ABSTRACT

Title of Document:

AFRICAN AMERICAN GIRLS' IDEAL DATING RELATIONSHIP NOW AND IN THE FUTURE AND FACTORS THAT SHAPE THESE PERCEPTIONS

Katrina Joy Debnam, Doctor of Philosophy, 2012

Directed By:

Dr. Donna Howard
Department of Behavioral and Community Health

The quality of dating relationships in adolescence can have long lasting effects on identity development, self esteem, interpersonal skills, and shape values and behaviors related to intimate relationships and risk behaviors. However, little is understood about how adolescents view their ideal partner and what implications these perceptions may have for romantic relationships. In fact, research suggests that over 400,000 adolescents have been victims of serious dating violence at some point in their lives. Among African American adolescents, religion may be particularly salient in romantic relationships. Religious organizations not only provide a place for seeking spiritual guidance and social interactions, but also provide unifying morals, beliefs, and practices for African American families.

In this dissertation, three studies where conducted. In Study 1 participants' self- identified, defined and vividly described 8 major characteristics, *good*

communication, honesty, trust, respect, compromise, understanding, individuality, and *self-confidence*, of a healthy relationship. In Study 2 several themes emerged in comparing girls' perceptions of an ideal dating relationship in high school with their perceptions of the ideal future relationship: (1) having a partner who shared similar education and career plans, (2) 'best friend' qualities such as respect, trust, and honesty, (3) importance of family in identifying an ideal relationship, and (4) temporariness of high school relationships. Study 3 findings suggest that the influence of religion in the lives of adolescents can be found in several domains. These included whether to become sexually active, choosing a partner based on religious affiliation and issues of sexual orientation. Interestingly, girls also felt that, despite the sanctity of marriage, women should not stay in unhealthy or harmful relationships.

Dating violence prevention curricula focus on helping girls identify unhealthy or abusive relationships and provide strategies to help them leave these relationships. More programs are needed to instill in girls the values and characteristics of *healthy* relationships. Early education and modeling of healthy teen dating relationships will help educators, practitioners and advocates empower girls so they are more likely to develop healthy dating relationships and less likely to experience harm in their dating relationships.

AFRICAN AMERICAN GIRLS' IDEAL DATING RELATIONSHIP NOW AND IN THE FUTURE AND FACTORS THAT SHAPE THESE PERCEPTIONS

By

Katrina Joy Debnam

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2012

Advisory Committee:
Associate Professor Donna Howard, Dr.P.H., Chair
Assistant Professor Mary A. Garza
Assistant Professor Kerry M. Green
Associate Professor Cheryl L. Holt
Associate Professor Mia Smith Bynum

Dedication

During this journey, on a weekly basis someone would ask how I was able to manage my many work, school, and personal responsibilities; on this day, I publicly declare that it was only by the grace of God that this was possible. It is to God I dedicate this great accomplishment! Over and over He proved that He would never leave me nor forsake me. To the amazing girls who shared their thoughts, beliefs, and dreams with me, thank you! Thank you for your openness and willingness to participate in this project. Finally, to my ever-present angel, Pop-pop, our dream is fulfilled!

Acknowledgements

model just by being yourself. I can't say thank you enough for all you have taught me (and still are teaching me) and the doors you have opened for me. To Elise, Anne, Karen, Patti, Qing, Mary, and the whole team, thank you for words of encouragement and support. I will tell anyone that I have been fortunate to work with some of the greatest people in Baltimore. Thank you.

Thanks to the UMD crew: Brian, Chandria, Shakira, Sylvette, Eric, Eva, and Denise. This journey would have not have been the same without you all. You guys always provided motivation for me to persevere. Thank you.

Last but not least, to the crazy, amazingly wonderful members of the Debnam and Barber families, thank you for your continuous support. You never let me forget this was the goal and that I would get here. Through it all, you remained the same and provided me with a place of rest and comfort. A special thanks to my Grandma Barber for picking up with where Pop-pop left and being a constant source inspiration to me and our entire family. Thank you.

Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

Adolescent dating violence constitutes a major public health concern in the United States. Defined as "the physical, sexual, or psychological/emotional violence within a dating relationship," incidence of teen dating violence has slightly increased since 2005 (Shaffer, 2009). Annually more than 16,000 adolescent males and females report being hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend and research suggests that over 400,000 adolescents have been victims of serious dating violence at some point in their lives (Jouriles, Platt, & McDonald, 2009; Shaffer, 2009). Approximately 8% of adolescent high school students report having been physically forced to have sexual intercourse against their wishes (Howard et al., 2007). An even higher number of adolescents report psychological victimization. Based on data from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBS), a national annual survey in all states among students in grades 9 – 12, approximately 3 in 10 report being verbally or psychologically abused in the previous year (Mulford, 2008). The prevalence of dating violence may not be uniform across racial/ethnic subgroups. According to 2009 YRBS data, the prevalence of dating violence is highest among African American females and males (14%) when compared to Hispanic (11%) and White (8%) females and males (Eaton et al., 2009).

Studies show many negative physical and psychological correlates of teen dating violence. In a study conducted by Foshee and colleagues (1996), 70% of girls and 52% of boys reported an injury from an abusive relationship. Victims of dating violence often

also suffer from low self esteem and negative body image (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002). In addition, teen dating violence has been found to be associated with binge drinking, suicide attempts, physical fights, and current sexual activity (Ackard, Eisenberg, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007; Milot & Ludden, 2009). Among girls who report physical or sexual dating abuse, rates of drug, alcohol, and tobacco use are twice as high when compared to girls who report no abuse (Dishion & Kavanagh, 2000; Howard, Wang, & Yan, 2007; Plichta & Falik, 2001). Furthermore, dating violence may result in high-risk sexual behaviors, which can lead to unintended pregnancy, sexually-transmitted diseases, and HIV infection (Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001). Despite these statistical associations with adverse behaviors, previous research has been unable to draw firm conclusions about the directionality of effect for teen dating violence. Unfortunately, the majority of the above associations reported for teen dating violence are drawn from cross-sectional study designs (Ehrensaft et al., 2003).

African American girls living in urban areas, compared to other race/ethnicities and non-urban areas, may be at increased risk of teen dating violence victimization. A recent study of African American girls aged 14-18 years revealed a 28% prevalence of dating violence and a 1-year incidence rate of 12% (Raiford, Wingood, & Diclemente, 2007). In addition, a higher likelihood of dating violence has been found to be correlated with living in a neighborhood with high levels of poverty, violence, and social disorganization (Banyard, Cross, & Modecki, 2006; Glass et al., 2003; Malik, Sorenson, & Aneshensel, 1997). Adolescents' exposure to multiple forms of violence (e.g., having witnessed a shooting or stabbing) in their community is significantly associated with violence in dating relationships (Malik et al., 1997). An inverse relationship has also

been found between neighborhood monitoring and violence perpetration among adolescents (Banyard et al., 2006). Adolescents who felt that their neighbors would report harmful behavior were less likely to admit perpetration of physical and sexual violence (Banyard et al., 2006). After witnessing violence in their community and/or home, girls may come to accept violence perpetrated by their partners as acceptable and appropriate or normative (Johnson et al., 2005). This problem is compounded by the fact that parents often struggle with how to teach their children about healthy relationships and how to prevent dating violence (Akers, Yonas, Burke, & Chang, 2010).

Given these realities for all adolescents, African American families living in communities plagued with violence may need increased support and guidance to identify a healthy dating relationship. In support of this idea of increased burden on African American girls, Raiford and colleagues (2007) found that African American girls who experienced dating violence were twice as likely as their non-victimized peers to report less understanding of healthy relationships. This adds further strength to the argument that if girls are not equipped with the necessary skills or knowledge to identify healthy romantic relationships, they may be more vulnerable to experiencing dating violence.

Romantic relationships in adolescence and their adulthood trajectories

Prior research shows that warm, supportive and low hostility or "high quality" romantic relationships in adolescence are associated with the same in adulthood (Adams & Williams, 2011; Kimmel & Weiner, 1995). However longitudinal research attempting to link normative adolescent relationships to adult outcomes is, thus far, limited in scope. A longitudinal study with German youth showed that the quality of adolescent romantic relationships was positively predictive of commitment in other relationships in adulthood

(Seiffge-Krenke, Overbeek, & Vermulst, 2010). Moreover, a study of college women

aged 18-19 conducted by Smith and colleagues suggests that experiences of adolescent

dating violence may increase the risk of adult victimization. In their study, adolescent

physical victimization significantly increased the risk of reported physical victimization

among college females (Smith, White, & Holland, 2003). Due to the lack of longitudinal

data, few other studies have been able to directly link adolescent dating violence

victimization with adult outcomes. However, scholars believe that adolescent victims

may carry patterns of violence into future relationships (Jouriles et al., 2009; Milot &

Ludden, 2009; Mulford, 2008; Smith, et al., 2003).

Developmental milestones during adolescence include independence seeking,

development of sexual identity, establishment of intimacy in relationships, and preparing

for personal and professional plans after high school (Furman, 2003; Werkle & Wolfe,

1999). Adolescent beliefs about their future romantic relationships may be equally as

important as current relationship characteristics. Little research has been devoted to

understanding how adolescent current romantic relationships differ from their goals for

future adult relationships. Using qualitative methods, McCabe and Barnett (2000) found

that only 1% of their sample of at-risk African American sixth-grade students were able

to provide a detailed description of their goals for future romantic relationships

(Steinberg & Morris, 2001). McCabe and Barnett (2000) suggest that, in addition to

career planning, it may also be important to help adolescents plan for future romantic

relationships (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Specific goals for future relationships could

have a positive effect on adolescents' understanding of healthy relationships and their

ability to navigate current dating challenges (e.g. negotiating sexual relations and contraception).

Justification for Current Study

Adolescent relationship development

Adolescence (i.e., ages 14 – 18 years) is a particularly important and challenging time for developing long lasting relationship patterns (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009; Furman & Shaffer, 2003). During this time, adolescents are developing their identity and learning to balance their need for autonomy with their desire to maintain relationships with peers, family and dating partners (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Research suggests that adolescent romantic relationships may play a distinctive role in identity formation (Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Sorensen, 2007; Sullivan, 1953).

While adolescent relationships were once not considered long lasting or influential enough to garner research attention, recent data suggest 35% of 15-16 year olds and approximately 60% of 17-18 year olds report relationships lasting 11 months or longer (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003). Furman and Shaffer (2003) propose that the formation of romantic relationships and dating is a normative experience that is one of the most important aspects of development during adolescence. In a review of the role of romantic relationships in adolescent development, Furman and Shaffer (2003) suggest that romantic relationships help adolescents develop distinct self-perceptions that are linked to their identity formation. Adolescents who have positive romantic experiences may begin to think of themselves as attractive and may gain greater self-esteem for attracting a worthy partner. Positive romantic relationships may also increase adolescents' self-confidence related to their ability to develop and maintain a successful

relationship. Indeed, empirical research shows that the quality of adolescent dating relationships affects their self-esteem, sexuality, and shapes their values regarding romance (Barber & Eccles, 2003). In addition, dating relationships may serve to strengthen adolescents' interpersonal skillfulness by facilitating the development of effective communication and negotiation skills along with empathy (Sorensen, 2007). Moreover, while some research shows an association between adolescent relationship "break ups" and depressive symptoms, "break ups" are also an opportunity for developing emotional resiliency and coping skills that will be needed later in life (Barber & Eccles, 2003; Monroe, Rohde, Seeley, & Lewinsohn, 1999).

Despite the potential influence of adolescent dating relationships and dating violence on the formation of healthy adult relationships, only recently have researchers begun to investigate how adolescents' relationships develop (Collins et al., 2009; Karney, Beckett, Collins, & Shaw, 2007). Thus far, research has shown that adolescent romantic relationships are important in forming a personal identity, succeeding in school, and developing self-confidence, but little is known about what adolescents do in a relationship, how they interact, and what individual, familial, and community factors contribute to healthy dating relationships (Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Zimmer-Gembeck, Siebenbruner, & Collins, 2001, 2004). A review of adolescent romantic relationship research to date documents the need for more extensive and systematic studies that explore the quality of relationship interactions, characteristics of the partner, and the influence of cultural and community factors on adolescent romantic relationships now and in the future (Collins, et al., 2009).

Little empirical research has explored partner characteristics during adolescence or their significance to the quality of the relationship (Collins, 2003; Collins et al., 2009; Karney, et al., 2007). Among adolescents, only partner socio-demographic characteristics have been explored. Adolescent females tend to date males slightly older than they are, but with similar race, ethnicity, and other socio-demographic characteristics (Carver et al., 2003; Gowen, Feldman, Diaz, & Yisrael, 2004). Some research even suggests that adolescent partners are similar on certain social characteristics, such as popularity (Simon, Aikins, & Prinstein, 2008).

The importance of the "ideal" in teen dating relationships

A burgeoning line of research investigates how adolescents select romantic partners and the psychosocial consequences of these choices. A study by Regan and Joshi (2003) showed that when asked about their "ideal" partner, adolescents selected different attributes for a romantic partner versus a sexual partner. In considering a long-term, romantic partner, adolescents desired a variety of cognitive qualities, such as humor, intellect, and intelligence (Regan & Joshi, 2003). In contrast, when asked about the desired traits of a casual sexual relationship, adolescents were more likely to choose external, physical characteristics (e.g. attractiveness, sexy appearance) (Regan & Joshi, 2003). Adolescents' idealized partner preferences may have implications for their psychosocial functioning and trajectories of romantic development (Sassler, 2010; Simon et al., 2008). Simon and colleagues (2008) found that adolescents selected partners who shared comparable social standing and physical attractiveness, but also depressive symptoms. As a result, an adolescent's ideal partner attributes could contribute positively or negatively to the health of the relationship. Clearly, little is understood about how

adolescents view their ideal partner and what implications these perceptions may have for romantic relationships. In addition, it is likely that other individual, familial or community factors may also influence adolescents' perceptions of the ideal partner (Sassler, 2010).

There remains a tremendous gap in the current literature examining adolescent ideal partner characteristics and how this relates to their actual partner choice. Insight into what adolescents look for in a dating partner could help researchers begin to understand how adolescents perceive a healthy adolescent dating relationship. Sorensen (2007) proposes that adolescents must be taught the characteristics of a healthy dating relationship and, as a result, may otherwise not automatically know what to look for in a dating partner.

Influence of Religion

An often under-studied factor influencing adolescents' behavior is the socializing influence of religion. The National Study of Youth and Religion, a national telephone survey of adolescents ages 13-17, found in 2003 that 84% of adolescents report a specific religious affiliation. Among adolescents with an identified affiliation, approximately 75% report being a member of a Christian faith. Forty percent of surveyed teens report attending religious services once a week or more, and 19% report attending one to three times per month. Furthermore, results reveal that over half of the adolescents surveyed rated the importance of their religious faith in shaping daily life as "very" to "extremely important." Given the role that religion appears to play in the daily lives of adolescents, it is important to understand how their religious beliefs and practices may influence how they perceive, initiate, engage, and participate in romantic relationships.

Among African American adolescents, religious beliefs and practices may be particularly salient in adolescent romantic relationships. African American culture is often characterized by the enduring influence of religion and family (Berry & Blassingame, 1982). Much research has been devoted to the role of religion in African American families, politics, values, and traditions (Giger, Appel, Davidhizar, & Davis, 2008; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) suggest that African American churches and families provide the major socialization agent for many African American adolescents.

Public and Private Religiosity

Previous research has identified two major dimensions of religiosity, private and public, as protective factors against a variety of adolescent health risk behaviors (CDC, 2010a, 2010c; Guzman, Ikramullah, Manlove, & Peterson, 2009). Private religiosity refers to "individual practices that are not seen by others, such as personal prayer, scripture study, attempts to live by religious principles, and personal commitment to religious ideals" (Bahr, Maughan, Marcos, & Li, 1998, p.982). Public religiosity "includes attending church, praying in public, and participating in other group activities and rituals" (Bahr et al., 1998, p.982). As a result of parental influence, African American adolescents may have high involvement in church activities, but exhibit little private religious behavior. The opposite could also occur whereby African American adolescents seldom engage in religious or church public activities, but maintain a private active prayer life. High levels of religiosity have been shown to be inversely associated with adolescent health risk behaviors, including risky sex, cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use (Guzman et al., 2009; Wallace Jr. & Williams, 1997). While existing

literature documenting the relationship between adolescent dating violence and religiosity is sparse, available evidence suggests that religiosity is inversely related to adolescent involvement in interpersonal violence (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Yan, Howard, Beck, Shattuck, & Hallmark-Kerr, 2010; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002).

On the other hand, there is some literature to suggest that adolescents who are strongly religiously committed may endorse traditional gender roles that place women as subordinate to men in a relationship. Adolescent girls who endorse stereotypical gender role beliefs may be more vulnerable to becoming involved in a relationship where the male uses violence to assert his dominance (Ayyub, 2000; Berkel, Vandiver, & Bahner, 2004; Levitt & Ware, 2006). These mixed findings provide further impetus to examine whether religiosity influences African American adolescent perceptions of an ideal dating relationship.

Public Health Implications

This dissertation study informs the work of researchers engaged in efforts to meet *Healthy People 2020* objectives to reduce physical, sexual, and psychological violence by current and former partners (IV-39) and to reduce adolescent victimization from crimes of violence (AH-11.4). Adolescent girls are more likely than males to experience injuries during violence from dating partners (Cercone, Beach, & Arias, 2005; Foster, Hagan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2004; Halpern, Oslak, Young, Martin, & Kupper, 2001). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also recommends that intimate partner violence prevention efforts should "attempt to promote healthy relationships by addressing change at all levels of the social ecology that influence intimate partner violence (IPV): individual, relationship, community, and society (CDC, 2010b)." These objectives spoke

to the importance of understanding how socio-cultural factors and development are tied to notions of ideal relationships and partner characteristics.

Theoretical Framework

The Socialization Influence Framework (Wallace Jr. & Williams, 1997) was used to guide this study. The Socialization Influence Framework purports that adolescent beliefs and behaviors are influenced by multiple sources of socialization; parents and family as the primary source, followed by religion, peers, and school as secondary sources. The model suggests that religion may operate as a way for families to exert social control, influence adolescents' social support system, values, and identity formation. Through these indirect socialization mechanisms, adolescent perceptions of dating relationships may be cultivated and formed.

Study Overview

Data for the study were collected as part of a broader research agenda examining healthy and harmful dating relationships among high school girls. The larger study began with a seed grant funded through the University of Maryland, School of Public Health, entitled the "Girls Healthy Dating Relationship Study". The study, consisting of interviews with 20 girls across 2 high schools in the greater Baltimore metropolitan area, sought to better understand factors that shape adolescent girls' ideas of healthy and harmful dating relationships. Funding from the National Institutes for Health (NIH) provided the means to expand this research to a larger sample of girls (the parent study), with a particular emphasis on how religion may shape girls' ideas of healthy and harmful dating relationships. Fifty girls were recruited from 6 high schools in the Baltimore, MD area to participate in the parent study. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were

conducted with adolescent girls to capture their perceptions of healthy and harmful dating relationships and the role of religion as a socializing influence in their lives. In addition, a series of 10 focus groups were conducted across all of the schools to confirm themes emerging from the interviews and validate preliminary findings.

This study was based on qualitative data collected from both the seed grant and parent study. It explored how African American girls (aged 15 – 18), who participated in the seed grant and parent study, described characteristics of a healthy relationship and their ideal dating relationship and ideal dating partner in high school and in the future. The Socialization Influence Framework (Wallace Jr. & Williams, 1997) was used to investigate how African American girls' religiosity influenced their perceptions of an ideal partner and dating relationship. Specifically, this study examined if girls' public religiosity, and private religiosity affected how they described their dating relationships. For the purposes of this study, public religiosity referred to girls' participation in public religious activities, e.g., church attendance and participation in religious-based organizations. Private religiosity was operationalized as the degree of importance that religion rates in the girls' lives (see definition of terms).

Through an in-depth analysis of interview transcripts or "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), this study sought to understand how African American adolescent girls characterized an ideal healthy relationship, in high school and in the future. It also explored the role of religion in shaping these perceptions. African American adolescent perceptions of an ideal dating partner and relationship provided insight into how they differentiated between an unhealthy and healthy dating relationship. This study provided important insights which can lead to the development of positive youth development

initiatives and faith-based interventions that will successfully promote healthy dating

relationship attitudes and behaviors, and reduce the risk of teen dating violence.

Study Aims

The specific aims of this dissertation study were: (1) to understand how African

American girls characterize healthy and/or ideal dating relationships; (2) explore the

differences in African American girls' perceptions of an ideal dating relationship during

high school as compared to the future; and (3) consider how religiosity may influence

African American girls' dating relationships. Three research studies explored the

following research questions:

1. How do African American girls' characterize healthy and/or ideal dating
   relationships? (Study 1)

2. How do African American girls' connotative meanings of healthy relationship
   characteristics relate to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 12
   recommended healthy relationship qualities? (Study 1)

3. What are adolescent girls' perceptions of the ideal dating relationship, right now?
   (Study 2)

4. What are adolescent girls' perceptions of the ideal dating relationship, in the
   future? (Study 2)

5. Do perceptions of an ideal dating relationship differ when adolescent girls'
   describe current versus future relationships? Why and how? (Study 2)

6. How do African American girls discuss the influence of religion within the
   context of their dating relationships? (Study 3)

The qualitative nature of this study provided the opportunity to examine these research questions through an in-depth and methodologically rigorous exploration of African American girls' narratives in which they described their dating relationships. As these factors have not yet been explored in a systematic fashion, this study was more exploratory, leading to the generation of research hypotheses rather than the explicit testing of hypotheses. The research questions guided the development of a qualitative data analysis methodology whereby interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded using a dictionary of terms developed specifically to address the research questions. Analysis of the coded interview transcripts yielded an enhanced understanding of the factors that shape African American girls' perceptions of the ideal healthy dating relationship and the influence of religion on girls' perceptions.

Definition of Terms

Adolescent/Teen: While acknowledging that studies utilize various age ranges to represent adolescence, the terms adolescent and teen were used interchangeably to refer to persons aged 15 – 18.

