).

Involuntary exposure is a term that I identified to describe how teens are often pressured by another individual to send sexually explicit photographs, usually through text message or email, and then the pictures are often purposefully leaked to other people. While the behavior generally occurs between dating partners, this is not always the case. Furthermore, leaking explicit photographs clearly represents an action that is committed with the intent to brag and elevate one's social status, but is highly "unwanted" and harmful to the person depicted in the photograph, thereby characterizing sexual harassment. While both genders send sexually explicit photographs, boys are more likely to pressure girls for a picture and to leak more sexually explicit pictures to friends—an action that is perceived as causing more social harm to girls than boys. In addition, one participant described how her male friends continually showed her sexually explicit photographs of other girls, despite her discomfort and open disgust with their actions. Showing explicit photos to people who do not want to see them is another form of sexual harassment.

Therefore, these behaviors that teens perceived as problematic only constitute sexual harassment or bullying within very specific contexts—bullying intends to cause harm while sexual harassment is unwelcome or results in harm. The same behaviors were also mentioned in situations where they posed no problems, and rather represented innocent flirtations. McMaster (2002) identified this notion that cross-gender roughness is typically flirtatious and lighthearted,

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which he identifies as the notion of “pushing and poke courting”. When assessing which behaviors constitute flirting rather than abuse, I realized that only behaviors that were both intended to be and received as friendly constitute flirting. Teens noted that some instances of roughness, derogatory comments, and sexual grabbing, touching and pinching were solely flirtatious. For instance, physical roughness is often used as a way to release tension or awkwardness.

It is important to consider how each of these behaviors were also perceived as harmful in different contexts because it highlights the potential of these behaviors to cause harm and questions the nature of the behaviors themselves. Allowing the behaviors in some situations and disallowing them in others blurs the line between right and wrong and creates ambiguity. For teens to use these behaviors as flirting is misguided; rather teens should be taught other ways in which to express interest to another individual.

While I was able to identify some gender differences in these behaviors, much more research needs to be done in this area to explore the questions: Do gender differences exist in dating violence, sexual harassment and bullying? How do the behaviors differ depending on gender? And why do the behaviors differ according to gender? Additionally, more research is needed to understand the multifaceted role that technology takes on in adolescents’ lives, particularly in relation to dating problems. Cell phones and social networking sites are clearly intertwined in teens’ dating lives, and therefore factor into dating violence, sexual harassment, and bullying. Again, extensive research is needed to delve into the complexities of teenagers’ experiences.

As noted previously, my research is limited in scope. Not only is my sample size small, consisting of only 15 interviews, but the participants were mostly heterosexual, African

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American adolescents. Therefore, my research is not representative of a large, national, heterogeneous sample. Rather, the anecdotes and experiences that were shared with me are specific to the group of teens that I interviewed and are characteristic of the environment that they live in. In hind sight, knowing that this is my sample, I wish that I had asked participants about how they perceived their race/ethnicity to play a role in the abusive behaviors so that I could better understand how race/ethnicity influences experiences of dating violence, sexual harassment and bullying.

Additionally, due to the sensitive nature of my research, my questions were designed to target teens' perceptions of dating violence, rather than the individual experiences of participants. In doing so, my research is based mostly on observations instead of on individual experiences, which is another weakness of my findings. Nonetheless, my research findings represent the perceptions and experiences of 15 individuals, and I hypothesize that many other adolescents across the country share these. More research is needed to fully understand adolescents' experiences of dating violence, sexual harassment, and bullying though, especially considering my interview questions were not designed to address the latter two but rather stumbled upon them.

In summary, when asked about dating problems, teens described many behaviors that are characteristic of dating violence, sexual harassment, bullying, and flirting. While behaviors characteristic of dating violence have been acknowledged by some smaller, more comprehensive studies, they are often ignored by national surveys that minimally address teen dating violence. However, during the interviews participants conceptualized the seemingly less severe forms of abuse, such as jealousy, control, sexual coercion, and cheating as more problematic to their daily lives than explicit, severe forms of physical and sexual abuse that are addressed in national

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surveys. Teens noted additional behaviors that they believe to be problematic, such as derogatory comments, general roughness, sexual grabbing, and leaking of sexually explicit photographs, which are characteristic of bullying and peer sexual harassment. Additionally, trends involving communication technologies and gender differences suggest generational shifts that have not been accounted for by studies on adult dating violence.

Ultimately, I hope that the current study has shed some light on the many normalized forms of abuse that are experienced by teens daily, as well as the complex role that gender and communication technologies play. With this information, newer studies can be designed to consider these complexities as well as ask more pointed questions about why teens perceive behaviors the way they do. Doing so will broaden scholars' understanding of adolescent dating violence, peer sexual harassment, and bullying—a necessary first step towards addressing the pervasive problems that teens face.