African American: The term African American was used throughout this study to refer to persons of African, Caribbean or West-Indian descent, or otherwise self-identifying as Black or African American. Girls were characterized based on their self-identified race and ethnicity, chosen from a listing of racial/ethnic categories. These data were gathered from a demographic survey which girls completed immediately before the interview.

Dating relationship: This term was used to refer to adolescent relationships with a peer who is more than a friend.

Dating violence: This term describes physical, sexual, or verbal/psychological/emotional violence within a dating relationship (CDC, 2010c).

Private Religiosity: This term was used to describe "individual practices that are not seen by others, such as personal prayer, scripture study, attempts to live by religious principles, and personal commitment to religious ideals" (Bahr et al., 1998).

Public Religiosity: This term was used to describe religious behaviors including "attending church, praying in public, and participating in other group activities and rituals" (Bahr et al., 1998).

Religion: This term referred to an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols (Thoreson, 1998).

Religious Affiliation: The self-identified association of a person with a religion, denomination or sub-denominational religious group (e.g. Christian, Baptist, Catholic, Muslim, etc.).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Development of Adolescent Relationship Research

While adolescent romantic relationships are a normal and important part of adolescent development, only recently has this line of research flourished (Collins, 2003; Collins et al., 2009; Halpern, Joyner, Udry, & Suchindran, 2000; Seiffge-Krenke, et al., 2010). Historically, researchers have shied away from investigating teen relationships for several reasons (Halpern et al., 2000). First, it was once considered "inappropriate" to ask adolescents intimate questions about their sexual beliefs and behaviors (Collins, 2003). Even as times have changed, researchers still minimized the importance of adolescent romantic relationships by describing them as trivial and transitory (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Yet, recent research indicates that 51% of adolescents report that their current relationship has endured 11 months or longer; suggestive of their stability and potential influence on psychosocial development (Carver et al., 2003). A slightly lower percentage of African American adolescents (36%) reported relationships that last 11 months or longer (Carver, et al., 2003). Another reason for the lack of attention to adolescent romantic relationships is the belief that these relationships mirrored familial and parent-child relationships and did not offer a distinctive contribution to adolescent development (Collins, 2003). However, research is beginning to show that adolescent romantic relationships *are* distinct from friendships and parent-child relationships, warranting a closer look at how they contribute to adolescent identity (Collins, 2003).

The first challenge in research examining adolescent romantic relationships is development of a clear understanding of exactly what constitutes a romantic relationship. Adolescents use a variety of terms and language to describe their dating relationships.

Casual relationships may be termed "friends with benefits" or "hook-ups", while more serious committed relationships are often denoted as "boyfriend/girlfriend" (Guzman et al., 2009). The terms used to describe teen dating relationships may be indicative of the behaviors that occur within the different relationships. This rich and nuanced language used to describe romantic relationships may also vary by sex, age, and race/ethnicity; thus adding another level of complexity (Guzman et al., 2009).

According to the CDC, healthy adolescent relationships should include respect, good communication, trust, compromise, individuality, anger control, efficient problem solving, fair fighting, understanding, positive self-confidence, honesty, and inspiring each other to be role models (CDC, 2010a). The CDC states that an adolescent relationship should be "free from physical, emotional, and sexual violence." Moreover, educating teens about the qualities and characteristics of healthy romantic relationships may prevent these different forms of dating violence (CDC, 2010c).

Elsewhere it has been proposed that healthy adolescent romantic relationships have five distinctive domains, each of which warrants research attention: (1) romantic involvement; (2) partner characteristics; (3) relationship content; (4) relationship quality, and (5) cognitive and emotional processes (Collins, 2003). *Romantic involvement* refers to whether adolescents date, the age they started dating, duration of relationships, and their frequency. This factor is the most studied by researchers as adolescents can easily report these characteristics in a quantitative survey. As mentioned in Chapter 1, few studies have examined adolescent partner selection and *partner characteristics*. Little is known about how adolescents choose a partner and what factors influence their decision to enter into a relationship. *Relationship content* refers to the actual behaviors or

activities adolescents engage in or avoid during the relationship. More research is needed

to understand how much time adolescents spend together and what they do when

together. *Relationship quality* describes the extent to which the relationship results in

positive or negative experiences. High or positive relationship quality would be

characterized by feelings of intimacy and affection; while low or negative relationship

quality results in feelings of irritation and conflict (Schafer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1981).

Finally, *cognitive and emotional processes* describe the emotional responses, perceptions,

and expectations that adolescents have for themselves, their partner, and the relationship.

For example, adolescents may expect certain behaviors from their partner (e.g., daily

phone calls) and how they emotionally respond to relationship challenges.

The Nature of Adolescent Romantic Relationships

To understand adolescent romantic relationships, first one must understand the

current nature, duration, dynamics, and behaviors associated with these relationships.

Carver and colleagues (2003) examined data from the 2003 National Longitudinal Study

of Adolescent Health (Add Health), which surveyed a nationally representative sample of

adolescents in grades 7-12. Study findings showed that 65% of adolescents have

experienced a romantic relationship in the last 18 months. When asked if they had a

romantic relationship or engaged in behaviors that constitute a romantic relationship (i.e.,

held hands or told partner that you liked or loved them), over half of African American

girls (52%) in this study reported engaging in a relationship in the last 18 months. In

addition, the median duration for an adolescent romantic relationship among a national

sample of adolescents was 14 months (Carver et al., 2003). African American

adolescents appear to have more stable relationships, in terms of length of time in the

relationship, than White and Hispanic adolescents (Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2005). Sixty seven percent of African American girls reported that their average relationship lasted longer than 24 months (Giordano et al., 2005).

One important emerging line of research examines adolescent partner characteristics and how and when adolescents interact with their partners. On average, adolescents report older dating partners. Boys typically identify romantic partners older than them up until age 17 or 18 and then they may select younger partners (Carver et al., 2003). In contrast, girls seem to consistently partner with boys older than they are regardless of their current age. African American girls report partners a median of 2.03 years their senior when the relationship begins. African American girls are also least likely to identify a romantic partner of a different race (Carver et al., 2003). Giordano and colleagues (2005) created an index of the types and frequency of interactions that adolescents have with their partners. African American girls reported significantly lower frequencies of interaction with their partners when compared to White girls (Giordano et al., 2005). Specifically, African American girls reported less time spent with their partner during the previous weekend. They were also less likely to report having hung out with their partner after school during the week or having gone over to their partner's house (Giordano et al., 2005).

African American adolescents also report extreme variability in the intimate, sexual, and committed behaviors they engage in while in relationships. African American girls are less likely to report discussing a problem with their partner, think of themselves as being a couple, go out with their partner, say that they love each other, and give each other presents (Carver et al., 2003; Giordano et al., 2005). However, this

intimate disclosure may increase with the duration of the relationship (Giordano, et al., 2005). African American girls also report engaging in significantly fewer romantic behaviors (e.g. kissing, holding hands) with their current partner than White teens (Giordano et al., 2005). Interestingly, in contrast, African American adolescents report high engagement in sexual intimacy (Giordano et al., 2005). In an analysis of adolescent self-reported behaviors in the Add Health national survey, Giordano et al. (2005) found that the odds of reporting that their current relationship included sexual intimacy was significantly higher for African American girls compared to White teens. In fact, the most important predictor of sexual behavior for all adolescents was reporting being in a romantic relationship in the previous 18 months (Johnston, Bachman, & O'Malley, 2010). This finding was substantiated by Carver et al. (2003). African American girls and boys were more likely to report having sexual intercourse when compared to White, Hispanic, and Asian adolescents, but reported lower levels of "petting behaviors" (e.g., touching under clothing and genitals; Carver et al., 2003).

Role of romantic relationships in adolescent development

Despite the dearth of studies empirically investigating characteristics of adolescent romantic relationships, theory suggests that adolescent romantic relationships contribute greatly to adolescent development (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Furman and Shaffer propose that adolescents are faced with five key developmental tasks that are impacted by romantic relationships: (a) changes in family relationships; (b) forming close relationships with peers; (c) development of an identity; (d) development of sexuality, and (e) academic achievement and future career planning.

Parent-child Relationships

A significant transformation occurs in the parent-child relationship during adolescence. As they begin to socialize more with peers, adolescents spend less time with family members and more time in activities outside of the home, like dating (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Adolescents may feel less emotionally attached to their parents and become more autonomous, increasing their assertiveness and decreasing submission to parents' authority (Kimmel & Weiner, 1995). Adolescents may also be more likely to turn to their peers and partner rather than their parents for support and guidance. Girls' romantic relationships can also become a source of contention if parents believe they are too young to begin dating or when dating interferes with curfews and social activities (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). On the other hand, when adolescents are involved in a positive and healthy romantic relationship this may foster positive interactions with parents and other family members at home (Furman & Shaffer, 2003).

Relationships with Peers

Adolescents spend more of their free time with their peers than anyone else (Smith, 2003). Adolescents form close relationships with their peers through participation in social activities, working through disagreements, and time spent together. Moreover, romantic relationships may influence adolescents' relationships with peers by increasing their social networks (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002). Through their partners, girls may develop friendships with persons that were not in their initial social network. Romantic partners may also compete with peers for girl's time and affection (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). In other words, adolescents may feel the need to negotiate the amount of time spent between their romantic partner and other friendships. In some cases, girls'

romantic partners may become a close friend and could begin to replace other friend relationships (Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002).

Identity Development

The primary developmental task of adolescence is identity formation. Based on the work of Erikson (1968), adolescents undergo a process whereby they determine who they are, what they believe in, and what they want to do with their lives (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). It is not until adolescents have learned how to separate themselves from their parents and become independent, form new patterns of relationships with peers, think about sexuality and romantic interests, and begin to form plans for their future, that they are able to see how these things fit together to form their identity (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Identity formation involves making commitments to a set of personal and political values and beliefs (ideological stance), to a set of education and career goals (occupational stance); and to a gender orientation which impacts relationships with males and females (interpersonal stance (Kimmel & Weiner, 1995; Shaffer, 2009). Furman and Shaffer (2003) suggest that romantic relationships may facilitate the development of adolescents' identity by prompting them to begin to think about what they are looking for in their partner and how this may relate to their personality traits, interests, and evaluation of self. Conversely, romantic relationships may also damage adolescents' identity formation if girls do not feel attractive to their partners or become involved in an unhealthy relationship (Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002).

Sexual Behavior and Intimacy

It seems natural that romantic relationships will influence adolescents' development of intimacy and sexuality. It is within the context of romantic relationships

that many adolescents have their first sexual experience. In addition, it is thought that through romantic relationships adolescents discover what is attractive and arousing (Knoester, Haynie, & Stephens, 2006). Adolescents determine what they like in their partner and reconcile their emerging sexual desires. Research also suggests that it is during this period that adolescents establish or solidify their sexual orientation (Bukowski et al., 1993).

Future Planning and Academic Achievement

Romantic relationships may also have a tremendous impact on girls' academic achievement and future aspirations (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Time spent with a romantic partner may distract from school work or may promote achievement if couples study together and provide support. In fact, Halpern et al. (2000), in a study of the relationship between intelligence and sexual activity among adolescents completing the 1995 Add Health survey, found that romantic involvement and sexual activity were negatively correlated with academic achievement. Adolescents who reported better grades in school and had high expectations about attending college were less likely to report recent sexual behavior (Halpern et al., 2000). However, girls whose partner encourages them to do well in school may also positively influence their plans for the future. An examination of students' grades and those of their current romantic partners found concordance, even after controlling for parents' education (Giordano, Phelps, Manning, & Longmore, 2008). That is, students' grades and their current romantic partners' grades were similar to each other, indicating a tendency to select a partner with similar academic achievement. Moreover, adolescent romantic relationships could provide a context for teens to share ideas and dreams regarding marriage and children

(Manning, Giordano, Longmore, & Hocevar, 2009). The myriad of ways romantic relationships affect adolescent development have yet to be fully explored, but it is clear that these relationships warrant more attention by researchers to better understand their relationship trajectories.

Thus far, adolescent developmental processes enacted through normative or healthy romantic relationships have been discussed. Unfortunately, national data suggests that approximately 1 in 10 adolescents will become involved in an unhealthy or harmful relationship during adolescence (Eaton et al., 2009; Howard, Wang, & Yan, 2007; Raiford, Wingood, & Diclemente, 2007). Unhealthy romantic relationships may have tremendous influence on girls' relationship trajectories.

Intimate Partner Violence in Adolescence

The prevalence of teen dating violence varies significantly from study to study due to differences in the definition and/or measurement of violence and the population studied. However, the most reliable source of data is collected by the CDC annually as a part of the YRBS. Overall, CDC data suggest that approximately 1 in 10 adolescents self-report physical abuse from a dating partner each year (CDC, 2010c). African Americans report a dating violence prevalence around 9.4% in adolescence (Fehringer & Hindin, 2009). The nature of this violence has been grouped into 3 categories: verbal/emotional, physical, or sexual abuse (CDC, 2010c).

Verbal and/or Emotional Abuse

Verbal and/or emotional abuse is characterized by threatening a partner and/or harming his or her self-worth (CDC, 2010c). This type of abuse can come in the form of name calling, making a partner feel guilty, bullying, purposeful embarrassment, or

controlling behaviors such as keeping him/her away from friends and family. According to national data from the YRBS, approximately 1 in 5 teens report being a victim of emotional abuse (Milot & Ludden, 2009). In a study of African American males and females aged 16-24, West and Rose (2000) found that verbal/emotional abuse was the most commonly reported form of violence among participants. The most highly endorsed acts among participants were hurt feelings, made she or he feel guilty, said mean things, insulted, and criticized. An examination of data collected by the Add Health study, that includes a nationally representative sample of high school students, revealed that 12% of African American girls aged 12 – 17 reported that their dating partner had insulted them in front of others (Carver et al., 2003). Another 17% of African American girls stated that their partner swore at them and 5% reported that their partner threatened them with violence (Carver et al., 2003). There is some indication that the prevalence of verbal and emotional abuse may have increased in recent years (Raiford et al., 2007). Raiford and colleagues found that of 147 African American adolescent girls who reported experiencing dating violence, 35% reported verbal abuse (Raiford et al., 2007). It is important to reiterate that the discrepancies in prevalence of dating violence is likely influenced by the sample (national, convenience, select) and the definition of forms of violence used in the study.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is the most easily identified form of dating violence. Physical abuse is defined as the intentional or purposeful pushing, hitting, shoving, or kicking by a dating partner (CDC, 2010c). The CDC reports that approximately 10% of adolescents nationwide report being physically hurt (i.e. pushed, hit, shoved, or kicked) by a dating

partner in the past 12 months (Jouriles et al., 2009). African American girls consistently report a higher prevalence of physical violence when compared to their White counterparts (Eaton et al., 2009). Based on data from the 1995 Add Health survey, Carver et al. (2003) found that 13% of African American girls, aged 12 – 18, in comparison to 7% of White girls, reported that their partner had pushed or shoved them. 1999 National YRBS data indicate an even higher prevalence among high school girls- 14% of African American girls report physical dating violence victimization (Howard & Wang, 2003). Furthermore, a cross-sectional survey of African American women and men aged 16-24, found that over half of African American women reported experiencing physical violence; 53% reported being slapped, 68% reported being pushed, grabbed, or shoved, and 53% had a partner who threatened to hit or throw something at them (West & Rose, 2000). A recent study, based on a community sample of African American girls aged 14 – 18, reinforces these statistics (Raiford et al., 2007); 18% of African American girls who reported having ever experiencing dating violence stated the nature of this violence was physical abuse only (Raiford et al., 2007).

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is defined as forcing a partner to engage in a sex act when he or she does not or cannot consent (CDC, 2010c). While few studies have investigated sexual abuse within teen dating relationships, data from the 2009 YRBS indicate that approximately 11% of high school girls have been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to (Eaton et al., 2009). Among African American women aged 16-24, 33% report experiencing some form of sexual aggression from a dating partner (West & Rose, 2000). That is, 41% described the aggression as forced

kissing, 36% reported their partner tried to force them to have intercourse, and 27% reported that their partner forced breast/chest fondling (West & Rose, 2000).

Approximately 11% of African American adolescents report that experiences with dating violence persist into young adulthood (Halpern et al., 2009). African Americans were 1.76 times more likely to report dating violence in both adolescence and young adulthood when compared to their White counterparts (Halpern et al., 2009). Research has shown many factors place adolescents at risk of experiencing an abusive relationship. These factors can be characterized as individual, family, and contextual/environmental factors.

Individual factors

A myriad of studies examine individual-level or socio-demographic factors that are correlated with adolescent reports of dating violence victimization (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Glass, et al., 2003). In a systematic review of published dating research for adolescents and young adults, Vezina and Herbert (2007) found inconsistent links between age, socio-economic status, race/ethnicity and dating violence (Ehrensaft et al., 2003). For example, while Howard and Wang (2003) revealed that being Black or Hispanic placed one at twice the risk of being a victim of dating violence, Wolitzky-Taylor found that race/ethnicity was not a significant risk factor for experiencing sexual or physical violence (Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2008). Mixed results related to race/ethnicity may be attributed to differences in sampling and to the study's inability to control for other factors, e.g. socioeconomic status and exposure to violence, that are associated with ethnicity and dating violence (Vezina & Hebert, 2007). Consistent results do show that feelings of depression, suicidal ideation and behaviors, engagement

in physical fighting and believing that violence is tolerable and justifiable in certain situations, places adolescents at increased risk for dating violence victimization (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Glass et al., 2003; Howard & Wang, 2003; Howard et al., 2007). Other externalizing behaviors that have a strong link to dating violence include school conduct problems (e.g. expulsion or suspension from school), substance use, and risky sexual behaviors, including multiple partners and inconsistent condom use (Vezina & Herbert, 2007; Glass et al., 2003, Howard et al., 2007). During a year-long study, African American adolescents who reported using drugs were twice as likely to report abuse at the 1 year follow-up compared with girls who did not report using drugs (Raiford et al., 2007). In summary, while there are some inconsistencies across studies regarding individual factors related to dating violence among adolescents, the majority of studies show that age, race/ethnicity, internalizing symptoms (e.g. suicidal ideation), and externalizing behaviors (e.g. substance use, risky sexual behaviors) are linked to reports of dating violence.

Family factors

Studies have long found correlations between family factors and adolescent experiences with dating violence. Vezina and Herbert (2007) note eight separate studies which reported that not living in a household with both parents acts as a risk factor for dating violence. They speculate that adolescents in such families may be more likely to witness conflict between parents and then are desensitized or less shocked to experience conflict in their relationships. In general, exposure to violence in one's family, either through witnessing parental violence or being the victim of violence/abuse from a parent, places adolescents at risk for dating violence (Vezina & Herbert, 2007; Glass et al.,

2003). Foshee and colleagues (2004) found that children who were hit by an adult were at greater risk of later becoming the victim of serious physical dating violence. Furthermore, Maas et al. (2010) found that the child maltreatment was predictive of teen dating violence victimization among female students in grades 11 and 12 participating in a longitudinal study in the Pacific region. In addition, some studies also suggest growing up in a home environment characterized by a lack of parental affection, support, supervision, or excessive discipline, can increase the risk of dating violence victimization for adolescents (Vezina & Herbert, 2007; Glass et al., 2003, Howard & Wang, 2003; Ehrensaft et al., 2003). A 20-year longitudinal study of girls from ages 13 to 33 years showed that those who did not feel close to their parents and were exposed to harsh discipline (i.e. power assertive) were at increased risk of being victimized during adolescence (Ehrensaft et al., 2003). Vezina and Hebert (2007) suggest that the lack of parental closeness and affection may lead adolescents to believe that they do not deserve to be loved or treated with respect, resulting in involvement in unhealthy dating relationships. As will be discussed in greater detail, family religious identity, beliefs, and practices have been found to function as a protective factor against violence victimization (Howard et al., 2007).

Contextual/Environmental factors

Research is beginning to show children who grow up in an environment (i.e., neighborhood) characterized by persistent exposures to violence may be at risk for experiencing dating violence during adolescence (Maas et al., 2010). In a systematic review of studies related to adolescent dating violence, analysis showed that exposure to community violence (e.g. having seen someone assaulted and witnessing a murder or

shooting), may desensitize adolescents to violence which may lead to them seeing violence as acceptable in a relationship (Glass et al., 2003). In addition, access and exposure to weapons in the community is a strong predictor for reporting violence in dating relationships (Glass et al., 2003).

Research shows that positive neighborhood characteristics, like collective efficacy, connectedness, and neighborhood monitoring may be associated with adolescent dating violence (Banyard et al., 2006; Champion, Foley, Sigmon-Smith, Sutfin, & DuRant, 2008; Jain, Buka, Subramanian, & Molnar, 2010). Collective efficacy, defined as the community's cohesiveness and residents' willingness to intervene for the common good, was found to lower the risk of dating violence perpetration by male youth aged 13 to 19 (Jain et al., 2010). Another study of adolescents aged 11 to 19 found that perceptions of neighborhood monitoring was associated with decreased reports of physical and sexual dating violence perpetration (Banyard et al., 2006).

An additional possible environmental influence is mass media. In her conceptual model of the potential influence of media use as a risk factor teen dating violence, Manganello (2008) proposes that the media provides a model for how to act in dating relationships. Adolescents may be influenced by how teens are portrayed on television and movies and how they interact and engage in dating behaviors. Media may also provide a source of information on dating and romantic relationships (i.e. internet sites). For instance, a study found that 23% of adolescents used the internet to access information about dating violence (Borzekowski & Rickert, 2001). While very few studies have empirically tested the relationship between media and dating violence, Johnson et al. (1995) found that African American females ages 11 – 16 who watched rap

music videos were more likely to consider dating violence an acceptable behavior than those females who did not watch the videos. Similar results were found among high school students who watched professional wrestling. Teens who watched wrestling matches were more likely to engage in various forms of violence (DuRant, Champion, & Wolfson, 2006). However, despite these results, all studies suggest more research is needed to determine if media use is a risk factor for dating violence (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Glass et al., 2003; Johnson et al., 1995; Manganello, 2008).

Although many associations have been found between adolescent dating violence and individual, family, and contextual factors, few studies are able to definitively say that these factors are predictors of dating violence. The majority of research studies have used cross-sectional data and, thus, are unable to draw causal conclusions. In addition, current research lacks an in-depth analysis of adolescents' dating world and how they understand influences on their romantic relationships.

Protective factors

There are several protective factors emerging in adolescent dating violence research (Jouriles et al., 2009). Linder and Collins found that during mid-adolescence high-quality friendships, characterized by security, disclosure, closeness, low levels of conflict, and effective resolution of conflicts were associated with reduced likelihood of experiencing dating violence (Linder & Collins, 2005). In addition, studies have found that adolescent scholastic achievement and aptitude are associated with decreased risk of dating violence (Halpern et al., 2001). Moreover, Raiford et al (2007) found that African American females who had a good understanding of the components of a healthy relationship were less likely to report abuse. Adolescents who reported low

understanding of healthy relationships were twice as a likely to report abuse after 1 year of follow-up (Raiford et al., 2007).

One protective factor that may be especially relevant for African American adolescents is religious involvement. Participating in regular religious activities appears to act as a protective factor against physical dating violence (Howard & Wang, 2003; Nonnemaker, McNeely, & Blum, 2003). While Vezina and Herbert's (2007) systematic review of dating violence studies report some conflicting results for the protective role of religion, Gover (2004) found that adolescents who reported religious activities were less likely to participate in high risk behaviors that decreased their odds of becoming involved in a violent dating relationship.   Other studies found that not having any religious affiliation and not considering religion as important were both risk factors for smoking, sexual and psychological (emotional) violence (Johnston et al., 2010; Nonnemaker, McNeely, & Blum, 2006).

The role of religion in adolescents' lives

In the last decade scholars have noted that there is little known about the role of religion in adolescents' lives (Smith & Denton, 2005; Wallace Jr. & Williams, 1997). Wallace and Williams in 1998 and Smith and Denton in 2005 purported that the vast majority of studies focusing on religion were with adults, while few have included samples of adolescents (Smith & Denton, 2005; Wallace Jr. & Williams, 1997; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002). After a thorough review of published studies in child and adolescent journals, Benson (1996) noted the lack of attention to religious and spiritual development from childhood to adolescence. Between 1990 and 2003, only 0.9% of 3,123 articles referenced "religion," "religious development," "spirituality," or "spiritual development"

as key words. However, interest in the role of religion in the lives of adolescents is experiencing somewhat of an increase. A reexamination of the frequency of publications on these topics from 2002 to 2008 revealed 1.3% of the 1,530 articles referenced religion (King & Roeser, 2009). Moreover, the National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR; see www.youthandreligion.org), developed in 2001, is a national random-digit-dial telephone survey that explores the religious lives of American youth from adolescence into young adulthood. Results from this 2002-2003 survey administration show that religion plays a significant role in the lives of many adolescents. The most commonly studied variables, in terms of how religion is conceptualized in these studies of adolescents, were: religious affiliation; self-rated religious importance; religious activities that adolescents engage in alone (private religiosity); and involvement in religious congregations or church attendance (public religiosity) (Banyard et al., 2006; Schwartz, 2006). These variables form the basis for the proposed study's examination of the role of religious socialization in African American girls' ideas about ideal dating relationships.

Religious Affiliation

Religious affiliation is the self-identified association of a person with a religion, denomination or sub-denominational religious group (e.g. Christian, Baptist, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, etc.). Findings from Waves 1 (2002) and II (2005) data collection of the NSYR showed that the majority of American adolescents reported Protestant (e.g. Baptist, Methodist, and Church of Christ) religious affiliation (56% and 48% in 2002 and 2005, respectively) (Banyard et al., 2006). Approximately another 20% of adolescents reported Catholic affiliation. The remaining reported affiliations included Mormon (2.5%), Jewish (1.5%), Muslim (0.5%), Unitarian Universalist (0.1%), and a substantial

percentage reporting no religious affiliation (15% and 24% in 2002 and 2005, respectively). Findings also show that adolescents' religious affiliation is generally the same as one or both of their parents (Banyard et al., 2006; Smith & Denton, 2005). In 2002, NSYR data showed that between 72% and 78% of adolescents reported that their religious affiliation and beliefs were "somewhat" to "very similar" to their mother and father (Smith & Denton, 2005).

Religious affiliations can provide the moral structure and framework for adolescents (Smith & Denton, 2005). As adolescents form their identity, the values and beliefs that are provided by their religious affiliation can influence the way they see the world and themselves in it (King & Roeser, 2009). Religious affiliations intentionally provide beliefs, moral codes, and values from which adolescents can build a personal belief system (Smith & Denton, 2005). Regarding adolescent romantic relationships, the beliefs and values provided by one's religious affiliation may emphasize the significance of committed relationships (Ellison & Anderson, 2001). For example, African American adolescents who endorse a conservative belief system may have different beliefs about what constitutes appropriate romantic relationship behavior when compared to African American adolescents who have no religious affiliation (Ellison & Anderson, 2001).

Public Religiosity

As previously defined in Chapter 1, public religiosity refers to the extent to which one participates in religious services, youth groups, and/or attends a church, synagogue, temple or mosque (Bahr et al., 1998). In 2002, over 40% of adolescents aged 12 – 18 surveyed in the NYSR reported attending religious services once a week or more; 19% reported attending one to three times a month; 22% reported attending a few or many

times a year; and only 18% reported never attending services (Banyard, et al., 2006a).

Interestingly, a comparison of 2002 and 2005 data from the NSYR show a decline in

public religious practices. Twenty-nine percent of adolescents in 2005 (in contrast to

over 40% in 2002) reported attending religious services at least once a week and a larger

percentage reported never attending services (28%; Denton et al., 2008). However,

findings from the 2009 national Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey of U.S. high school

students (grades 8, 10, and 12) indicated that 31% of White and 41% of African

American adolescents attend religious services about once a week or more (Johnston, et

al., 2010). Discrepancies in the findings from the NYSR and the MTF surveys may

reflect differences in sampling and time. That is, MTF does not include all high school

students and the NYSR study last collected data in 2005 versus 2009 for the MTF.

Another measure of public religiosity that was captured on the 2005 NYSR survey

administration was participation in a religious youth group. Thirty-nine percent of

adolescents reportedly attended a religious youth group at least a few times a year.

Overall adolescents, African American adolescents in particular, reported regular

participation in public religiosity activities. It is through involvement in public religious

services and activities, that adolescents receive increased access to helpful networks,

social capital, and mentors (P. E. King & Roeser, 2009). Religious activities offer an

opportunity for adolescents to develop relationships with persons that provide helpful

information, sound advice and social support (P. E. King & Roeser, 2009).

Private Religiosity

Another dimension of adolescent religiosity is the extent to which youth engage in

religious and/or spiritual activities in private. These activities could include personal

prayer, meditation, reading scriptures, and fasting (Bahr, et al., 1998). Data from the 2005 NYSR, indicated that 30% of adolescents reported praying alone at least once a day; 26% reported praying alone once a week or a few times a week; 17% prayed alone one to two times per month; 10% prayed alone less than once a month, and 17% never prayed alone (Denton et al., 2008). The frequency of adolescents who reported reading scriptures alone is substantially lower than private prayer; 38% reported reading scriptures alone one to two times a month or more and 48% reported never reading scriptures. Findings from the 2005 Wave II data collection of the NYSR showed that while adolescents reported lower conventional religious activities like prayer and scripture reading compared to 2002, other practices like fasting and meditation experienced slight increases between 2002 and 2005. Private religiosity may also include the degree to which adolescents value religion as important to their daily lives (Bahr, et al., 1998; J. Nonnemaker, et al., 2006; J. M. Nonnemaker, et al., 2003). In 2009, MTF data revealed that compared to 26% of White students, 53% of African American students reported that religion is very important in their life (Johnston, et al., 2010).

Socio-Demographic differences in Religious Behaviors

There is variability in religiosity (i.e. the qualities/aspects of one's religiousness) by age, gender, race and geographic location. Studies generally show slight decreases in religious service attendance and public activities among older adolescents, i.e. 17-18 year olds (Haynie, 2002; Regnerus, Smith, & Fritsch, 2003; Schwartz, 2006). Denton et al. (2008) propose that the decrease is a result of the structure and availability of religious activities for this age group. Many religious education classes (e.g. Sunday school) and youth groups are geared toward early and mid-adolescents (i.e. 13-16) who are of school-

age. As adolescents begin to "age out" of these activities there may be limited

opportunities for them to participate in other religious activities. On average, girls are

more likely to report engaging in religious activities (Smith & Denton, 2005; Regnerus et

al., 2003). Smith and Denton (2005) report that adolescent girls, in comparison to

adolescent boys, attend religious services more frequently, see religion as shaping their

lives more, pray more alone, and are more involved in religious youth groups. Data from

the 2009 national MTF survey of American adolescents reports that African Americans

are more likely than Whites to report attending religious services once a month or more

(61% compared to 45%; Jain, et al., 2010). Adolescents in the southern region of the

United States also appear to be more religious. Southern adolescents were more likely to

report they attend religious services once a week or more and that religion is very

important in their lives when compared to adolescents in the Northeast, North Central

(Mid-West), and Western (West coast) regions of the United States (Jain, et al., 2010;

Schwartz, 2006). Given these findings, African American adolescents in the Southern

U.S. may be more likely to report religious influences on their romantic lives when

compared to those in other regions.

Religious Influences

Given the importance of religion among adolescents, and the frequency of their

participation in religious activities, it is important to consider how religion may impact

the developmental processes occurring during adolescence. As described earlier,

adolescence is a pivotal developmental period in child development. It is during

adolescence that teens develop their identity and sexuality, experience changes in their

family relationships, form close relationships with peers, and develop plans for their

future (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). As a result, religion may play an important role in adolescents' identity and intimacy development and provide direct and indirect influences on adolescents' beliefs and behaviors related to romantic relationships.

Influence of Religious Dimensions on Adolescent Development

Identity Formation

As noted earlier, identity formation is the principal development task during adolescence. Erikson suggests that religious beliefs, values, and morals "enable youth to make sense of the world and understand their place in it" (Erikson, 1968). It is upon these religious beliefs, values, and morals that adolescents begin to build their personal belief system. This belief system becomes the basis for which adolescents begin to define themselves and understand how they are connected to others in the world. Erikson also proposes that religion gives meaning to life and guides behavior, and without it, adolescents could become confused about their identity. Moreover, Smith and Denton (2005) suggest that personal experiences with a higher power or God figure may solidify the importance of religion in terms of adolescents' identity formation.

In addition, religious communities provide a venue for adolescents to connect with others who share their beliefs and view of the world. Religious communities may promote positive self-images among adolescents by providing opportunities for positively reflected appraisals in youth groups and religious classes (Regnerus et al., 2003). A study of rural youth showed that church attendees made personal decisions to become committed to their faith as a result of some turning point experience during adolescence (Champion et al., 2008). These youth also reported that Christian role models (e.g. pastors and youth leaders) at their church and participation in religious activities

contributed to their development as a person and their future goals (Good & Willoughby, 2007). Christian friends were also identified as being important to youth's development of goals, values, and overall sense of identity (Good & Willoughby, 2007). Moreover religious involvement appeared to influence the family goals of adolescents. Church-attending adolescents reported clear goals regarding marriage and future families, such as wanting a career in their hometown to maintain current friendships that may have been influenced by the importance of family in their religious culture.

Other studies have found that religious involvement is significantly related to adolescents' self-esteem and attitude towards self (Bowen, 2008; Cercone et al., 2005; Smith, 2003). Furrow et al (2004) found that adolescents who reported a religious identity were more likely to report that they have a sense of meaning, direction, and fulfillment in life. In addition, data from the 1996 MTF survey revealed that high school seniors who attended religious services and said religion is very important to them were significantly more likely to "take positive attitudes toward themselves" than seniors who never attended services and said religion is not important (Smith & Faris, 2002).

Religious Identity

Teens may develop a strong religious identity during adolescence. This identity may be characterized by beliefs regarding appropriate behaviors in romantic relationships (i.e. sex and intimacy). For example, adolescents whose religious beliefs oppose the use of contraception may be more likely to delay their sexual debut and equate sex with marriage (Rostosky, Wilcox, Wright, & Randall, 2004). In fact, Bearman and Bruckner (2001) found that White, Asian, and Hispanic adolescents with higher religiosity scores (i.e. high frequency of prayer, church attendance, and importance of religion) were more

likely to delay their sexual debut in middle and late adolescence (after age 15). Religious

adolescents may also be more likely to identify other ways to be intimate with their

partner (e.g. heavy petting, grinding) in order to not violate the religious values ingrained

in their identity (Rostosky et al., 2004).

Positive Health Trajectories

It is no surprise that many studies have found significant relationships between

religious variables and health outcomes among adolescents. Religion appears to

influence positive youth development (Regnerus et al., 2003). In a review of published

literature regarding the influence of religion on various positive outcomes during

adolescence, Regnerus reports that religious attendance and involvement positively

influences adolescent educational aspirations and attainment (Halpern et al., 2001).

Regnerus suggests this relationship may be a result of the social support that adolescents

receive from their religious community that reinforces values related to educational

achievement (Halpern et al., 2001). A recent study of a national random sample of teens

revealed that perceived importance of religion, attendance at religious services, and

participation in religious youth groups significantly contributed to explaining the

variation in smoking, alcohol use, truancy, sexual activity, marijuana use, and depression

(CDC, 2010b). That is, as the importance of religion, attendance at services, and

participation in youth groups increased, reports of substance use, truancy, and depression

decreased. These health risk behaviors were inversely related to the religious variables.

An inverse relationship between violence and religiosity was also demonstrated in this

study, as was a significant relationship between perceived importance of religion and

reported interpersonal violence perpetration. Adolescents who reported higher

importance of religion were less likely to report having hit or threatened to hit someone else.

Negative Health Trajectories

It is also possible that religion could have a negative influence on adolescent development. Studies have found that individuals who endorse stereotypical gender role attitudes are more likely to blame the victim when presented with domestic violence scenarios and less likely to see the seriousness in domestic violence scenarios (Ayyub, 2000). In particular, Judeo-Christian and Islamic beliefs may reinforce male dominant views. Jeffords (1984) suggests that Judeo-Christian beliefs may contribute to a patriarchal system that assigns women a subordinate role to men. Morgan (2004) found that religiously devout college women endorse more traditional gender roles when compared to women who were less religiously committed (i.e. less religious service attendance, engagement in prayer, participation in church social activities, reading the Bible, and feelings that God loves them). This finding is consistent with the work of Berkel and colleagues (2004) who found that White college students who endorsed traditional gender role attitudes were more likely to support the use of violence against women than those with egalitarian views. Similarly, religiously devout adolescent girls may believe that they have fewer rights and less power in their romantic relationships. Girls may feel subordinate to their partner and allow the use of violence in the relationship and may not feel empowered to leave an abusive relationship. More research is needed to understand how religious and non-religious girls view gender roles and their relationship to violence in today's adolescent romantic relationships.

Many of the relationships found between religion and health outcomes demonstrate a direct and independent effect while controlling for other potential influences. For example, Milot and Ludden (2009) found that the importance of religion in an adolescent's life was a significant protective factor for substance use after controlling for parental social support. However, some scholars suggest that religion may also have an indirect effect on adolescents (Regnerus et al., 2003; Wallace Jr. & Williams, 1997). For instance, adolescents' Christian friends may discourage them from becoming romantically involved with someone who is not a Christian, creating an indirect influence operating through social norms and/or peer pressure, on adolescents' selection of a romantic partner. Parental religious beliefs and practices may also contribute indirectly through religion to affect adolescents' romantic relationships by determining where they go to school, and restricting who they can be friends with, as well as their engagement in social activities outside of their religious community (Knoester et al., 2006). This mediated religious influence provided by family and friends could potentially protect adolescents from engaging in an unhealthy dating relationship.

The Role of the Church and Religion in the African American Community

The prevalence of religious beliefs and practices is particularly salient among certain groups i.e. females, African Americans, Southern U.S. residents. Within the African American community the role of religion and the church have a long history and tradition of providing support and leadership (Giger et al., 2008; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Religious organizations are seen as not only a place for seeking spiritual guidance and social interactions, but also a force in political welfare and social action. They are often the most visible, respected, and heavily frequented institutions in African American

communities (Campbell et al., 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Eric Lincoln, a historian of the African American church in America stated, "to understand the power of the African American church, it must first be understood that there is no distinction between the African American church and the Black community. The Church is the spiritual face of Black subculture, whether one is a member or not is beside the point" (Lincoln, 1984, p.96). Religious institutions provide unifying morals, beliefs, and practices for African American families. Parents bring, and sometimes force, their children to come to church because they believe that it will provide a dose of moral education that children can use throughout their daily lives (Smith & Denton, 2005). Religious institutions provide opportunities for children to be socialized through watching and observing potential role models (e.g. clergy and church elders) and develop leadership skills and talents (e.g. leading youth group and singing in the choir). Parents hope that the values and lessons imparted to their children will help them to make good decisions and resist negative influences as they mature to adulthood (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

Among African American adolescents, the role of religion may be particularly influential in how girls select a partner and engage in romantic relationships. The direct influence of religion may decrease risky sexual behavior and increase their expectations for their partner. For example, African American girls who are religiously committed may look for a partner who is of the same faith as their own. Smith and Denton (2005) found that 95% of adolescents characterized as devoted (attending services weekly or more, very or extremely close to God) and 57% of adolescents characterized as regulars (attending services weekly, but less religious than devoted adolescents) reported

believing in waiting for marriage to have sex. Girls may also be more likely to develop

future family goals that include a partner who is religious and possesses certain positive

characteristics. Indirect religious influences on African American girls' romantic

relationships could include a social support system that discourages sex before marriage.

The Socialization Influence Framework proposed by Wallace Jr. and Williams (1997)

provides an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding how African Americans

girls' perception of their ideal partner may be influenced by religion.

Figure 1. Socialization Influence Framework
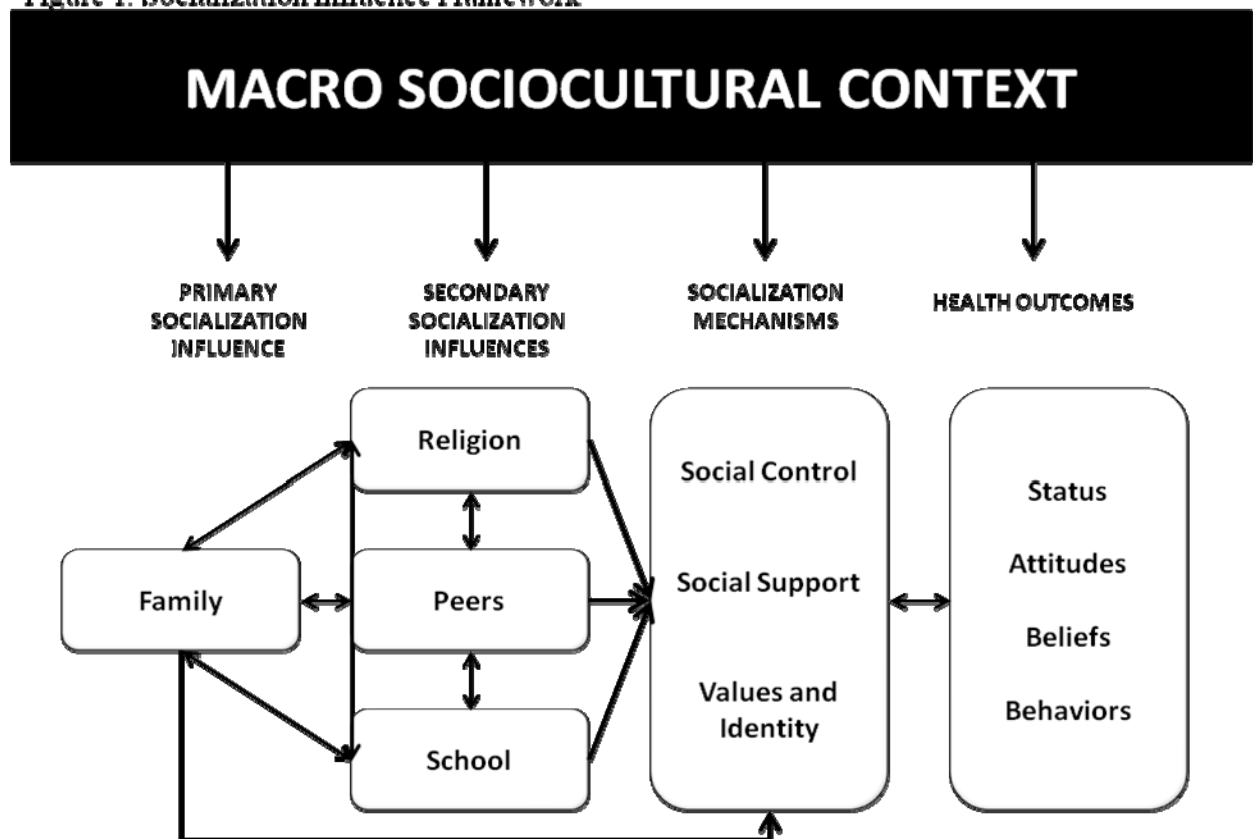
Theoretical underpinnings of the proposed study

Wallace Jr. and Williams (1997) propose that adolescent romantic relationships may be influenced by multiple sources of socialization. Socialization is the "process by which a human being, beginning at infancy, acquires the habits, beliefs, and accumulated knowledge of society through education and training for adult status" (Merriam Webster's, 2007). Wallace Jr. and Williams propose that adolescent health outcomes are influenced by a process of socialization that "begins in childhood and extends over the life course" (Wallace Jr. & Williams, 1997, p. 460). Socialization occurs across various domains of influence and through several mediated pathways to shape an adolescent's life.

According to the Socialization Influence Framework (SIF), parents are the primary socialization influence on adolescents. Family may include an adolescent's parents, guardians, siblings, grandparents, and other extended relatives. Families can create the foundation for an adolescent's religious norms and values by encouraging prayer, church attendance, and ritual, i.e. celebrating religious holidays (Wallace Jr. & Williams, 1997). For example, children can be first influenced by their parents' encouraging prayer before bed and at dinner time. Families may also choose to have children receive specific rites, like first communion, christening and coming of age ceremonies, such as a bar or bat mitzvah.