Notes

¹ I will use both terms, “survivor” and “victim,” which although sometimes used interchangeably within the discourse of adolescent dating violence, can denote slightly varied meanings. Many victims’ rights groups have constructed the term “survivor” as an empowering tool to indicate that previously abused people are no longer powerless, while the term “victim” arguably implies an absence of power. Some scholars feel that it is inappropriate to designate a politically correct term because doing so pigeonholes people’s experiences when they might not resonate with that vocabulary (Young & Maguire, 2003). I will use both terms throughout this paper to avoid discounting people’s experiences, but I will specifically use “survivor” when discussing the stories of people who are no longer in abusive relationships in order to avoid depicting them as powerless. It is important to note that when I use the term “survivor” it does not denote that a person is no longer struggling with their past abuse, but rather that they are no longer in an abusive relationship and have begun the process of recovery.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. What are some “teen dating problems” that your peers face?
 - Describe each in detail.
 - Do you think that these problems are common? (i.e. hear about it among you peers daily, weekly, monthly, etc.)
 - What role, if any, do you think new technology concerning internet and phone communication plays in these problems? (i.e. texting, instant messaging, myspace and facebook)
 - In your opinion, when does an ordinary relationship disagreement cross the line and become a serious dating problem? Please explain.
 - How often do you think a parent or adult is told about the problem? If an adult is not confided in, what do you think are the reasons that they are not?
 - Do people seem to accept these problems as normal, and therefore okay, or do they feel differently when they hear about them? If so, please explain.
 - Do these problems seem to affect one gender more than another? If, so please explain.
 - What, if anything, do you think should be done to address these dating problems?

2. What role do you think jealousy plays in teen relationships?
 - Is jealousy common in teen relationships?
 - Does jealousy create problems? If so, how?
 - How do you think new communication technologies play a role in relationship jealousy, if at all?
 - Do you think boys and girls are equally affected by jealousy?

3. Do you think that teens sometimes feel pressured by their partners to have sexual relations (includes oral, anal, and vaginal penetration as well as kissing and touching) when they do not want to?
 - How are teens pressured? What are teens pressured to do?
 - How do you think new communication technologies contribute to this pressure, if at all?
 - How common do you think this is in relationships?
 - Do you see any gender differences?
 - Does this pressure seem widely accepted or how else do people feel about it?
 - What about sending explicit pictures via text or other forms of communication? Is there pressure to do so?

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4. Do you think that some teens in relationships get “too rough” with their partners?
 - If yes, how so? In what ways are they rough?
 - Are there any gender differences in this behavior?
 - Do you think that something tends to cause someone to behave roughly to their partner?
 - Do you think that rough behavior is common among your peers who are in relationships?
 - Walking down the hallways, do you see shoving, grabbing, etc?
 - Is there sexual touching in the hallways?

5. Do you think that teens in relationships are sometimes mean in what they say to their partners?
 - What are some examples of mean statements that are more common?
 - How are these comments usually said—face-to-face, via other forms of communication, or both?
 - Do you think that teens say these things to purposely hurt their partners?
 - How common do you think this behavior is?
 - Are there any gender differences?

6. When your peers start to date someone, do you see any changes in how they act, who they hang out and who they communicate with on a daily basis?
 - If so, what changes do you see?
 - How do other communication technologies play a role in all of this, if at all?
 - Do you think that some of your peers feel pressured to hang out more with their partners?
 - If so, how are they pressured? Are they punished if they spend time with other people?
 - Are there any gender differences?

7. After speaking with me, can you think of any other problems that teens face in dating relationships or anything else about teen dating that you want to tell me?

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Appendix B

Morning Announcement

Lindsay Hoyle, a student from the University of Michigan, is conducting a study on teenage dating relationships. She wants to know what you see and hear about, both inside and outside of school, and what you think are problems in teen dating. Lindsay will be interviewing students on school grounds, but after school hours. The interviews should take no more than 45 minutes, and at the end of the interview, study subjects will receive a \$10 gift certificate to Showcase Cinemas. Students interested in sharing their opinions on teen dating relationships and helping by taking part in the study should contact Mrs. Beverly Tyler in the front office.

Verbal Recruitment to Classes

My name is Lindsay Hoyle. I am a student at the University of Michigan, double majoring in Women's Studies and Political Science. I am currently working on my senior thesis that deals with how adolescents conceptualize teen dating relationships. The purpose of this study is to identify different types of problems that can arise when teenagers enter into relationships. I want to build a better account of the daily problems that today's teens face, and in order to do so, I need to speak with teens so that they can tell me about their experiences.

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to participate in one face-to-face interview here at your high school after school hours. The interview should take about 45 minutes, and at the end of the interview you will receive a \$10 gift certificate to Showcase Cinemas. If you are interested in participating please get into contact with Mrs. Beverly Tyler to schedule an interview time.

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Tables

Table 1

Selected demographic characteristics

Sex

| | |
|------|---|
| Male | 6 |
|------|---|

| | |
|--------|---|
| Female | 9 |
|--------|---|

Age

| | |
|----|---|
| 15 | 2 |
|----|---|

| | |
|----|---|
| 16 | 2 |
|----|---|

| | |
|----|---|
| 17 | 8 |
|----|---|

| | |
|----|---|
| 18 | 3 |
|----|---|

Ethnicity

| | |
|-------|---|
| White | 1 |
|-------|---|

| | |
|------------------|----|
| African American | 12 |
|------------------|----|

| | |
|----------|---|
| Hispanic | 1 |
|----------|---|

| | |
|-------|---|
| Other | 1 |
|-------|---|

Nationality

| | |
|----------|----|
| American | 15 |
|----------|----|

Sexual Orientation

| | |
|--------------|----|
| Heterosexual | 15 |
|--------------|----|

Family Income Level

| | |
|-----|---|
| Low | 2 |
|-----|---|

| | |
|--------|----|
| Middle | 13 |
|--------|----|

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Table 2

High school demographic characteristics

| | |
|------------------|------|
| Number enrolled | 1238 |
| Sex | |
| Male | 51% |
| Female | 49% |
| Ethnicity | |
| Hispanic | 2% |
| Asian | 1% |
| Other | 1% |
| White | 40% |
| African American | 56% |