As children mature, they are exposed to secondary socialization influences-religion, peers, and school. While adolescents may perceive less direct influence from their parents while with friends and in school, the family remains an important socializing influence, even if adolescents do not realize it. In school, adolescents may become

exposed to different religious beliefs and practices through their friends. Conversely,

parents may choose to shape secondary sources of socialization to correspond to their

religious beliefs (Schwartz, 2006). For example, parents for whom religion is important,

may not only require that their adolescent participate in religious services and practices

(e.g. Sunday school), but may also choose to send their adolescents to religious schools

and encourage their children to embrace friendships with adolescents of similar religious

backgrounds.

The model suggests that the primary and secondary socialization influences

operate through three mechanisms, social control, social support, and internalization of

values and identity to determine adolescent health outcomes. The SIF suggests that

parents who purposely choose to send their adolescent to religious schools in order to

reinforce religious beliefs are exercising social control. Peers and religious schools may

also employ social control by pressuring adolescents to conform to positive or negative

dating behaviors. For example, schools may not allow girls to dance with boys at school

parties. Social support can be defined as the appraisal, belonging, and tangible support

received from one's social network (Schafer et al., 1981). Adolescents whose parents

restrict their social network to only peers of similar religious background are also

restricting their social support system (Smith, 2003). Adolescents may benefit from a

social support system that includes friends with similar religious beliefs and behaviors.

Research has shown that adolescents' friendships have a tremendous effect on their

involvement in delinquent behaviors, such as vandalism, drug use, and violence (Haynie,

2002). Moreover, as described in detail above, religion may influence adolescents'

identity formation. Religious beliefs, instilled by parents and reinforced at religious

schools, can form the basis for adolescent values, morals, and become a central component to how they think about themselves.

Finally, the SIF suggests that these socialization mechanisms are also influenced by a larger socio-cultural context in which adolescents live. The economy, political atmosphere, and the media (i.e. television, movies, and internet) are broader macro-sources of influence on adolescents. For example, teen television shows depicting sexually active or violent romantic relationships may negatively influence adolescents. This age of technology and social networking may also make it easier for adolescents to engage in relationships with persons that they would not have ordinarily had an opportunity to meet.

The SIF is a useful model to examine how religious values and practices are passed on, modeled and reinforced by parents, schools, and peers to influence African American adolescent's perceptions of an ideal relationship. Thus, it constituted the conceptual framework for this dissertation study.

In conclusion, extant literature underscores the need for more research to understand influences on adolescent girls' romantic relationships. It is important to understand how African American adolescents perceive their ideal relationship as this may form the basis for romantic relationships in the future. African American girls who do not fully understand the characteristics of a healthy relationship may be more vulnerable to dating violence in adolescence and in adulthood. This study sought to uncover how African American girls characterized and perceived the ideal healthy dating relationship in high school and in the future. Given the historical role of religion in the

African American community, this study also explored how religious beliefs influenced

girls' perception of and engagement in dating relationships.

Chapter 3: Study 1: *"If you don't have honesty in a relationship, then there is no relationship":* African American Girls' Characterization of Healthy Dating Relationships, A Qualitative Study[1]

Introduction

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Choose Respect initiative (http://www.cdc.gov/chooserespect/), adolescents need help from their parents, teachers, coaches, and family to recognize and understand the characteristics of healthy dating relationships. The Choose Respect initiative was developed by the CDC as a national effort to motivate adolescents to "challenge harmful beliefs about dating violence and take steps to form healthy and respectful relationships" (CDC, 2010a). The CDC issued a comprehensive list of healthy characteristics that should be a part of adolescent romantic relationships. These characteristics include: *respect, good communication, trust, compromise, individuality, anger control, efficient problem solving, fair fighting, understanding, positive self-confidence, honesty, and inspiring each other to be role models* (CDC, 2010a). Moreover, an adolescent relationship should be "free from physical, emotional, and sexual violence" (CDC, 2010c).

Little research has investigated the qualities that adolescents' themselves attribute to a healthy dating relationship. Given the increase in prevalence of African American girls reporting teen dating violence since 1999 (CDC, 2008), more research is needed to understand how girls perceive healthy adolescent romantic relationships. It is important to understand how African American adolescents perceive healthy dating relationships as this may form the basis for romantic relationships now and in the future. African

---

[1] *A paper to be submitted to Journal of Primary Prevention*

American girls who do not fully understand the characteristics of a healthy relationship may be more vulnerable to dating violence in adolescence and in adulthood.

Implications for Teen Dating Violence

Teen dating violence (TDV) constitutes a major public health concern in the United States. Defined as "the physical, sexual, or psychological/emotional violence within a dating relationship," annually more than 16,000 (roughly 1 in 10) adolescent males and females report being hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend and research suggests that over 400,000 adolescents have been victims of serious dating violence at some point in their lives (Jouriles et al., 2009; Shaffer, 2009). Approximately 8% of adolescent high school students report having been physically forced to have sexual intercourse (Howard et al., 2007). The prevalence of physical dating violence may not be uniform across racial/ethnic subgroups. According to 2009 national YRBS survey of U.S. students in grades 9 – 12, the prevalence of dating violence is highest among African American females and males (14%) when compared to Hispanic (11%) and White (8%) peers (Eaton et al., 2009). An even higher number of adolescents report psychological victimization, or being verbally and psychologically abused by their dating partner. Based on data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health Study), a national school-based study of adolescents in grades 7-12, approximately 3 in 10 youth report psychological victimization in the previous year (Mulford, 2008).

African Americans are disproportionately represented in urban neighborhoods characterized by high levels of violence, crime, drug activity, and poverty (Martinez, Rosenfeld, & Mares, 2008; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). African American

girls, particularly in those urban areas may be at increased risk of teen dating violence

victimization. Among a convenience sample of African American girls aged 14-18 years,

a 28% prevalence of dating violence was found after a 1-year longitudinal study (Raiford,

et al., 2007). A higher likelihood of dating violence has been found to be correlated with

living in a neighborhood with high levels of poverty, violence, and social disorganization

(Banyard, et al., 2006; Glass et al., 2003; Malik et al., 1997). Adolescents' exposure to

multiple forms of violence (e.g., having witnessed a shooting or stabbing) in their

community is significantly positively associated with violence in dating relationships

(Malik et al., 1997). One explanation for the observed relationship between

neighborhood violence and TDV is that after witnessing violence in their community

and/or home, girls may come to accept violence perpetrated by their partners as

acceptable and appropriate or normative (Johnson et al., 2005). This prevalence may also

be compounded by the fact that some African American parents struggle with how to

teach their children about healthy relationships and how to prevent dating violence

(Akers et al., 2010). In fact, based on trend analysis of national YRBS data, the

prevalence of physical dating violence for African American females has experienced a

slight increase from 1999 to 2009 from 12.4% to 14.3% (CDC, 2012a).

African American families living in communities plagued with violence may need

increased support and guidance to identify examples of healthy dating relationships that

they can model. Indeed, Raiford et al (2007) found that African American girls who

experienced dating violence were twice as likely as their non-victimized peers to report

less understanding of healthy relationships. Adolescents who reported less understanding

of healthy relationships, as self-reported on a relationship knowledge scale, were twice as

a likely to report abuse after 1 year of follow-up (Raiford et al., 2007). This adds further strength to the argument that if girls are not equipped with the necessary skills or knowledge to identify healthy romantic relationships they may be more vulnerable to experiencing dating violence.

Consistent with the CDC's efforts to promote healthy teen relationships and prevent TDV, this study explored the characteristics that African American adolescent girls ascribe to a healthy dating relationship. More specifically, the aims of this study were to: (1) investigate how African American adolescent girls characterize healthy relationships and (2) describe the connotative meanings of these characteristics in relationship to the CDC's 12 healthy relationship qualities.

Methods

Setting and Participants

The sample consisted of 33 African American girls aged 15 – 18 years who were recruited from 5 high schools in the Mid-Atlantic region. These youth were participating in a broader study examining the effects of socialization on adolescents' perceptions of TDV. To recruit participants, meetings were held with school principals to introduce the study objectives/logistics and gain their participation in the study. Next, study staff conducted information sessions at each school during school assemblies, lunch periods or special class sessions. Interested students were asked to contact study staff via phone or email to confirm eligibility and discuss the consent process. School demographics are provided in Table 1. All study procedures were approved by the University of Maryland Institutional Review Board (IRB). Student assent and parental consent were received from all girls age 15-17. Girls aged 18 years provided written informed consent to

participate. Participants were asked to identify their race, age, and grade level in a socio-

demographic survey completed immediately before the interview.

Table 4.1: School Demographics

School Name (grades)	School Type	Enrollment	% African American	% Free and Reduced Lunch (FARM) / Annual Tuition*
School A (Pre-kindergarten-12)	Private, all female	911	14%	$24,630
School B (9-12)	Private, Roman Catholic, all female	287	19%	$11, 550
School C (9-12)	Public coed	1,104	54%	62%
School D (9-12)	Private, Roman Catholic, all female	317	21%	$11, 375
School E (9-12)	Public coed	1,634	89%	58%

*Private schools do not calculate FARM rate, thus annual tuition provided as proxy for socioeconomic status

Interview Procedures

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted after school hours in a

private room at each participating school. All interviews were audio-recorded and lasted

approximately 1 – 1.5 hours. Interviews were conducted by trained research staff (3

women; 1 African American and 2 Caucasian interviewers). The interview guide

included items about dating terms used by high school youth, perceptions of healthy and

unhealthy relationships, and an examination of the sources of influence on girls'

perceptions of relationship quality. Specifically, girls discussed their perception of an

ideal relationship, what they value in a relationship, and the qualities of a healthy

relationship. Girls were asked *"What makes a relationship healthy?"* Follow-up

probing questions *(e.g., What does a relationship with good communication look like?)* were used to elicit a full and detailed description of qualities and characteristics that girls attributed to a healthy dating relationship.

Data Analysis

All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and entered into Atlas.ti, a qualitative data management program (Atlast.ti, 6.1 ed, 2010). First, a coding dictionary was created that captured all of the CDC identified characteristics of a healthy relationship, (i.e. *mutual respect; trust; honesty; compromise; individuality; good communication; anger control; problem solving; fighting fair; understanding; self-confidence; and, being a role model).* All codes in the dictionary were given operational definitions to enhance reliability and validity and aid in the coding process. Narrative segments of the interview transcript were highlighted and coded using specific dictionary terms. All coding was completed by one research team member. A second coder reviewed the coded segments of data to determine agreement with the primary coder, thus strengthening consistency of the coding process. Any suggested changes to coding were discussed between members of the research team; adjustments were made as necessary.

Systematic coding of transcripts in Atlas.ti allowed for the conduct of "data reduction" (Berg, 2007). Data reduction refers to the process in which raw qualitative data is simplified or reduced into meaningful codes. Once this step was achieved Atlas.ti was used in "data display" process mode. That is, the interview data were assembled by their assigned codes (Berg, 2007). In this step, interview text is organized by the code(s) that were assigned to it during the coding process.

It is important to note, that girls were not provided a list of the 12 CDC recommended characteristics of a healthy adolescent relationship to discuss during the interviews. As a result, to examine the concordance between girls' descriptions of a healthy relationship and the characteristics or qualities put forth by the CDC, specific queries were run in Atlas.ti. First, across all the transcripts, responses to the interview question, "*How would you define a healthy relationship?*" were extracted and saved in a separate word processing file. Next, individual queries were conducted using each of the CDC's recommended qualities of a healthy dating relationship. Thus, 12 queries were run in Atlas.ti to extract any text in the interview transcripts that contained the 12 CDC recommended qualities (e.g. *respect, equality, fighting fair)* of a healthy relationship. All narrative passages from the different queries were saved as a separate word processing files, then read and reread for meaning to understand how the characteristics were being defined and were portrayed in a healthy relationship.

Results

Sample Characteristics

A total of 33 African American girls participated in the semi-structured interviews. Girls ranged from 15 to 18 years and attended public and private high schools in a large mid-Atlantic city. Participant demographics are summarized in Table 2.

Table 4.2: Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Categories	(N = 33)
Age	15	12.1%
	16	48.5%
	17	36.4%
	18	3.0%
Classification	10th grade	12.1%

	11th grade	54.5%
	12th grade	33.3%
School Attended	School A	21.2%
	School B	15.2%
	School C	24.2%
	School D	15.2%
	School E	24.2%

Of the 12 characteristics identified by CDC, 3 were mentioned by over 75% (N = 26) of participants, 5 were mentioned by 24-67% of participants, and the remaining 4 were mentioned by less than 21% (N = 7) of participants (see Table 3). Given the low frequency for these 4 characteristics, *Role Model, Problem Solving, Anger Control*, and *Fighting Fair*, data are not provided in the current study for these characteristics. Results are arrayed in relation to the CDC identified healthy relationship characteristics and ordered by the frequency in which they were mentioned by participants. In the results that follow, first the CDC definition is provided and then a description of how participants discussed this characteristic as a part of a healthy relationship.

Table 4.3: *African American girls' characteristics of healthy dating relationships*

CDC characteristic and definition*	N (%)	Illustrative Quotes
Trust - *Partners should choose to trust in each other and give each other the benefit of the doubt.*	30 (91%)	*"…trusting them and know you can say anything to them and they'll still be there for you"*
Communication* - *Each partner should speak honestly and openly to avoid miscommunication. If a partner needs to sort out his or her feelings first, their partner should respect those wishes and wait until they are ready to talk.*	27 (82%)	*"it's good to communicate because if not…it leads to a whole bunch of problems, like you just gotta tell him; be honest with him and let him know how you feel."*
Honesty - *When a dating partner lies, it takes time to rebuild that trust in him or her. Honesty builds trust and strengthens the relationship.*	26 (79%)	*"If you don't have honesty in a relationship, then there is no relationship."*
Respect* - *Respect means that each person values who the other is and understands the*	22 (67%)	*"I respect him a lot because he respects my*

other person's boundaries.		*decision to wait [for sex]."*
Self Confidence - *When dating partners have confidence in themselves, it can help their relationships with others. It shows that they are calm and comfortable enough to allow others to express their opinions without forcing their own opinions on them.*	17 (52%)	*"I think if your self-esteem is high, and you have confidence in yourself...then you can be happy with somebody else."*
Individuality - *Each partner should not have to compromise who they are, and his or her identity should not be based on their partner's. Partners should each continue seeing his or her friends or doing the things that he or she loves. They should be supportive if their partner wants to pursue new hobbies or make new friends.*	12 (36%)	*"A healthy relationship to me is just keeping your independence, like knowing who you are..."*
Understanding - *Each partner should take time to understand what the other might be feeling by putting themselves in their shoes.*	9 (27%)	*"So somebody that would be understanding and not kind of pressure me into other things..."*
Compromise* - *In a dating relationship, each partner does not always get his or her way. They should acknowledge different points of view and be willing to give and take.*	8 (24%)	*"You have to learn how to compromise because if both of you are working two jobs and they are on different schedules, and say for instance you have children*

*The definitions provided by girls for these characteristics appear to be discordant from the CDC definition.

Note. The N (%) column refers to the number and percentage of the sample that identified this characteristic within context of healthy relationships during their interview.

<u>***Trust***</u> *- Partners should choose to trust in each other and give each other the benefit of the doubt.*

Approximately 91% of girls in the study discussed trust as a component of a healthy relationship. This was the most frequently endorsed characteristic.   African American girls' definition of trust in a healthy relationship spoke to their need for a partner who they could confide in about feelings and daily activities and someone who would maintain their privacy. Girls' judged the trustworthiness of a dating partner if they could disclose anything and not worry about others finding out. Girls also characterized

a healthy relationship as one in which they should be able to share everything and not have to hide anything. A healthy dating relationship was characterized as one in which you felt comfortable sharing secrets and could depend. This concept was described as follows: *"trusting them and know you can say anything to them and they'll still be there for you;" "when you feel like you can share anything with them."*

In contrast, participants also defined trust in terms of its antithesis, lying and infidelity or *"cheating."* Girls shared that in a healthy relationship they should be able to trust that their partner would not lie to them and would not *"cheat"* with another girl. Cheating was seen a bitter betrayal of trust by girls. The following exemplifies how trust is viewed in a healthy relationship by these African American girls:

> *"Trust is, to me ... If you go to a party tonight, I'm going to trust that you're not going to hook up with other girls behind my back...Or if I share my secrets with you, you're not going to tell all your friends. It's just kind of, really basic things, but they can have really big repercussions if they're broken."*

Good Communication - *Each partner should speak honestly and openly to avoid miscommunication. If a partner needs to sort out his or her feelings first, their partner should respect those wishes and wait until they are ready to talk.*

Communication was the second most frequently mentioned characteristic with over 80% of girls explicitly discussing it. Girls believed that a healthy relationship involves *"openness"* and *"transparency."* They felt that both partners should be able to express their feelings and not keep secrets. One participant described good communication this way, *"but I guess just being transparent and talking about everything and just making sure you both see eye to eye on everything."* Similar to their

characterization of trust, a healthy relationship would also include their partner *"just being there to listen."* Girls stated that they look for someone who will listen to their thoughts, feelings, and their day to day concerns. They wanted to be able to *"talk about life, stuff that's bothering you like or talk about stuff…, like actual relationships, what it means to be in a relationship with the person."* Importantly, girls stated that good communication could only exist in a relationship where they felt they could confide in their partner without being judged. Thus, in addition to wanting someone who would not reveal their secrets (trust), girls wanted to be able to be authentic without worrying that their partner would criticize them for their beliefs or behavior.

In contrast to the CDC definition of good communication, the girls did not acknowledge that there may be instances where you had to allow time for a partner to sort out his or her feeling first. Rather, girls' stressed that in a healthy relationship they should be able to talk through any disagreements right away and not let them remain unaddressed. This is illustrated in the following quote, *"If you feel a certain way just say it…get the real answer for the question or whatever you felt."*

This description of communication aligns with their discussion about honesty. Girls stated that honest communication is the only way to maintain a healthy relationship. Girls felt that *"it's good to communicate because if not…it leads to a whole bunch of problems, like you just gotta tell him; be honest with him and let him know how you feel."*

Honesty *- When a dating partner lies, it takes time to rebuild that trust in him or her. Honesty builds trust and strengthens the relationship.*

More than 75% of the participants included honesty as a central characteristic of a healthy dating relationship. *"If you don't have honesty in a relationship, then there is no*

relationship." Girls believed that honesty builds the foundation for a relationship. In addition, girls believed that honesty was intricately linked to trust in a healthy relationship. For example, *"you don't know if they're honest. You have to try and kind of trust them to a sense…"* That is, girls felt that they could not place trust in a person if they were suspicious about that person being honest. Girls equated honesty with commitment to the relationship and loyalty to their partner. Girls stated that in a healthy relationship their partner would not cheat on them with another girl and would remain loyal and committed to only them.

In order to be loyal and committed, girls felt there could be *"no lies"* in a healthy relationship. They felt that a healthy relationship could only exist if both partners were completely honest with one another. Girls shared that honesty is a value that was instilled in them while growing up and they expected these same values to be exhibited in their dating relationships. There was an expectation that a dating relationship could not withstand dishonesty. Girls believed that *"honesty is what keeps a relationship strong."*

Their comments reinforced the notion that honesty was related to the ability to have good communication in a healthy relationship. Girls shared that in a healthy relationship partners should be able to openly and honestly communicate about their feelings. Girls expressed distaste with relationships where their partner was not honest about intentions to break-up or change the nature of the relationship. The quote below summarizes participants' views about honesty in a healthy relationship.

> *"So honesty-I just don't want to be lied to. I don't want to be told something that's not true. I don't want to be told a story that has five parts of it missing or*

five parts of it that you've added onto it…I just wanna hear the blunt truth, even if

it's ignorant, I wanna hear it."

Respect *- Respect means that each person values who the other is and understands the*

other person's boundaries.

Approximately 67% of the girls discussed respect as a component of a healthy

relationship. *"Just respectful to everyone, like respecting your elders, respectful--*

respecting you as a person, respecting your body." This quote very eloquently

summarizes how girls discussed respect as a vital part of *any* healthy relationship.

Analogous to the CDC definition, girls stated that in a healthy relationship each partner

would respect who the other is and his or her rules and beliefs. This was specifically

described in the context of sexual dynamics. Girls shared that their partner would need to

respect where they stood on sexual relations being a part of their relationship. Girls felt

that *"when you see that a guy respects your body, that's one way of know[ing] that he*

respects you" and *"I respect him a lot because he respects my decision to wait [for sex]."*

Girls stated that sex with someone outside of the relationship, or cheating, could be

characterized as disrespectful.

Interestingly, girls shared that respect also should be shown in casual dating

relationships. Although girls used various terms and language to describe these types of

relationships (e.g. friends with benefits, hook-ups, etc.), girls felt that respect was an

important component of healthy dating even before a more committed relationship,

denoted as "boyfriend/girlfriend" began (Guzman et al., 2009). Girls expressed that

while dating their partners should not be disrespectful to them, *"…like you was just out*

with me and next thing you out with somebody else" and *"If you respect me, you will not be out there with another female and lie about it."*

Another way these girls gauged respect in a healthy relationship was through the value a dating partner accorded their morals and opinions, as exemplified in the following: *"Like if a girl doesn't want to do something, don't pressure her to do something"* and *"Acting like a gentlemen and respecting my ideas and opinions and not thinking less of me because of them."* Again, a consistent reference point revolved around sexual decision making, i.e. the pressure by the girl's partner for them to engage in sexual activity. Respect for one's sexual decision making was described this way, *"All we did was just watch a movie, eat popcorn that was it. And like he respected that I wasn't...I didn't want anything to go further."* While the CDC definition makes no specific reference to sex, respecting girl's body and beliefs about sex was the most frequent way that girls believed their partner showed them respect.

Self-Confidence *- When dating partners have confidence in themselves, it can help their relationships with others. It shows that they are calm and comfortable enough to allow others to express their opinions without forcing their own opinions on them.*

Slightly over 50% of the girls mentioned self-confidence as a quality of a healthy relationship. While the CDC definition of self-confidence does not include mention of self-esteem, participants in this study seemed to discuss self-confidence and self-esteem as the same characteristic. The following summarizes this sentiment: *"I think if your self-esteem is high, and you have confidence in yourself...then you can be happy with somebody else."* Although it was not as widely endorsed as other qualities, girls indicated that other girls need to be able to love themselves before they can be in a

healthy relationship. Having positive self-esteem and self-image may facilitate healthy relationships because girls will not seek affirmation or approval from their partner.

When self-confidence was mentioned by participants, it was almost exclusively described in the context of its diminishment, i.e., as a way that a partner can take advantage of a girl in an unhealthy relationship. Girls stated that in an unhealthy relationship, a partner will talk down to them, make them feel like nothing, and in other ways lower their self-confidence. Girls also felt that if someone has low self-confidence then they may be less likely to leave an unhealthy relationship, as in the following: *"Sometimes it could be a self-esteem thing like… they might not feel like they're good enough or pretty enough for anyone else and they might think that's the only person they can get."* In contrast to the CDC definition of self-confidence, girls did not discuss the ability to express their opinions as an example of self-confidence within their healthy relationships. However, this idea of being able to express their opinions can be found in girls' definitions of communication and honesty within a healthy relationship.

Individuality *- Each partner should not have to compromise who they are, and his or her identity should not be based on their partner's. Partners should each continue seeing his or her friends or doing the things that he or she loves. They should be supportive if their partner wants to pursue new hobbies or make new friends.*

Approximately 36% of girls were attuned to the idea of individuality as a part of a healthy relationship. Many of the girls' statements about individuality aligned with the CDC definition of this characteristic. Girls talked about how, in a healthy relationship, they would maintain their identity and not let their partner change who they were. Girls discussed wanting independence within their relationship and being able to maintain their

own interests and activities. Girls liked *"having a chance to find out who I am on my own for a while,"* *"just having freedom,"* and *"being true"* to who they are. Participants used these quotes to describe how a dating relationship should allow them have freedom to do things outside of the relationship. Another participant described maintaining individuality in a relationship this way, *"I think I would definitely take more time to get to know somebody more and not just try and drop everything for the relationship."* Girls described past relationships in which they spent all their free time with their partner at the expense of their other friendships. Girls believed that a healthy relationship would allow them to keep their current friendships and do the things that they like to do. Participants stated that if they had to compromise their independence then maybe the relationship was not suitable. This was stated as follows: "A *healthy relationship to me is just keeping your independence, like knowing who you are and not letting anybody touch that because if they don't like you for who you are, then maybe they don't belong in your life."* While not discussed in high frequency across all participants, the girls that did discuss individuality seemed to have strong beliefs about the need to maintain their identity and individuality in a healthy relationship.

*<u>**Understanding**</u> - Each partner should take time to understand what the other might be feeling by putting themselves in their shoes.*

Approximately 27% of girls mentioned understanding as a quality of a healthy relationship. Among those who did discuss it, the sentiment was expressed that a healthy relationship involved a partner who *"can understand everything you are going through."* They discussed a relationship where their partner could empathize and appreciate their feelings, whether they be in reference to a morally shaped sense of boundaries or

competing priorities. The girls stated that a healthy relationship would include *"at least understanding that I have certain morals, and I want to wait for this, and I want to be able to do certain things. So somebody that would be understanding and not kind of pressure me into other things..."* A partner exhibiting understanding about competing priorities was described this way, *"...just want someone who can have time for you and understand that they aren't your only priority and that you do have other things to do however you still want them to be there for you."* Finally, understanding was also discussed in terms of knowing their partner in a deeply personal way. Girls expressed a desire for their dating partner to really "*understand*" who they are and their personality, *"just understanding, somebody who gets where you coming from; who can relate to you."* Girls felt that honest and open communication with their partner could help them understand their personality, needs, and desires.

Compromise *- In a dating relationship, each partner does not always get his or her way. They should acknowledge different points of view and be willing to give and take.*

Interestingly, while girls discussed compromise less frequently than other characteristics of a healthy adolescent relationship (~ 24% of girls), it was mentioned as a necessary component of <u>future</u> adult relationships. Girls discussed that in the future they would desire a partner who they could compromise about jobs, working hours, children, and religion. Girls stated that they would need to compromise with their partner as to whether they would have children, how to raise their children, and what religion they would practice. As one girl described it; *"You have to learn how to compromise because if both of you are working two jobs and they are on different schedules, and say for instance you have children, ...the priority is no longer you, however it's your children*

and taking care of your family." Girls felt that compromise would be needed in order to make their future relationships work. Surprisingly, this reference to future relationships was not found in the girl's description of the other CDC characteristics. It is possible that girls felt compromise was a more "mature" quality that they do not need to address at this time. One participant noted that *"If you are not able to compromise then the relationship is not going to go that far off the immature level."* This is not to say that girls were engaging in immature relationships, but developmentally, they may not see this quality as a necessary component of their current dating relationships.

Discussion

This study explored African American adolescent girls' characterizations of a healthy dating relationship and examined the connotative meanings in the context of CDC's 12 healthy dating relationship qualities. Analysis suggests African American girls have eloquent descriptions of the characteristics of a healthy relationship. Participants provided thoughtful, graphic and expressive definitions of the qualities that are important components of a healthy relationship. Girls were able to articulate the meaning of each characteristic and vividly describe what that characteristic looked like in their current dating relationships.

In contrast to previous literature which suggests that African American girls have a less-informed understanding of what constituted a healthy relationship (e.g. Raiford et al., 2007), girls showed a sophisticated understanding of healthy relationships by self-identifying 8 major characteristics, *good communication, honesty, trust, respect, compromise, understanding, individuality,* and *self-confidence*, of a healthy relationship. These characteristics are consistent with those put forth by the CDC as qualities of a

healthy adolescent dating relationship. However, it is unclear if these characteristics

were seen as unique qualities to the girls. Many of the definitions of individual

characteristics greatly overlapped with the connotative meaning of other characteristics.

Furthermore, the 4 most mentioned characteristics were *good communication, honesty,*

trust, and *respect*. These qualities are often a part of character development social-

emotional learning curriculum taught in elementary and middle school (US Department

of Education, 2005). As a result, it may not be surprising that girls may think of these

characteristics when asked to describe a healthy relationship.

It is interesting to note that the girls' definition of *respect* sheds light on recent

challenges in understanding the terms and language that adolescents use to describe their

dating relationships. Recent research suggests that "romantic dating relationships" may

not be an accurate term to describe teen relationships (Guzman et al., 2009). Within the

current study, adolescents provided their own definition of a dating relationship and used

this context to articulate the qualities that were necessary to make that relationship

healthy.

In contrast, *problem solving, role model, anger control,* and *fighting fair,* were 4

qualities that were least articulated (not described in results). However, it could be

argued that these qualities are encompassed in the descriptions of other CDC

recommended characteristics. For example, it is possible that a definition of

compromising behavior in a relationship would involve *problem solving*. Additionally,

good communication would include *fighting fair* and *anger control*. While girls less

frequently mentioned these characteristics directly, results show that the manner in which

they described *compromise* certainly suggested the ability to problem solve regarding

problems in the future. In addition, girls' definition of *communication* made reference to not letting arguments fester, decreasing angry feelings (i.e. *anger control*) and speaking openly and honestly about any problem in the relationship (i.e. *problem solving, fighting fair*). Developmental dynamics may also help explain the infrequency with which these qualities were addressed. Girls with more dating experience in which they had to practice *problem solving* or deal with *fighting fair* in arguments may have been more likely to mention these characteristics. Since girls were not asked about their own dating histories, this cannot be discerned from the data. More research is needed to understand how girls' previous dating experiences may impact their characterization of a healthy relationship.

The girls were able to provide clear, succinct definitions of the qualities they believed should be part of healthy dating relationships. Their connotative definitions amplify and contextualize those offered by the CDC. For example, the definitions provided for *compromise, respect, and good communication* appear to be discordant with those offered by the CDC. Girls only discussed *compromise* as an important component of their future healthy relationships. Girls did not see how this characteristic could help them identify healthy adolescent relationships. In addition, although girls expressed that *good communication* is needed to maintain a healthy relationship, they also shared that it was important that both partners are direct and honest without regard of the other person's feelings. This strategy may, in fact, create more problems or conflict and create a negative or unhealthy atmosphere within the relationship. Moreover, *respect* was mostly used in reference to sexual dynamics in adolescent relationships. While girls stated that in a healthy relationship their partner would *respect* their beliefs about the

presence of sex in the relationship, they did not discuss *respect* in reference to valuing

who the other is, as suggested by the CDC. In fact, it is interesting to note that many of

the girls used cheating dynamics as a context to illustrate the qualities of healthy dating

relationships. For example, girls saw cheating as an example of disrespect and

dishonesty, and believed they could not *trust* their partner if they thought he/she may

cheat on them. Few studies have examined the influence of infidelity on adolescent's

dating beliefs and experiences (Williams & Hickle, 2011). Girls who have been in

relationships that involved unfaithful partner may place more emphasis on the existence

of trust, respect, and honesty in a healthy relationship. However, despite differences in

the meaning they attributed to the individual characteristics, it is clear that girls do have a

general understanding of healthy relationship qualities that they should look for in their

romantic relationships.

   While this data was not available, it is possible that some of the African American

girls that participated in the current study may live in neighborhoods characterized by

poverty and violence in which teen dating violence may be more prevalent (Jain et al.,

2010). Research suggests that families in these neighborhoods may also struggle to

provide guidance to adolescents regarding healthy relationships (Akers et al., 2010).

Despite these potential negative influences on girls' perceptions of a healthy relationship,

girls were able to thoughtfully describe many characteristics of a healthy relationship.

This is especially encouraging given that girls are not often provided direct guidance

specifically related to healthy relationships (Sorensen, 2007). Unhealthy relationships

and dating violence are often topics within the curriculum of high school health classes,

but the same cannot be said about healthy relationships (National Conference of State

Legislatures, 2011b). The characteristics of a healthy relationship and how to identify them are not typically discussed when the dating violence lesson is presented to adolescents. Yet evaluation of Safe Dates, perhaps the most rigorous teen dating violence curricula (Foshee & Langwick, 2011), indicates that these lessons are important in increasing adolescent understanding of dating relationships (Foshee et al., 1998; Foshee et al., 2005). Evidence-based interventions that provide specific and detailed lessons for adolescents regarding what constitutes a healthy relationship are needed. Without being directly taught this information, it is plausible that adolescents essentially "learn-as-they-go" about healthy relationships (Banister & Leadbeater, 2007). Positive youth development national legislation and previous research (Akers et al., 2010; Guzman, et al., 2009; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2011a; Sorensen, 2007) shows that more programs are needed to help adolescents identify and successfully engage in healthy relationships. Given the persistent national prevalence of teen dating violence under the current health education model that only focuses on helping adolescents' identify unhealthy dating relationships, more community programs and standard school health curricula are needed regarding healthy relationships for adolescents.

Limitations

The current study offers unique insight into African American girls' perceptions of what constitutes a healthy dating relationship, but several limitations should be acknowledged. While semi-structured interviews allowed for the collection of rich data, girls were not provided a list of the CDC recommended qualities of a healthy relationship to discuss. More research is needed to determine if the CDC characteristics that were

rarely mentioned were less important or not considered a part of healthy relationship. In addition, study participants constitute a convenience sample of African American adolescent girls in a large Mid-Atlantic city. While representativeness is strengthened by the inclusion of the voices of youth from at least 5 different urban neighborhoods (the voices of which are not often heard in empirical studies), future studies should explore other ethnic groups and African American males and females that live in other geographic regions.

Indeed, these girls may represent a unique sample of high achieving high school girls. Too often, research has depicted African American girls' as prone toward risk engagement and unhealthy behaviors. This study sample represents a sample of African American girls who are successfully progressing through high school and have strong personal goals. Information gleaned from these interviews in some ways dispels the notion that girls are not aware of healthy relationship characteristics (Raiford et al., 2007). Yet, the brief demographic survey that preceded each interview prevented a detailed examination of study data stratified by other demographic factors like family socio-economic status and previous dating experience. Though recruitment of participants extended over a period of time, it may be that those students who volunteered to participate in the study represent a subset of adolescent girls that are comfortable discussing their dating beliefs and behaviors. Finally, a longitudinal study with repeated interviews over the course of several years could have provided additional insight into developmental changes that may occur in the lives of the girls that influence their perceptions of healthy relationships as they age.

Practical Implications and Conclusions

The extant literature is replete with data on the many negative psychosocial correlates of teen dating violence. Victims of dating violence often also suffer from low self-esteem and negative body image (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002). Among girls who report physical or sexual dating abuse, rates of drug, alcohol, and tobacco use are twice as high when compared to girls who report no abuse (Dishion & Kavanagh, 2000; Howard et al., 2007; Plichta & Falik, 2001). Furthermore, dating violence may result in high-risk sexual behaviors, which can lead to unintended pregnancy, sexually-transmitted diseases, and HIV infection (Silverman et al., 2001). Given the potential for unhealthy relationships to negatively impact adolescent functioning, it is critically important to help girls identify healthy relationships and encourage their participation in dating relationships that are free from harm.

Findings from the current study draw attention to the qualities that girls readily identified in a healthy relationship. These qualities can provide the basis for programs and educational materials to prevent teen dating violence. Results can be used to develop curricula to teach girls how the characteristics put forth by the CDC have practical application to their current relationships. For example, curricula may need to focus on *problem solving* skillfulness and the need for *compromising* as characteristics of healthy adolescent relationships. Activities and exercises could be geared to role playing and modeling these dynamics. Regarding the notion of respect, girls should have a broader understanding of what respect means and requires within the context of their relationships. More examples are needed to help girls see how respect can be demonstrated in other ways not related to sex. Study findings make relevant these

characteristics by providing contextualized examples that resonate with the lives of contemporary African American adolescent girls.

In addition, community based participatory methods should be used to solicit adolescents help in developing prevention curricula and interventions that are more relevant and engaging for today's teens. The CDC endorses the use of a Social Ecological Framework for prevention of youth violence. A Social Ecological Framework encourages direct attention to individual, relational, community, and societal influences on behavior (CDC, 2012c). This facilitates examination of multiple facets or levels of influence on behavior. In fact, previous research has found peer fighting and paternal use of violence at home to be predictors of physical and sexual dating violence victimization (Foshee et al., 2004). With this in mind, prevention curricula and programs should consider the potential influence of parents, family, school, friends, and societal norms in shaping and reinforcing girls' healthy relationships ideas and behaviors. The "Dating Matters" prevention program sponsored by the CDC and Liz Claiborne, Inc. is a current attempt to address multiple levels of the Social Ecological Framework within a dating violence prevention educational program (CDC, 2012b). While results from this program are still forthcoming, previous research supports moving beyond the individual-level influence on dating violence to examine how girls' experiences within other spheres of influence can have a large impact on the meaning they attribute to the characteristics of a healthy relationship. For instance, girls who witnessed violence and infidelity in their parents' relationship may need more guidance on how respect and honesty are portrayed within a healthy dating relationship.

Many current school-based dating violence prevention curricula focus on helping girls identify an unhealthy relationship and provide strategies to help them leave an unhealthy relationship. Primary prevention of teen dating violence should also focus on instilling in girls the values and characteristics of healthy relationships. Parents, health educators, and social workers should empower and educate girls to recognize the characteristics of a healthy relationship prior to their engagement in dating relationships. In taking these steps, we may succeed in preventing girls from ever having to experience a harmful dating relationship.

Chapter 4: Study 2: *"I want somebody that's on top of their dreams:"* African American Girls Perceptions of the Ideal Dating Relationship Now and In the Future[2]

Introduction

Adolescence, i.e., ages 14 – 18 years, is a particularly important and challenging time for developing long lasting relationship patterns (Collins et al., 2009; Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Karney et al., 2007). During this time, adolescents are developing their identity and learning to balance their need for autonomy with their desire to cultivate relationships with peers, family and dating partners (Collins et al., 2009; Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Research suggests that adolescent romantic relationships may play a distinctive role in shaping beliefs about autonomy, identity, and intimacy (Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Sorensen, 2007). Romantic relationships may facilitate the development of adolescents' identity by prompting them to begin to think about what they are looking for in their partner and how this may relate to their personality traits, interests, and evaluation of self. It is also thought that through romantic relationships adolescents discover what is attractive and arousing (Knoester et al., 2006). Conversely, romantic relationships may also damage adolescent girls' identity formation if girls do not feel attractive to their partners or become involved in an unhealthy relationship (Collins, 2003; Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Kroger, 2007).

Furman and Shaffer (2003) propose that romantic relationships have lasting impacts on adolescents' self-perception. Adolescents who have positive romantic experiences may begin to think of themselves as attractive and may gain greater self-

---

esteem in their ability to attract partners. Positive romantic relationships may also increase adolescents' self-confidence related to their ability to develop and maintain a relationship. Indeed, empirical research shows that the quality of adolescent dating relationships affects their self-esteem, sexuality, and shapes their values regarding romance (Barber & Eccles, 2003). In addition, dating relationships may serve to strengthen adolescents' interpersonal skillfulness by facilitating the development of effective communication and negotiation skills along with empathy (Sorensen, 2007). Moreover, while some research shows an association between adolescent relationship "break ups" and depressive symptoms, "break ups" are also an opportunity for developing emotional resiliency and coping skills that will be needed later in life (Barber & Eccles, 2003; Monroe et al., 1999).

Romantic Partner Characteristics

Modest empirical research has explored partner characteristics during adolescence or their significance to the quality of the relationship (Collins, 2003; Collins et al., 2009; Karney et al., 2007). Among adolescents, only partner socio-demographic characteristics have been explored. Adolescent females tend to date males slightly older than they are, but with similar race, ethnicity, and other socio-demographic characteristics (Carver et al., 2003; Gowen et al., 2004). Some research even suggests that adolescent partners are similar on certain social characteristics, such as popularity (Simon et al., 2008).

Adolescents' idealized partner preferences may also have implications for their psychosocial functioning and trajectories of romantic development (Sassler, 2010; Simon et al., 2008). Regan and Joshi (2003) investigated how adolescents select romantic partners and the psychosocial consequences of these choices. Study data suggested that

when asked about their "ideal" partner, adolescents selected different attributes for a romantic partner compared to a sexual partner. In considering an ideal long-term, romantic partner, adolescents desired a variety of cognitive qualities, such as humor, intellect, and intelligence (Regan & Joshi, 2003). In contrast, when asked about the desired traits of an ideal sexual partner, adolescents were more likely to choose external, physical characteristics (e.g., attractiveness, sexy appearance) (Regan & Joshi, 2003). Simon and colleagues (2008) found that adolescents selected partners who shared comparable social standing and physical attractiveness, but also had similar depressive symptoms. Adolescents desired partners who were ranked similarly by their peers as being "most popular," "good looking," and self-assessed affective, cognitive, motivational, and somatic symptoms of depression (Simon et al., 2008). As a result, an adolescent's ideal partner attributes could contribute positively or negatively to the health of the relationship. Despite these two studies, little is understood about how adolescents view their ideal partner and what implications these perceptions may have for romantic relationships. Insight into what adolescents look for in a dating partner could help researchers begin to understand the developmental process by which adolescents become involved in a healthy adolescent dating relationship.

Connection to future relationships

Adolescent beliefs about their future romantic partners may be equally as important as current ideal partner characteristics. Little research has been devoted to understanding how adolescent current dating relationship needs differ from their goals for future adult relationships. Using qualitative methods, McCabe and Barnett (2000) found that only 1% of their sample of at-risk African American sixth-grade students were able

to provide a detailed description of their goals for future romantic relationships (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). McCabe and Barnett (2000) suggest that, in addition to career planning, it may also be important to help adolescents plan for future romantic relationships (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Specific goals for future relationships could have a positive effect on adolescents' understanding of healthy relationships and their ability to navigate current dating challenges (e.g. negotiating sexual relations and contraception).

Given that African American girls, in particular, may be at increased risk for experiencing unhealthy dating relationships during adolescence and in adulthood, more research is needed to understand why this is so and how their relationship preferences and dynamics may heighten vulnerability (Black et al., 2011; Howard et al., 2007; Raiford et al., 2007). African American girls, compared to other race/ethnicities, have reported higher rates of physically violent dating relationships (Banyard et al., 2006; Malik et al., 1997; Watson, Cascardi, Avery-Leaf, & O'Leary, 2001). In one of the few qualitative studies examining dating experiences of African American adolescents, Johnson and colleagues (2005) found that the African American youth often observed gender-based violence in their families and struggled to understand the boundaries of violence in their own dating relationships. Furthermore, Raiford and colleagues (2007) found that African American girls who reported experiencing dating violence were twice as likely as their non-victimized peers to report less understanding of healthy relationships.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Ecological Framework can be used to understand multiple influences on girls' perceptions of the ideal relationship now and in the future. The framework

suggests that individual, relational, community, and societal influences can impact one's dating behaviors (CDC, 2012c). Previous research has found parental divorce, low parental monitoring, and violence in the home can increase the likelihood of dating violence perpetration (Banyard et al., 2006). Girls who witnessed domestic violence in the home may be more likely to see this as a characteristic of a healthy dating relationship. In addition, the dating experiences of adolescent girl friends may also influence their perceptions of the ideal relationship. Research has shown that having a friend who was a victim of dating violence may place girls at increased risk for physical and sexual dating violence victimization (Foshee et al., 2004). Being exposed to dating violence within their friendship networks may normalize violence as an acceptable part of high school dating relationships. Finally, societal norms may create a climate in which ideal dating relationships in high school are "hook ups" or "casual" sexual relationships (Guzman et al., 2009). It is within this social ecological framework that the current study will explore girls' perceptions of the ideal dating relationship now and in the future.

Little research has explored the context of African American adolescent dating relationships (Sullivan, Erwin, Helms, Masho, & Farrell, 2010) and even fewer studies have attempted to use qualitative methods to investigate adolescent relationships (Akers et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2005; Sullivan et al., 2010). Qualitative methods allow for the collection of rich, descriptive data to better understand some phenomena. Using these methods to explore African American adolescent dating relationships facilitates understanding the complex and nuanced dynamics associated with this important developmental period. Qualitative methods are able to "give voice" to adolescents views and opinions in rich and expressive ways that cannot be obtained using quantitative

methods. The current study aimed to provide a layered and in-depth description of African American girls' perceptions of the ideal dating relationship now and in the future. Using girls' narratives as content, analysis was conducted to shed light on the qualities desired in their dating relationships and relational factors that influence teen dating behaviors. The specific research questions were:

1. What are adolescent girls' perceptions of the ideal dating relationship right now?

2. What are adolescent girls' perceptions of the ideal dating relationship in the future?

3. Do perceptions of an ideal dating relationship differ when adolescent girls' describe current versus future relationships? Why and how?

Methods

Participants, Eligibility, and Recruitment

These data were obtained as part of broader research agenda examining adolescent girls' perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships and the role of socialization in shaping these ideas. Participants constituted a convenience sample recruited across 5 high schools in a large Mid-Atlantic city. Sampling, recruitment and interview protocols all received approval from the University of Maryland Institutional Review Board (IRB).   Eligibility criteria included: (a) African American female high school student between the ages of 15 and 18 years old; (b) enrolled in a participating high school and; (c) agree to have the interview audio recorded. Participants were asked to self-identify their race and grade level during the eligibility process and again in a socio-demographic survey completed immediately before the interview.

Study Procedures

Participants were recruited during information sessions at each school during school assemblies, lunch periods or special class sessions. School demographics are provided in Table 1. Upon receiving consent from their parent/guardian, semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with adolescent girls in a private room at their participating school. All interviews were audio-recorded and lasted approximately 1 – 1.5 after school hours. Interviews were conducted by 3 members of the research team, two Caucasian and one African American. Prior to beginning each interview, girls were informed about the purpose of the study and the situations that would necessitate a breach in confidentiality. If during interviews participants disclosed that she or someone she knew was in danger, the first point of contact was the consulting clinical psychologist and per IRB protocol a determination was made about the need for further reporting and notification. All participants were also given an incentive "gift" bag that contained a resource listing of, local and national hotlines and websites specifically geared toward teen dating dynamics along with monetary compensation ($20).

Table 5.1: School Demographics

School Name (grades)	School Type	Enrollment	% African American	% Free and Reduced Lunch / Annual Tuition
School A (Pre-kindergarten-12)	Private, all female	911	14%	$24,630
School B (9-12)	Private, Roman Catholic, all female	287	19%	$11, 550
School C (9-12)	Public coed	1,104	54%	62%
School D (9-12)	Private, Roman Catholic, all female	317	21%	$11, 375

| School E (9-12) | Public coed | 1,634 | 89% | 58% |

The Interview Guide included items about dating terms used in high school, perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships, and a discussion of the sources of influence on girls' perceptions of relationships. Specifically, girls discussed their perception of an ideal relationship and how their perceptions may change in the future. Girls were asked "*How would you describe the "perfect" dating relationship, right now?*" and "*Would you describe the "perfect" dating relationship differently if I was asking about the future? If so,why?*" Follow-up probing questions were used to elicit a full and detailed description of girls' perceptions of the ideal relationship. For example, if the participant responded that her ideal dating relationship included communication, a follow-up question would be "*what do you mean by communication?*"

Data Analysis

All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and entered into Atlas.Ti, a qualitative data management program (Atlast.Ti, 6.1 ed, 2010). A coding dictionary was created using codes like "time, current," "time, future," "ideal relationship," and "healthy relationship characteristics" to capture text related to girls perceptions of the ideal relationship currently and in the future. Finally, a phenomenological approach was used to generate additional codes for the dictionary based on line-by-line reading of the first 10 of the 33 interview transcripts. Once completed, two members of the research team independently coded two transcripts and then met to review the codes. When the coding dictionary was finalized, all transcripts were coded by one research team member. A second coder reviewed the coded segments of data to determine agreement with the

primary coder, thus strengthening consistency of the coding process. Any suggested changes to coding were discussed between members of the research team; adjustments were made as necessary.

Systematic coding of transcripts in Atlas.ti reduced the interview data into meaningful narrative segments associated with specific codes. For example if a girl discussed her ideal dating relationship in the future, this narrative text was coded as "time, future," and "ideal dating relationship." To obtain data related to girls' perceptions of the ideal dating relationship, both currently and in the future, specific analysis was conducting using Atlas.ti. First, across all the transcripts, responses to the interview questions, "*How would you describe the "perfect" dating relationship, right now?*" and "*Would you describe the "perfect" dating relationship differently if I was asking about the future?*" were extracted and saved in a separate word processing file. Specific queries were conducted in order to capture perceptions of an ideal dating relationship in relation to girls' hopes and dreams for current and future relationships. Queries were completed using the following codes: "time, current," "time, future," and "ideal dating relationship." All narrative passages from the different queries were saved as a separate word processing files, then read and reread for meaning to understand if perceptions about an ideal dating relationship change as they describe current versus future relationships. Next axial coding was completed in which subcategories and categories were formed from the coded data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Main themes were identified through an iterative process of reading and rereading the data to increase comprehension. The following section presents all emergent themes and subcategories with interview quotes to illustrate their meaning.

Results

Sample Characteristics

A total of 33 African American girls participated in the semi-structured

interviews. The age range of participants was 15 – 18 years. Participant demographics

are summarized in Table 2. The majority of girls (55%) were in 11th grade at the time of

the interview and 49% were 16 years old.

Table 5.2: Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Categories	(N=33)
Age	15	12.1%
	16	48.5%
	17	36.4%
	18	3.0%
Classification	10th grade	12.1%
	11th grade	54.5%
	12th grade	33.3%
School Attended	School A	21.2%
	School B	15.2%
	School C	24.2%
	School D	15.2%
	School E	24.2%

Ideal Dating Relationship, in High School

An overarching theme was the transience of high school relationships. Girls

regarded all current dating relationships as casual and temporary. Girls did not believe

that their current relationships would result in adult or long-term romantic relationships.

Girls discussed their plans after high school and talked about not wanting to be involved

in a serious relationship in high school. *"It depends on what stage in your life you are in,*

people are going off to school so seniors don't want to get involved in a deep relationship

most of the time…" This same student stated, *"we are going away to school and don't*

want to get tied down to somebody and then catch feelings and then go away, you have to

go through the separation of that…" Girls did not seem to believe that the relationships they currently engaged in would become a permanent part of their futures after high school. Relationships lasting more than 6 months were considered "*shocking*" among girls. Thus, the themes extracted from girls' discussion of the current ideal dating relationship should be viewed within a high school context.

Somebody that's similar to me

Girls described a desire to be in a relationship with someone similar to them intellectually and socially and someone who may share their values. Girls felt that sharing things in common with the partner would make it easier for them to connect and may make the relationship last longer. For example, girls desired a partner with similar religious values, *"I'm pretty religious so it would be nice like if I'm asking for advice I could get it from a Christian perspective too."* A preference for similar family backgrounds was also expressed, *"I would want somebody that had … the same upbringing that I had…so they would understand kind of the things that I've done, or the way I do things so, cause they've kind of done it too."* In addition, girls looked for someone who was also *"educated," "still in school,"* so that they can have substantive and meaningful conversations. Girls wanted to be able to talk to their partner about their views on issues and to be able to express their opinions about the relationship. Girls expressed a desire to be with a partner who shared their approach to school and academics. One participant described it this way *"I mean, I have good grades; I have good attendance. I want a boy that's like me. I want somebody with good grades. I don't want no boy that's barely coming to school, E's and F's. No, why would I want that?"* This theme is consistent with previous research showing that adolescents tend to date

partners that had similar ratings by their peers of popularity, attraction and desirability (Byrne, 1971; Simon et al., 2008). Furthermore, girls sought someone who had similar plans for their education and career. This quote summarizes these beliefs, *"you want somebody that's motivated, you don't want somebody that's like high school's the end, cause [because] me personally, I plan on going to college after this, so I don't want to be with somebody who's plans are high school's the end, I want somebody who has those same kinds of goals as me."*

Being my best friend

Overwhelmingly, girls expressed a wish for their ideal partner to be their best friend. *"…just someone being my best friend, because that's something that a girl really needs is just a best friend honestly. Some girls say "oh I don't need a best friend, I'm fine" but every girl needs a best friend, regardless if it's a guy, your mom, your sister, just a best friend. And I think that's what a lot of girls look for in guys."* Participants discussed this quality in the context of their ideal partner being a friend that they could depend on. The ideal partner would be a close friend that would be there for them when they experiencing problems or struggles. They wanted a friend who they could talk to, who would be in their *"corner,"* *"somebody who is there through everything,"* but someone you can also *"hang out with."* Girls wanted a partner who would be a friend around whom they could be comfortable. Their best friend would allow them to be themselves and reveal their beliefs, likes and dislikes; in other words, *"don't have all your barriers, your walls up."* Girls also wanted a partner where they could remain best friends even after the relationship ended. The desire for a "best friend" partner is described best this way, *"I would say someone that you can feel comfortable with, telling*

everything to...but someone that, in the end, you could be best friends, you could end up on good terms, you can be open with them."

In their descriptions, participants provided specific personality characteristics that they wanted in a best friend romantic partner. The girls wanted a best friend who possessed the following characteristics: respect, trust, good communication, honesty, openness, and loyalty. One participant described good communication this way, *"just being transparent and talking about everything and just making sure you both see eye to eye on everything."* Another participant described trust and loyalty this way about their ideal partner, *"If he goes somewhere, I know that he wouldn't do anything to hurt me. I just have to trust him that he won't do nothing to hurt me."* To be respectful, an ideal partner would *"show his appreciation for you whether people are around or not, like don't treat her differently regardless of who is around..."* Some girls felt that honesty was the most important factor to look for in an ideal partner. A participant stated, *"honesty is want keeps a relationship strong. If you don't have honesty in a relationship, then there is no relationship."* Girls emphasized that cheating violated their concept of respect, trust, and honesty in an ideal relationship. Girls were uniformly against the existence of cheating in their ideal relationship. One girl said, *"first [thing that] comes to mind would be cheating. It could be like betraying their trust..."*

The desire for family approval

While adolescence is a developmental period during which youth begin to rely more on their peers, feel less emotionally attached to their parents and spend less time with family members (Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Kimmel & Weiner, 1995; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002), an emerging theme from these interviews was the importance of family

in shaping girls' ideas about ideal relationships and how to identify an ideal partner. Girls expressed a desire not only for their parents' approval, but also interest in observing how their partner would interact with his family. Girls believed that their partner should be respectful of their parents. The relationship between a partner and his parents would expose how she could expect to be treated in their relationship. One participant reflected on her mother's advice *"my mother always says look at how they treat their mother and you will see how they treat you."* Girls stated that an ideal relationship would include meeting their partner's parents and receiving approval from them, *"like they have met their parents, they know their parents, their parents trust both of them to be together"* and *"someone who's like, not afraid to be around my family."* The inclusion of this characteristic by participants underscores the continued importance of parents and family in these adolescents' relationships. This persists alongside their growing desire for autonomy and is an important, sometimes overlooked dynamic during this developmental stage.

Ideal Dating Relationship, in the Future

As mentioned in the description of the interview protocol, girls were asked if they felt their perceptions of an ideal relationship would change in the future. Girls were not provided with an exact timeframe for "future," but were allowed to create this context on their own. All girls considered "in the future" as after finishing high school. However, the exact time frame for "in the future" could not be determined based on data from each interview. For those who discussed a timeframe, the range of responses provided by girls included 4 years from the time of the interview to around the age of 30.

Marriage

Consistently when asked about an ideal future relationship in the future, girls referenced a husband or being married. It was clear that the majority of the girls interviewed saw an ideal future relationship as a marriage. In discussing her ideal life 4 years from now, one girl described the desire for marriage this way, *"you would want to really find that guy that's good for you, and settle down, and probably think about marriage."* Another girl stated *"I hope I have a good relationship with my husband."* This is consistent with national research that shows that teens generally possess a favorable attitude toward marriage (Wood, Avellar, & Goesling, 2008). In the future, girls disclosed that they would be looking for a husband or hoped that they would already be married, *"I just really hope I find that one person that I know I can't be without .... he'll hopefully want to get married."*

In the future, girls believed they would take their dating relationships more seriously. While girls did not directly define what they meant by serious, it could be inferred that girls felt that future dating relationships would have the potential to become permanent, i.e. marriage. One participant described it this way, " *but when you get older and start to settle down …you have to be serious because you have to look for that one that you want to marry."* Girls discussed that in the future they would be looking for a life partner. One participant expressed she would want *"to find a guy that I can spend the rest of my life with actually stay with him for the rest of my life."* This is in contrast to the casualness that they attributed to their current high school dating relationships. Girls expressed that there would be similar characteristics in their current and future ideal partner, e.g. being a friend, faithful, and trusting, but that in the future all relationships

would be more serious. This difference in casual/temporary versus future, serious

relationships sheds light on the complex and varied terms that adolescents use to

differentiate types of relationships. Finally in the future, girls felt they would be looking

for someone who would make a "good husband." However, many girls were unsure

about what qualities embodied a "good husband."

Being my best friend

Similar to their perceptions of an ideal relationship in present time, girls stated

that they would be looking for a friend in their ideal future mate. Very eloquently one

participant stated, *"and just someone to, like I said, be my best friend, that's all I need. I*

don't need you treating me like princess, nourishing me, no none of that, just be a friend.

Be my friend, just be there when I need you, that's all I ask for." In contrast, however,

when probed about the best friend qualities that they would be looking for, girls were not

as specific as they had been when discussing the ideal relationship in high school.

Participants emphasized qualities like being able to compromise, trusting, and a good

communicator, but left out many others like respectful and honest. Many girls discussed

the need in an ideal relationship to compromise about wanting children, jobs, and in

arguments with their partner. For example, *"In the future as an adult, there are more*

things that you have to compromise on there are more things that come into play, as far

as family finances things that will come as you mature and as you age." There was also a

difference in the way that girls described good communication. One participant

described it this way, *"communication in this stage [present time] is not so much,*

because you don't have that many things to deal with, but in the real world, you know,

you have bills to pay, you have the mortgage payment, teenagers don't have to worry

about this kind of stuff." Girls felt that communication will become a more important part of the ideal relationship in the future when girls felt that they would have more responsibilities and adult issues to discuss with their partner.

Someone who is financially stable

One characteristic that was consistently mentioned when discussing qualities of the ideal future romantic relationship, was a "husband" who was financially stable. Over and over again, girls stated that they wanted partners who could *"provide for us."* Girls were not specific about the type of job or career that their ideal partner would have, but were very clear that the job should provide *"enough to pay their bills or whatever they need in life."* Another participant described their ideal partner a someone who *"...can't owe a lot of people money and then you're using my money to pay them back; no you have to be financially stable, have a good house, a good job, a decent job..."* Girls also talked about their partner being independent and not needing to rely on them for anything. This quote captures these sentiments: *"I'd want them to be successful, like someone who is able to be independent, kind of. They would stand on their own two feet if I wasn't around."* It is possible that this desire may be a reflection of the many successful African American role models that are available to girls today.

Goal Oriented

In additional to being financially stable, girls believed they would desire a partner who was "goal-oriented." Although they did not provide specific details on what these goals should be, girls agreed that their ideal partner would *"have to be motivated to do something with their lives. They cannot sit on the couch for the rest of their life and do absolutely nothing. That is a huge problem."* Another girl described it this way, *"if I*

have my life together and you don't, you have to go, … I just want someone who has their life together, who knows what they want, what they're doing … you just have to have your head right, you have to have a good head on your shoulders." Participants spoke forcefully about the need for their ideal partner to have goals for the future. For example, "*you gotta have potential, you gotta actually have something going on with yourself because if I have something going on with myself, I'm not gonna talk to anybody that's doing anything less. So you actually have to have something going for yourself that will actually make me actually have a reason to even talk to you."*

Discussion

The interview data collected with girls in this study illustrate the strength and articulation of their voice in understanding ideal relationships. Girls provide thoughtful and expressive statements about their dating beliefs. When given the opportunity to discuss their hopes and desires for current and future relationships, girls provided positive depictions of friendship and marriage with a suitable partner. This portrayal is somewhat in contrast to much previous research which too often depicts African American girls as prone toward risk engagement and unhealthy behaviors. Information gleaned from these interviews in some ways dispels the notion that girls are not aware of healthy relationship characteristics (Raiford, et al., 2007). Girls described their ideal relationships using terms that portray positive perceptions of adolescent current and future relationships.

Similarities and differences were evident from African American girls' narratives about an ideal dating relationship now and in the future. Several themes emerged from their description of the ideal relationship during high school: (1) having a partner who shared similar education and career plans, (2) importance of family in identifying an ideal

relationship, and (3) temporariness of high school relationships. Different themes

emerged in their description of the ideal future relationship: (1) desire for marriage, (2)

financial stability, and (3) goals oriented. In both their characterization of the ideal

relationship during high school and in the future, girl discussed a desire for 'best friend'

qualities such as respect, trust, and honesty. Many of the characteristics that girls

verbalized as qualities they associated with an ideal relationship are ones identified by the

Centers for Disease Control in their description of a healthy dating relationship

(www.chooserespect.org). It is encouraging to hear that adolescent girls place value on

these qualities and actively seek them in their romantic relationships.

Developmentally, adolescence is a time when girls are constructing their own

identity. Their identity may be shaped by dating partners and friends that share and

challenge their emerging ideas of self and goals. An examination of students' grades and

those of their current romantic partners found concordance even after controlling for

parents' education (Giordano et al., 2008). Consistent with the Giordano and colleagues

(2008), adolescents expressed a desire to have a partner who was similarly educated and

motivated academically. Conversely, girls who are less successful academically may be

more likely to become involved with a dating partner who does not have strong

educational goals. The academic and relationship trajectories for these adolescents may

be drastically different than for those girls who partner with someone who is

academically motivated. In fact, previous research has shown that adolescents scoring

high on intelligence aptitude tests may be more likely to delay sexual activity (Halpern et

al., 2000). More research is needed to understand the positive and negative pathways

through which high school relationship partners can influence girls' academic aspirations and future planning (Halpern et al., 2000; Schvaneveldt, Miller, Berry, & Lee, 2001).

Interestingly, there was an emphasis on the influence of family in shaping girls' descriptions of the ideal relationship both in high school and in the future. While in high school, girls discussed wanting their parents' approval of their relationship. Girls believed there was a link between how a boy interacted with his family and how he would treat her in the relationship. Previous research has not yet investigated this relationship between boys and their parents. Future research should begin to uncover the socializing role of parents and family in promoting healthy relationship behaviors among boys. The influence of family may seem surprising given the emphasis on media as a central agency shaping teens dating dynamics which seems to discount and/or question the impact of family and parents on adolescents' lives (Escobar-Chaves et al., 2005; Villani, 2001). Yet, research suggests that ethnic minority mothers have a dynamic relationship with their adolescent daughters in which they attempt to protect them from harm and prepare them for development in sexuality and social relationships (Biederman, Nichols, & Durham, 2010). Indeed, girls' narratives highlight the importance they place on family as an sphere of major influence on their ideas of an ideal partner and desire for marriage. It is interesting to note that despite the consistent references to marriage and husbands, very few girls discussed children or stated that children would be included in their ideal future romantic relationships. It is unclear if children were too distal of a consideration for girls, or if they simply do not see children as a part of their ideal future romantic relationships.

Girls tended to equate high school romantic relationships with casualness. Girls consistently stated that these relationships were temporary, and thus, not as important to their future relationships and goals. As teenagers, they want to *"have fun"* in high school and their romantic relationships. However, given the high percentage of girls who report giving birth in 2009 (39.1 per 1,000 females) (CDC, 2011), thus linking them to their high school romantic relationship for years to come, it may be important for girls to consider the potential permanence of their high school relationships and behaviors (McCabe & Barnett, 2000). There is no guarantee that the casual romantic relationships with which these girls are now involved will not be a part of their future.

The emphasis on marriage in participant's descriptions a future ideal relationship provides encouraging support for marriage as an important institution in the lives of African American girls. Marriage rates among African Americans have significantly declined over last several decades. Today, fewer African Americans are married than any other racial or ethnic group (US Bureau of the Census, 2010). Yet, research shows that marriage holds positive implications for African American children, parents, and families (Green, Doherty, Fothergill, & Ensminger, 2012, online first; Horwitz, White, & Howell-White, 1996; Koball, Moidduddin, Henderson, Goesling, & Besculides, 2010). Research suggests that being exposed to an intact family or non-divorced parents is associated with delays in smoking initiation and sexual debut (Barrington, 2010; LaVeist, Zeno, & Fesahazion, 2010). African American families experience better mental health, less depression and higher social support when engaged in a marriage self-rated as being of high quality (Lincoln & Chae, 2010). Furthermore, married African Americans engage in fewer sexual risk behaviors which could result in sexually transmitted diseases,

than single or cohabitating African Americans (Taylor, Adimora, & Schoenbach, 2010).

It is important that parents and families support this future goal for marriage among

adolescents in order to positively affect the future of marriages within the African

American community. It is yet to be determined, however, if setting goals for marriage

and future relationships will actually result in positive future outcomes; more research is

needed to understand the longitudinal effects of future relationships planning on

adolescent developmental trajectories. Research does suggest that increased planning for

the future, even if not related to relationships (i.e. career and educational planning) may

have positive implications for engagement in risky health behaviors (Robbins & Bryan

2004; Somers & Gizzi, 2001).

Perhaps as a reflection of the current national economic climate, girls placed a

strong emphasis on an ideal partner being financially stable and having tangible goals for

their future. Girls consistently discussed wanting a future partner to be able to provide

for her financially. Many girls even took this desire further by stating that their ideal

future partner would have a stable career, not *"just a job."* This aligns with research

which showed that young adults (age 18 and over) valued a financially secure

relationship and placed high value on positive economic prospects (Manning, Giordano,

Longmore, & Hocevar, 2011). Similarly, a survey of adult Black men and women

showed that respondents' ideal marriage partner would earn significantly more than they

do (King & Allen, 2009). Respondents consistently sought partners who would help

them acquire a middle class income or sustain a middle-class lifestyle (King & Allen,

2009). It is not clear if among the girls in the current study this preference is born out of

a desire of wanting to maintain the socio-economic status of their current families or a

value that has been instilled by other socializing influences. More research is needed to better understand the value adolescents and young adults place on this quality for their ideal future partner.

Limitations

There are a number of study strengths and limitations of the current study. The study was grounded in a phenomenological approach to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of the participants through rich text probing and analysis of narrative for emergent theme. Data analysis was conducted in a rigorous, methodological manner beginning with verbatim transcription of interviews and concluding with a summary of themes, implications and recommendations for future research. Moreover, it utilized a coding dictionary and coding procedures that were designed to increase inter-rater reliability and enhance both rigor and completeness (Berg, 2007). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for collection and examination of nuanced and complex data. Importantly, the method "gave voice" to the perceptions of adolescent girls in a manner that both authenticates and communicates their subjective understandings of this challenging developmental period.

Study participants constituted a convenience sample of adolescent girls recruited from high schools in the mid-Atlantic region through word of mouth, fliers, and school presentations. It may be that those students interested in participating in the study represent a select subset of students that is more comfortable talking about their dating relationship behaviors. Despite wide-ranging recruitment strategies, and the extended nature of recruitment, girls who do not regularly attend school may have not been aware of the study in order to express interest in participating. In addition, girls in the study

often discussed the importance of academics and achievement in their ideal relationship. Schools participating in the study may contain more academically minded adolescents than teens who attend schools in other areas. Furthermore, girls' current relationship status (i.e. dating, single), may have influenced the qualities they attributed to an ideal relationship. As relationship status was not an inclusion criterion for the study, it is not clear if adolescents who were currently involved in romantic relationship had differing views about ideal relationships than girls who were not currently involved in a relationship. Finally, the study also place no restrictions on sexual orientation of participants, thus, it is unclear if the perceptions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender African American adolescent girls are expressed in current study findings.

Implications

Study findings provide a window into adolescent perceptions of the ideal romantic relationship now and in the future. Findings can be used to inform the work of researchers engaged in efforts to meet *Healthy People 2020* objectives to reduce physical, sexual, and psychological violence by current and former partners (IV-39) and to reduce adolescent victimization from crimes of violence (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion). Community based initiatives could be developed based on study findings which speak to the everyday experiences of today's adolescent girls. Initiatives like the "Yes!" project have successfully used community based participatory research to enlist the participation of youth in addressing risky behaviors like alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use within their community (Wilson, Minkler, Dasho, Wallerstein, & Martin, 2008). For example, initiatives may want to focus on helping girls understand how seeking a current dating

partner who academically excels and a *"best friend"* may have positive implications for their own academic achievement. More research is needed to understand how and why adolescents desire particular characteristics and how these preferences may be related to current and future adolescent dating violence perpetration and victimization. Girls who do not have a clear vision of their ideal relationship may be more likely to fall victim to an unhealthy relationship. It is currently unknown how girls' current perceptions of the ideal mate may relate to the health and success of their future adult relationships. The myriad of ways romantic relationships affect adolescent development have yet to be fully explored, but it is clear that these relationships warrant more attention by researchers to better understand their relationship trajectories.

Chapter 5: Study 3: The Influence of Religion in African American Girls Dating Relationships[3]

Introduction

African American girls consistently report higher rates of verbal, physical, and sexual violence when compared to their White peers. Using data from the 1995 Add Health survey, Carver et al. (2003) found that 13% of African American girls, aged 12 – 18, in comparison to 7% of White girls, reported that their partner had pushed or shoved them on purpose.   National YRBS data from 2009 indicate an even higher prevalence among high school girls- 15% of African American girls report physical dating violence victimization as compared to a prevalence of 8% among their White counterparts (YRBSS, CDC, 2012a).

A recent study based on a community sample of African American girls aged 14 – 18 reinforces these statistics (Raiford et al., 2007); 18% of African American girls who reported having ever experiencing dating violence stated the nature of this violence was physical abuse only (Raiford et al., 2007). Yet, West and Rose (2000) found that verbal/emotional abuse was the most commonly reported form of violence among a convenience sample of African American males and females aged 16-24. The most widely experienced abusive acts among this sample of participants were hurt feelings, made he or she feel guilty, said mean things, was insulted, and criticized. In addition, 33% of African American girls in this study reported experiencing some form of sexual aggression from a dating partner (West & Rose, 2000). That is, 41% described the aggression as forced kissing, 36% reported their partner tried to force them to have

intercourse, and 27% reported that their partner forced breast/chest fondling (West & Rose, 2000).

Longitudinal data suggests that approximately 11% of African American adolescents report that experiences with dating violence persist into young adulthood (Halpern et al., 2009). African Americans were almost 80% more likely to report dating violence in both adolescence and young adulthood when compared to their White peers (Halpern et al., 2009).

There are several protective factors for teen dating violence emerging in the research literature (Jouriles et al., 2009). Linder and Collins (2005) found that high-quality mid adolescent friendships (both male and female), characterized by security, disclosure, closeness, low levels of conflict, and effective resolution of conflict, were associated with reduced likelihood of dating violence victimization. In addition, research has found that adolescent scholastic achievement and aptitude are associated with decreased risk of dating violence (Halpern et al., 2001). Moreover, Raiford et al (2007) found that African American females who had a good understanding of the components of a healthy relationship were less likely to report dating abuse; youth who reported low understanding of healthy relationships were twice as a likely to report abuse after one year of follow-up (Raiford et al., 2007).

Religion as a protector factor for adolescents

One protective factor that may be especially relevant for African American adolescents is religious involvement. Religious involvement can include activities like attending church, being a member of a religious youth group, prayer, and meditation. Participating in regular religious activities has been found to act as a protective factor

against physical dating violence (Howard & Wang, 2003; Nonnemaker, et al., 2003). Gover (2004) found that adolescents who reported religious activities were less likely to participate in high risk behavior (e.g., such as recent drug use and driving under the influence of alcohol) that increased their vulnerability of being a victim of a violent dating relationship.   Other studies have found that not having any religious affiliation and not considering religion as important were both risk factors for sexual and psychological (emotional) violence (Johnston et al., 2010; Nonnemaker et al., 2006).

While it is not empirically clear the mechanisms through which religion acts as a protective factor, religious involvement has been significantly linked to adolescents' self-esteem and attitude towards self (Bowen, 2008; Cercone, et al., 2005; C. Smith, 2003). Furrow et al (2004) found that adolescents who reported a religious identity were more likely to report that they have a sense of meaning, direction, and fulfillment in life. Data from the 1996 Monitoring The Future survey indicated that high school seniors who attended religious services and endorsed religion as being personally very important were significantly more likely to "take positive attitudes toward themselves" than seniors who never attended services and said religion was not important (Smith & Faris, 2002).

Many African American girls develop a strong religious identity during adolescence. This identity may be characterized by beliefs regarding appropriate behaviors in romantic relationships (i.e., sex and intimacy). For example, adolescents whose religious beliefs prohibit the use of contraception may be more likely to delay their sexual debut and equate sex with marriage (Rostosky et al., 2004). In fact, Bearman and Bruckner (2001) found that White, Asian, and Hispanic adolescents with higher religiosity scores (i.e., high frequency of prayer, church attendance, and importance of

religion) were more likely to delay their sexual debut in middle and late adolescence (after age 15). Religious adolescents may also be more likely to identify other ways to be intimate with their partner (e.g., heavy petting, grinding) in order to uphold their religious values and religious identity (Rostosky et al., 2004). Some religions (i.e., Catholicism, Orthodox Jewish, Muslim) have strict beliefs about dating among adolescents. Catholicism views dating as a precursor for marriage, while many Orthodox Jews practice "shomer negiah" and are not allowed to touch a member of the opposite sex (Manolson, 2002). Adolescents within the Hindu tradition may not be allowed to date and practice a tradition of arranged marriages (Sprecher & Chandak, 1992).

Religion may also act as a protective factor by influencing adolescents' association with members of the religious community. Religious communities may promote positive self-images among adolescents by providing opportunities in youth groups and religion classes where adolescents can engage in positive reflected appraisals (Regnerus et al., 2003). For example, youth groups may include supportive peers who provide positive evaluations that adolescents use to reevaluate their self-image, which in turn increases their self-esteem and lessens their sadness. A study of rural youth showed that church attendees reported that Christian role models (e.g. pastors and youth leaders) at their church and participation in religious activities contributed to their development as a person and their future goals (Good & Willoughby, 2007). Christian friends were also identified as being influential in shaping teen's self-development of goals, values, and overall sense of identity (Good & Willoughby, 2007). Rural youth in this study stated that their Christian friends influenced their decision to not drink alcohol and "party." Finally, religious beliefs and involvement may indirectly reduce the risk of dating

violence by discouraging premarital sex and alcohol use (Mason & Windle, 2001; NIH, 2003).

Religious influences in the African American Community

Within the African American community the role of religion and the church have a long history and tradition of providing support and leadership (Giger et al., 2008; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Religious organizations are seen as not only a place for seeking spiritual guidance and social interactions, but also a force in political welfare and social action. They are often the most visible, respected, and heavily frequented institutions in African American communities (Campbell et al., 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Eric Lincoln, a noted historian of the African American church in America eloquently expressed this dynamic as follows: "*To understand the power of the African American church, it must first be understood that there is no distinction between the African American church and the Black community. The Church is the spiritual face of Black subculture, whether one is a member or not is beside the point*" (Lincoln, 1984, p.96). Religious institutions provide unifying morals, beliefs, and practices for African American families. Parents bring, and sometimes force, their children to come to church because they believe that it will provide a dose of moral education that children can use throughout their daily lives (Smith & Denton, 2005). Religious institutions provide opportunities for youth socialization; first by providing role models (e.g. clergy and church elders) and second, through developing youth leadership skills and talents (e.g. leading youth group and singing in the choir). Parents hope that the values and lessons imparted to their children will help them to make good decisions and resist negative influences as they mature into adulthood (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

The role of religion may be particularly influential in how African American girls go about selecting a dating partner and engage in dating behaviors. African American girls who are religiously committed may look for a partner who is of the same faith. Girls may also be more likely to develop future family goals that include a partner who is religious and possesses certain positive characteristics (e.g., positive self-image and academically motivated). Indirect religious influences on African American girls' romantic relationships could include a social support system that discourages sex before marriage. Furthermore while existing literature documenting the relationship between adolescent dating violence and religiosity is sparse, available evidence suggests that religiosity may also be inversely related to adolescent involvement in interpersonal violence (Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Howard et al., under review; Yan et al., 2010; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002).

Theoretical Framework

Given the potential influence of religion on African American girls' romantic relationships, the Socialization Influence Framework (SIF), developed by Wallace Jr. and Williams (1997), provided a guiding framework for the current study. The SIF proposes that adolescent beliefs and behaviors are influenced by multiple spheres of influence, including their religion, parents/family, school, and peers. The framework suggests that parent's religious beliefs and practices shape adolescent behaviors both directly and indirectly through mechanisms of social control, social support and internalized values and identity formation. For example, African American parents may not only require that girls participate in religious services and practices (e.g. Sunday school), but may also choose to send girls to religious schools and encourage them to embrace friendships with

adolescents of similar religious backgrounds. As a result, African American girls'

perceptions of and engagement in dating behaviors may be greatly influenced by their

religious institution, and parents' and friends' religious beliefs.

More research is needed to understand the how religion impacts African

American girls' romantic relationships. Within this context, the present study explored

the role of religion in African American girls' dating relationship dynamics. The study

also sought to examine if African American girls' religiosity influenced their dating

beliefs and behaviors. Religiosity was defined as girls' participation in religious

activities, e.g., church attendance, participation in religious-based organizations and the

degree of importance that religion rates in the girls' lives. Using a qualitative

methodology consisting of in-depth analysis or "thick description" of interview

transcripts (Geertz, 1973), the following research question was investigated: How do

African American girls discuss the influence of religion within the context of their dating

relationships?

Methods

Setting and Participants

Eligibility criteria included African American girls' aged 15 – 18 that were part of

a broader research agenda examining adolescent girls' perceptions of healthy and

unhealthy dating relationships. Since the study aim was to examine girls' ideas about

dating and the role of religion in shaping those ideas, the sample was not restricted to

include only girls who had a history of dating relationships. Study participants attended

one of five schools in the greater Baltimore, Maryland area (see Table 1). All study

procedures were approved by the University of Maryland Institutional Review Board

(IRB). Student assent and parental consent were required from all girls age 15-17. Girls

age 18 provided informed consent to participate. Participants were asked to identify their

race and grade level in a socio-demographic survey completed immediately before the

interview.

Table 6.1: School Demographics

School Name (grades)	School Type	Enrollment	% African American	% Free and Reduced Lunch / Annual Tuition
School A (Pre-kindergarten-12)	Private, all female	911	14%	$24,630
School B (9-12)	Private, Roman Catholic, all female	287	19%	$11, 550
School C (9-12)	Public coed	1,104	54%	62%
School D (9-12)	Private, Roman Catholic, all female	317	21%	$11, 375
School E (9-12)	Public coed	1,634	89%	58%

Interview Procedures

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted after school hours at each

participating school in a private room. All interviews were audio-recorded and lasted

approximately 1 – 1.5 hours. Interviews were conducted by trained research staff (3

women; 1 African American and 2 Caucasian interviewers).

The interview guide included items about dating terms used in high school,

perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships, and three questions on the influence

of religion on girls' dating relationships. Specifically, girls discussed how religion

shapes ideas about dating relationships. Girls were asked: (1) *Do you think that*

someone's particular religious faith or degree of religiosity affects their dating in any

way? Why or why not? Please explain. (2) *How does religion shape people's dating*

relationships?, and (3) *How might your friend's religious faith have shaped their ideas*

about dating and dating relationships? Follow-up probing questions (e.g., *Would you*

date someone of a different religion?) were used to elicit a full and detailed description of

whether, why and in what ways religion might shape their ideas about dating and

influence their dating behaviors.

Data Analysis

All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and entered into Atlas.ti, a

qualitative data management program (Atlast.ti, 6.1 ed, 2010). To analyze the qualitative

interview data, a systematic and reliable protocol was implemented to enable themes to

inductively emerge from the data and theoretical constructs associated with religiosity to

be examined. First, a coding dictionary was created using terms like "religious beliefs,"

"religious doctrine/rules," "religious involvement," "religious affiliation" to capture

references to religious constructs within the interview data. All interview transcripts

were read line by line and codes were applied to segments of the narratives that seemed

relevant to the analysis. All coding was completed by a primary coder. To strengthen

consistency of the coding process, as a form of qualitative interrater reliability, a

secondary coder reviewed random segments of coded narrative. Discrepancies in the

choice of codes across the two coders were discussed until consensus was reached.

Adjustments were made as necessary. Systematic coding of transcripts in Atlas.ti

allowed for the conduct of "data reduction" (Berg, 2007). The term "data reduction"

refers to the process in which raw qualitative data was simplified or reduced into

meaningful codes. Next, Atlas.ti was used in "data display" process mode. That is, the

interview data was assembled by its assigned codes to facilitate interpretation of meaning (Berg, 2007).

To generate data output on the role of religion in shaping dating beliefs and behaviors, specific queries were run in Atlas.ti. First, across all the transcripts, responses to the interview questions, "*Do you think that people's particular religious faith or degree of religiosity affects their dating in any way?; How does religion shape people's dating relationships?*; and *How might your friend's religious faith have shaped their ideas about dating and dating relationships?*" were extracted and saved in a separate word processing file. In addition, in order to capture data regarding how religion influences adolescent dating relationships that may have emerged elsewhere in the transcriptions, additional queries were conducted using the coding dictionary. Specifically, queries were conducted using the "religion" and "religious beliefs, values, and morals" codes. Next axial coding was conducted in which subcategories and categories were formed from the coded data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, main themes were identified through an iterative process of reading and rereading the data to increase comprehension.

Results

Sample Characteristics

A total of 33 African American girls participated in the semi-structured interviews. Girls ranged from 15 – 18 years and attended public and private high schools in a metropolitan mid-Atlantic city. While all participant data was used in analysis, it is important to note that a total of 23 girls self-identified as being affiliated with a Christian religion (e.g. Baptist, Methodist, and Catholic). The remaining 10 girls did not comment

on their religious affiliation. Other participant demographics are summarized in Table 2.

All emergent themes are discussed below.

Table 6.2: Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Categories	(N=33)
Age	15	12.1%
	16	48.5%
	17	36.4%
	18	3.0%
Classification	10th grade	12.1%
	11th grade	54.5%
	12th grade	33.3%
School Attended	School A	21.2%
	School B	15.2%
	School C	24.2%
	School D	15.2%
	School E	24.2%

During each interview, girls were asked to describe how someone's particular

religious faith or religiosity might influence their dating and dating relationships. While

not specifically asked about their personal dating experiences, many study participants

did discuss the role of religion in the context of their own dating behaviors during high

school. Much of the conversations regarding dating revolved around their beliefs about

virginity, sexual relations, and sexuality. Participants also described how religion

influenced their dating partner preferences.

Premarital sex, virginity, and sexual orientation

Virginity and beliefs about sex before marriage was a frequent topic of

conversation by participants. Many participants who self-identified as Christian (n = 23)

acknowledged that their faith does not support sex before marriage. Some participants

stated their intention to wait until marriage before having sex. These participants felt that

this religious principle was one they would uphold during adolescent dating. *"I'm gonna*

uphold like the whole like not to have sex before marriage and like if I was in a

relationship I would definitely honor that." Other participants, however, disclosed that

while they knew sex before marriage went against their faith, their personal beliefs about

sex would determine whether they have sex or not. Participants acknowledged the

conflict between their religious beliefs and real life actions. Girls stated they either tried

or are trying to stay virgins, but were not sure they would wait until marriage before

having their first sexual experience. Girls shared some frustration in trying to reconcile

their desire to *"do the things they want to do,"* while attempting to adhere to religious

teachings contrary to these desires. This conflict is best illustrated as follow: *"Based on*

my religion, it's [sex before marriage] something you shouldn't do, but if I'm to be

completely honest, I highly doubt that I will wait until marriage. Even though I'm not

ready now, I don't see myself waiting all the way 'til marriage."

Characteristics of dating partners

Research suggests that the characteristics of adolescent's dating partner can have

tremendous effects on their sexual behavior, academic achievement, and future planning

(Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Giordano et al., 2008; Knoester et al., 2006). Having a partner

who holds similar religious beliefs may also reinforce girls' religious practices and

adherence to religious principles that include rules related to premarital sex. During the

interviews, participants were often asked if they would date someone who had a higher or

lower degree of religiosity. Overwhelmingly, participants stated they would find it

difficult to date someone who was more religious than them. Participants felt this would

be an area of constant tension in their dating relationships resulting in disagreements and

arguments. One participant described a situation in which she wanted to get a tattoo, but

her dating partner was adamantly against tattoos because of his religious beliefs. The girl got the tattoo anyway and her dating relationship subsequently ended because of the decision to go against her partner's religious beliefs. In discussing the religious involvement of her partner, another participant remarked, *"I'm not going to ask you 'Do you go to church every weekend?' I never ask that…"*

Participants were also asked if they would date someone of a different religion. Almost all participants felt they would only be able to date someone who possessed similar religious beliefs. Girls felt strongly that if they held Christian beliefs (i.e. believed in God as a Higher Being), then they wanted their partner to also believe in God. However, participants were not interested in their dating partners' specific religious denomination, *"I'm not going to say the exact religion, but they have to [have] morals and faith…"* It was clear that participants desired a dating partner who possessed congruent religious beliefs.

Regarding beliefs about sexuality, participants discussed how religion could affect girls' engagement in relationships with males. It is important to note that the interview protocol did not directly inquire about girl's sexuality or sexual orientation. Participants disclosed that even if a girl felt she may be attracted to another girl, she would be less likely to act on those feelings if she was religious. *"You may be a homosexual and you decide that you want to date a girl [and] in your place of worship it says that God says that men and wife [women] must marry… I think that might cause a little conflict."* Despite this, participants felt that being lesbian or gay was not something that should be seen as a sin or sinful. Participants felt that sexual orientation should not be a reason for someone to be denigrated within their religion. *"And I hate the idea that God loves*

everyone equally and all sins are the same, then we treat gay people one way, and a

murderer a different way." Girls did not feel that being lesbian or gay was a worse sin

than other sins like premarital sex or murder. Girls were particularly attuned to what

they felt was a contradiction in religion in its regard of homosexual orientation. Girls had

strong feelings about how the Bible and religion treats sexuality unfairly. Girls disclosed

having friends that were gay or lesbian. They did not believe it was fair that religion

casts a negative view on their friends because of their sexual orientation.

Influence of friends' religious beliefs on dating behaviors

According to the SIF, friendships should provide another sphere of influence on

African American girls dating behaviors. Thus, participants were asked to describe how

their friends' religious faith may have influenced their ideas about dating and dating

behaviors. Girls' beliefs about their friends' dating behaviors, as related to religion, are

important because adolescents spend more of their free time with their peers than anyone

else (Smith, 2003). Girls may gain access to potential dating partners through their

friendship networks (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002). There is the potential that their friends'

religious beliefs and dating behaviors could greatly influence girls' beliefs and behaviors.

In addition, while it is plausible that the girls in this study may have drastically different

views on religion and dating behaviors than their friends, research does suggest that

adolescents tend to share similar beliefs and views with their friends and other peers in

their social networks (Hafen, Laursen, Burk, Kerr, & Stattin, 2011; Linden-Andersen,

Markiewicz, & Doyle, 2009). Consequently, the views described in this section may

actually shed light on study's participants' dating beliefs and behaviors related to religion.

Analysis of transcript data uncovered two lines of thought about the role of religion in

their friends' dating behaviors: (a) participants either believed that their "religious" friends had higher standards for their dating relationships, (b) participants believed that religion had absolutely no influence on their friends' dating behaviors.

Participants stated that their friends who were religious, i.e. actively attended church and felt their faith was important to their identity, were likely to desire similar qualities in a partner. As one girl described her friend, *"She definitely wants to date a Christian because like she wants someone, instead of going to church with her friends and praying with her friends, she wants a boyfriend, you know, someone that she's interested in to share that same thing with her..."* Participants also felt that their religious friends used their religion to guide them in terms of relationship behaviors. For example, participants believed their religious friends would wait until marriage before having sex. Talking about her friends *"who strongly believe in their religion,"* one participant's views were evocative of others: *"I think it impacts their relationship more 'cause...according to their religion, they know what they supposed to do and what they not...it has a bigger impact on the decisions they make in their relationships."* In addition, their religion would determine who they *"decide to date, how many people they decide to date at one time, what they decide to do, where they decide to go."* Many participants believed that their religious friends were greatly influenced by their religious principles; these principles would then dictate who and how they dated. However, participants did not provide details about what specific principles were referenced when their friends were selecting partners. Other than not supporting sex before religion, participants did not have a clear idea about specific religious principles related to dating behaviors.

In contrast, many participants believed that regardless of their friends' active participation in religious activities, religious beliefs did not play a factor in deciding who to date and how they engaged in dating behaviors. Participant's observations suggested that their friends were not concerned about how their dating behaviors may be in conflict with their religious beliefs. In this regard, one participant equated religion to a coping mechanism which excused or provided forgiveness for dating behaviors they had engaged in but may have lingering regret or guilt: *"Sometimes even people who are the most religious can be the most sinful, because they use religion as a get out, a pass,"* *"most people will look at their own religion when they are hooking up or doing something they feel guilty about"* and *"when you're young in high school...you tend to use religion as more of a way to cope with yourself and what you've done and as a kind of like an easy way out."* Participants shared that although their friends may have been raised with certain religious beliefs *"my friends who have a faith but they don't really use it."* As noted earlier, this incongruence in religious beliefs and dating behaviors was evident in discussions about sex and teen relationships. Participants felt that their friends often ignored their religious beliefs when deciding how to engage in relationship behaviors, *"I don't think they really think about God when they're living their life. He's kind of like an afterthought like once they've done something bad they might want to like pray for forgiveness."*

Future relationships

Although they were not specifically asked about the role of religion in their future relationships, many participants initiated, without prompting, discussion on the role of religion in relation to marriage. This may be particularly revealing in terms of providing

116

a window into how the girls believed religion might influence their beliefs of about a future dating partner. Interestingly, participants also discussed the influence of religion in the context of divorce and unhealthy marriages.

In contrast to participants' seeming lack of interest in the religious beliefs of their high school dating partners, participants were greatly concerned about how religion would play a role in their marriage. Participants remarked that since they are presently *"not looking to settle down,"* religion is less of a factor in high school relationships. Participants expressed the belief that religion would be more important in future relationships because they would have to decide how they would be married (i.e., in a church and/or by a minister or priest) and whether they would raise their children in a particular faith and according to particular religious principles. Participants remarked that religion would be *"more important later on in life."* They believed that marrying someone of a different religion could cause conflicts in that relationship, *"You can marry somebody who has a different religion but when kids get involved that's when clashes start cause like they are gonna want their child to do this and they are gonna want their child to do that, then it causes a lot of problems and commotion.*" Participants believed that they may have to *"compromise on how we would raise our children"* in deciding which religion to raise their children within.

Given the prevalence of teen dating violence among African American females, it was enlightening to uncover that participants discussed the role of religion in the context of unhealthy marriages. A number of participants believed that religion could impact a person's ability to leave an unhealthy marriage. Girls felt that since many religions do not support divorce, one may feel obligated to stay in an unhealthy marriage.

Girls felt that *"some religions don't condone divorce if a person is unhappy and then they're stuck in this harmful relationship."* They expressed disagreement with these religious beliefs that forbade divorce, without exceptions. Importantly, participants shared their belief that religion should not be a reason to stay in an unhealthy marriage. They believed that while religious tenets may disapprove of divorce, a higher power (e.g. God) would not want them to be physically hurt in their marriage. One participant described this belief very poignantly, *"God hates violence but he also hates divorce. I don't believe God wants you to stay with a violent man."* Girls believed that if divorce was necessary to escape an unhealthy relationship, then it should be allowable, regardless of one's religion.

Discussion

This study examined the role of religion in adolescent dating relationships from the point of view of African American females; a population at increased risk for teen dating violence victimization. Erikson (1968) suggests that religious beliefs, values, and morals "enable youth to make sense of the world and understand their place in it." It is upon their religious beliefs, values, and morals that adolescents begin to build their personal belief system. This belief system may become the basis for which adolescents decide how and why they engage in dating relationships.

Participants in this study clearly articulated the ways in which religion does influence teen's perceptions of and engagement in dating behaviors. Consistent with the SIF demonstrating the importance of religion among contemporary adolescents, participants elaborated the various ways in which religion can and does influence their perceptions of appropriate dating behaviors (to have sex or not have sex) and preferences

118

for partners (same religion, sexual orientation) (Smith & Denton, 2005). Findings support the SIF which suggests that parents' and friends' religious beliefs are important factors in understanding and shaping girls romantic relationships.

Evident from the perspectives of these girls was awareness of a conflict between adherence to religious beliefs and personal desires to explore their sexuality in a dating relationship. Less evident was any consensus on how the conflict was to be resolved. When confronted with this conflict, participants seemed to feel forced to decide whether to maintain their virginity. Extant research substantiates this adolescent dilemma. In their extensive examination of the role of religion in the lives of adolescents, Smith and Denton (2005) found that 95% of adolescents characterized as "devoted" (i.e., attending religious services at least weekly and very/extremely close to God) and 57% of adolescents characterized as "regulars" (i.e., attending services less than weekly and somewhat to not at all close to God) reported believing in waiting for marriage to have sex. However in contrast, according to the national 2009 YRBS, the majority of African American females (58%) report ever having sexual intercourse and 45% report having had sex with at least 1 person in the last 3 months. Hence, while adolescents report strong religious beliefs, and religious teachings generally encourage sexually conservative values, attitudes and behaviors, research also shows that a large proportion of African American teens are already having sex during high school.

Study findings also add to the meager research on factors associated with how adolescents select dating partners or the significance of these dynamics to the quality of the dating relationship (Collins, 2003; Collins et al., 2009; Karney et al., 2007). With respect to the role of religion in their partner selection and future relationships, findings

suggest that girls may not be extremely concerned with the religious beliefs of their

dating partners during high school; yet, they expressed much more interest in the

religious beliefs of potential marriage partners. Developmentally, adolescents are more

likely to focus solely on their high school relationships and how their peers perceive their

relationships (Shulman & Scharf, 2000). However as they grow older and graduate from

high school, teens may begin to see how their behaviors and beliefs can influence their

future relationships (McCabe & Barnett, 2000). Participants in this present study were

able to foresee their future relationships and believe that religion will be a factor in their

spousal choice.

The voices of these African American girls rang clear as they expressed strong

beliefs about divorce and unhealthy relationships. Participants provided insightful

comments about the relationship between religions that do not support divorce and in the

context of remaining in an unhealthy marriage. In fact, research suggests that many

clergy members and religious couples are encouraged to mend their unhealthy

relationships and keep the marriage intact (Hajjar, 2004; Nason-Clark, 2009; Rotunda,

Williamson, & Penfold, 2004). Extant literature provides many examples of domestic

violence survivors who share that their religious faith sustained them through their

domestic abuse, while others felt obligated to suffer in "sacred silence" regarding their

abuse (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2003; Nason-Clark, 1997, 2004). Given that research and

programs that bridge the gap between religion and unhealthy relationships are still in its

infancy, it was somewhat surprising that these adolescent females had such strong beliefs

about the role religion in marriage and divorce. However, participants did not directly

discuss the role of religion as protective against harmful or unhealthy adolescent dating

relationships. Girls did not appear to believe that religion played a large role in the healthfulness of their high school relationships. Nevertheless, it cannot be surmised that religion does not act in a protective role, e.g., preventing adolescent teen violence. More research is needed to explore how religion may provide a framework for perceptions of healthy relationships among adolescents.

Implications

The African American girls in this study gave voice to their understanding and confusion regarding the influence of religion and religious beliefs on teen and future dating behaviors. Participants recognized the conflict and sometimes contradiction between their religious values and their everyday actions. Findings highlight the need for interventions and programs that can help adolescents address and resolve the tension between their beliefs and the real world dynamics and social norms that shape their behavior. For example, girls seemed to struggle with how they could be expected to maintain their virginity when facing a reality where sex appears as socially normative among their friends' networks. If girls are expected not to engage in premarital sex, they may need to learn how to communicate and negotiate this with their dating partners. Interventions should provide an opportunity for girls to model empowering communication messages with potential partners regarding their desires and decisions related to premarital sex. Parents may also be in a pivotal positive to help adolescents resolve any perceived conflicts between their family's religious beliefs/rules and their daily lives as teenagers. Parents can reflect on their own experiences with premarital sex to educate their adolescents about how to they can maintain their virginity (Sieving, McNeely, & Blum, 2000). In addition, such interventions should attempt to highlight the

health advantages of waiting till marriage for sex, regardless of individual religious beliefs. Adolescents need to be reminded that not only may premarital sex go against their religious doctrine, but it also places them at risk for contracting sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy.

Moreover, it is also possible that this conflict could place adolescents at more risk for risky sexual behaviors. It is unclear if girls discussed the tension between their religious beliefs and peer/societal norms with their parents. Girls may not actually receive any parental guidance or support when confronted with questions regarding sexual behaviors. In addition, some states' and local school districts' curricular provide "abstinence only" education. This lack of comprehensive sex education, in conjunction with family religious beliefs that support abstinence until marriage, may create an atmosphere in which adolescents are at greater risk of engaging in risky sexual behaviors. Girls who decide to engage in sexual activities may not use contraception; alternatively, they may engage in certain sexual behaviors (i.e. oral sex), but not consider it "sex" in order to preserve their virginity status but still be sexually intimate with a partner (Bruckner & Bearman, 2005; Sawyer, Howard, Brewster-Jordan, Gavin, & Sherman, 2007). More research is needed to understand how families are able to balance the religious beliefs they instill in their adolescents while also providing practical guidance regarding their sexual identity, desires and intimacy needs. Future studies should examine the content and source of advice provided to girls related to their sexual behaviors.

Though not directly addressed by girls in the present study, adolescents' perceptions of virginity and the influence of virginity pledges is also important to

consider. Often, religious institutions encourage adolescent church members to take

virginity pledges in which they pledge not to have sex until marriage (Martino, Elliott,

Collins, Kanouse, & Berry, 2008). It is unclear if and how these pledges play a role in

adolescents' ultimate decision to engage in sexual acts (Bersamin, Walker, Waiters,

Fisher, & Grube, 2005; Bruckner & Bearman, 2005; Martino et al., 2008). It is possible

that adolescents who agree to take a virginity pledge with their school or religious

institution may have different perceptions of the role of religion in their dating behaviors.

In addition, research has shown that making a private virginity pledge may reduce the

likelihood of engaging in sexual intercourse and oral sex among adolescents (Bersamin et

al., 2005). Future studies should also attempt to determine if adolescents with virginity

pledges have different perceptions of what constitutes intimacy, sex and sexual acts

(Sawyer et al., 2007). Community based participatory research with adolescents may

help identify ways to reconcile the conflicts between their desire for independence and

intimacy with dating partners and their religious beliefs and principles.

Of great importance, these adolescents appeared to have sophisticated insights as

to the role of religion in unhealthy dating relationships. Participants strongly believed

that religion does not condone individuals remaining in unhealthy relationships.

Participants stated that a higher power would not support violence in a marriage and

participants supported the option of divorce as a legitimate means to escape an unhealthy

relationship. These findings underscore the need for parents, families, and religious

leaders to better attend to the role of religion in teens leaving unhealthy relationships. In

fact, organizations like the *Faith Trust Institute* (www.faithtrustinstitute.org) are

beginning to provide more resources for adolescents of various religious faiths to

empower them to identify unhealthy characteristics of their dating relationships to prevent future partner violence.

Limitations

The data analyzed in the present data are limited by the questions and probes that were used in the interview protocol. More interview questions focusing on the specific values and beliefs instilled in the African American females would better contextualize the findings. Despite these constraints, structural coding and phenomenological analysis captured detailed explanations of African American adolescent female's beliefs about religion and their dating behaviors. In addition, given the somewhat sensitive topic area, data may be prone to social desirability. Participants may not have been comfortable revealing details about their specific dating behaviors. In spite of this, respondents did appear to be candid and forthcoming in their responses to the interview questions. Interviewers used common interview techniques to help adolescents become comfortable with the information they were providing.

Conclusions

Given the salient role of religion and the church in the African American community, it is not surprising that the results of this study illustrate the influence of religion on African American adolescent girls' ideas about dating relationships and marriage. This study highlights the internal conflict that adolescent girls experience when trying to reconcile their religious beliefs and developmental needs for intimacy and independence. In making decisions about their dating behaviors, some girls uphold their religious beliefs about sex, while others ignore or overlook their religious beliefs. It remains unclear, however, how this internal conflict may impact adolescents' emotional

well-being and other risk behavior engagement. Within a positive youth development framework, search for protective factors in the context of adolescent dating violence are being investigated. Continued connections and collaborations with religious institutions can help researchers, practitioners and educators better understand the role of religion and religious beliefs in shaping African American adolescent girls dating dynamics.

Chapter 6: Summary

Previous research illustrates the need for greater understanding of how adolescents view their ideal partner and what implications these perceptions may have for healthy dating relationships in high school and the future. Among African American adolescents, religion may be particularly salient in dating relationships. Religious organizations not only provide a place for seeking spiritual guidance and social interactions, but also provide unifying morals, beliefs, and practices for African American families. This dissertation sought to: (1) understand how African American girls characterize healthy and/or ideal dating relationships; (2) explore the differences in African American girls' perceptions of an ideal dating relationship during high school as compared to the future; and (3) consider how religiosity may influence African American girls' ideas about dating and engagement in dating behaviors. Each study conducted as part of this dissertation provided findings that can be used to develop positive youth development initiatives and faith-based interventions that promote healthy dating relationship attitudes and behaviors, and reduce the risk of teen dating violence.

In Study 1, girls provided in depth descriptions of the characteristics that they ascribe to a healthy dating relationship. These characterizations were examined within the context of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 12 identified healthy dating relationship characteristics. Findings indicated girls' independently attributed 8 major characteristics, *good communication, honesty, trust, respect, compromise, understanding, individuality,* and *self-confidence*, to a healthy relationship. Findings reveal an existing strong basis to empower African American girls to recognize qualities

of a healthy relationship which can aid them in quickly identifying potentially unhealthy or harmful relationships. Study 2 findings shed light on African American girls' perceptions of the ideal relationship from a developmental perspective. Girls discussed how they viewed an ideal relationship currently, in high school, and how their perceptions may change in the future. Thorough examination of interview data girls revealed their desire for a partner who shared similar education and career plans, but who also displayed 'best friend' qualities such as respect, trust, and honesty. In addition, girls described the importance of family in evaluating a dating relationship and the temporariness of high school relationships. However, as girls discussed their ideal future relationships their desires shifted to an expectation to be married to a husband who was financially stable and goals oriented. Finally in Study 3, girls' discussion of religion, within the context of their dating relationships, was examined. Girls saw religion's influence in terms of their decisions to become sexually active, choosing a partner based on religious affiliation and issues of sexual orientation. Interestingly, girls' also felt that, despite the sanctity of marriage, women should not stay in unhealthy or harmful relationships.

Overall, girls provided thoughtful and expressive depictions of healthy relationship characteristics. The African American girls in this study were able to identify and describe many of the well-regarded characteristics of a healthy relationship. Without being asked directly about the characteristics put forth by the CDC, girls identified $2/3^{rd}$ of the qualities considered essential to a healthy relationship. In their discussion of the ideal relationship in high school, several of these qualities were exemplified in their description of a dating partner who was also their "best friend,"

127

possessing qualities like trust, respect, and honesty. Furthermore, girls discussed a desire

for similar morals and religious beliefs in order to sustain a healthy dating relationship.

Girls felt it was important that their partner not be more religious than them and also

possess beliefs in the same higher being (e.g. God). Information gleaned from these

studies in some ways dispels the notion that African American girls are not aware of

healthy relationship characteristics. Girls described their ideal relationships using terms

that portray positive perceptions of adolescent current and future relationships.

The Influence of Family

Interesting, there was a strong reoccurring emphasis on the influence of family in

these African American girls' descriptions of their desired romantic relationships. While

in high school, girls discussed wanting their parents approval of the relationship. Girls

believed there was a link between how a boy interacted with his family and how he

would treat her in the relationship. Girls stated that an ideal relationship would include

meeting their partner's parents and receiving approval from them. The inclusion of this

characteristic by participants highlights the continued importance of parents and family in

these adolescents' relationships and may provide a means to further influence adolescent

engagement in healthy relationships. In the future, girls consistently discussed a desire

for a husband or to be married. This desire for marriage is also noted in girls' description

of the need to compromise in a healthy relationship. Girls saw this quality as a necessity

within healthy adult relationships; that is they expected that a healthy relationship would

require compromise with one's partner about jobs, working hours, children, and religion.

More specifically, girls stated that they would need to compromise with their partner as

to whether they would have a family that included children, how to raise their children, and what religion they would practice.

It is also imperative to note that girls were acutely aware of the conflict that exists between their religious beliefs and societal norms. Girls expressed personal desires to want to be intimate and/or explore their sexuality in a dating relationship. However, many participants acknowledged that their religious faith does not support sex before marriage. Girls seemed to struggle with how they could be expected to maintain their virginity when sex appears socially normative among their friends and within the high school context. There was no consensus among girls as to how to reconcile this conflict. Yet, it was extremely positive that in their descriptions of healthy relationship characteristics, girls discussed a desire for their partner to respect where they stood on sex being a part of their relationship.

Unhealthy relationship dynamics

Given the higher prevalence of physical dating violence among African American girls, it is enlightening that girls were able to both identify the qualities of a healthy relationship, but also note unhealthy relationship dynamics. Girls characterized an unhealthy relationship as one where a partner will talk down to them, make them feel like nothing, and in other ways lower their self-confidence. Particularly encouraging was girls' discussion articulation of the role of religion in unhealthy relationships. In their discussion of future romantic relationships, girls felt it was important that religion not deter someone from leaving an unhealthy marriage. These girls strongly believed that religion does not condone individuals remaining in any unhealthy relationships.

Implications for future research

Study findings provide a window into adolescent perceptions of the ideal healthy romantic relationship. Study findings speak to the need for more interventions and curricula to prevent adolescent dating violence. For example, positive youth development programs may want to focus on helping girls understand that seeking a current dating partner who academically excels and is a *"best friend"* may have positive implications for their own academic achievement. Results can be used to develop curricula to enable girls to articulate, model and communicate to their peers how the characteristics put forth by the CDC may have practical applications to their current relationships. Study findings make relevant these characteristics by providing contextualized examples that resonate with the lives of contemporary African American adolescent girls. More research is needed to understand how and why adolescents desire particular characteristics and how these preferences may be related to current and future adolescent dating violence perpetration and victimization. Girls who do not have a clear vision of an ideal relationship may be more likely to fall victim to an unhealthy relationship. Furthermore, more research is needed to explore how religion may provide a framework for perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationships among adolescents. Findings highlight the need for interventions and programs that can help adolescents address and resolve the tension between their beliefs and the real world dynamics and social norms that shape their behavior.

Future research should include using more mixed method approaches to understand teen dating relationships. More descriptive information is needed regarding the physical and emotional injuries that result from unhealthy dating relationships and the prevalence of these injuries among not only among high school students (ages 14-18), but

also younger, middle school aged adolescents (ages 11-13). Future research can also build upon the information gleaned from this study to develop survey instruments that can identify adolescents at risk for engaging unhealthy relationships.

Often school-based dating violence prevention curricula focus on helping girls identify an unhealthy relationship and provide strategies to help them leave an unhealthy relationship. Preventing teen dating violence should also focus on instilling in girls the values and characteristics of healthy relationships. New forms of technology, e.g. text message, cellular phone applications, and social media, could also be used to educate adolescents about healthy relationships. Parents, health educators, and social workers should empower and educate girls to recognize the characteristics of a healthy relationship at an early developmental age. In taking these steps, we may succeed in preventing girls from ever having to experience a harmful dating relationship.

Appendices

Appendix I: Methods

Study Overview

      This study sought to: (1) to understand how African American girls characterize ideal healthy dating relationships; (2) explore the differences in African American girls' perceptions of an ideal dating relationship during high school as compared to the future; and (3) consider how religiosity may influence African American girls' perceptions of and engagement in dating relationships. There is limited research that examines African American girls' perceptions of an ideal dating relationship and the qualities they hope for in future dating relationships. Given the statistics suggesting high prevalence of dating violence victimization among African American girls, study findings shed light on the beliefs that may influence risk of victimization.   Moreover, because of the importance of religion in the African American community, it may function as an important socializing influence. Religious beliefs and practices may act as a positive influence on dating beliefs by instilling strict values as regards dating, partner characteristics and/or appropriate dating behaviors. On the other hand, religious beliefs and practices could also make African American girls more vulnerable to dating violence by endorsing traditional gender roles that provide fewer rights and less power to females in a romantic relationship. In summary, findings from this study can be used to better understand how individual and community factors may play a role in promoting healthy dating relationship attitudes and behaviors among African American girls and preventing teen dating violence.

Conceptual Framework

      The conceptual framework for the study was the Socialization Influence Framework (SIF), developed by Wallace and Williams (1997; see below). The SIF proposes that adolescent beliefs and behaviors are influenced by multiple spheres of influence, including their parents/family, religion, school, and peers. The framework suggests that parent's religious beliefs and practices shape adolescent health related behaviors both directly and indirectly through mechanisms of social control, social support and internalized values and identity formation. For example, parents may restrict adolescents' friendships to peers who share similar religious beliefs.

      The research questions for this dissertation study emerged from the multiple domains of socialization influence which constitute the SIF. This study not only investigated adolescent characterization and perceptions of the ideal relationship now and in the future (RQ #1-5), but also how religious beliefs and practices may influenced these perceptions (RQ #6).

Overall Strategy and Rationale

Qualitative research methods allow in-depth exploration of participant beliefs, perceptions, and behaviors (Devers, 1999). While studies that exclusively make use of survey questionnaires typically ask participants to <u>rate</u> their beliefs and experiences numerically, qualitative methods can answer *how* and *why* research questions (Ragin, Nagel, & White, 2004). Qualitative methodology can include a range of approaches including focus groups, historiography, case studies, ethnography, participant observation, and interviewing (Berg, 2007). The goal of qualitative research is to capture a rich, "thick description" of the subjectivity (Geertz, 1973). It allows for understanding of complex dynamics and examination including: 1) internal processing of information, in the context of needs, motivations and pressures; 2) how dissonance is appraised and resolved; 3) what potentially prompts particular behaviors (Ragin, et al.,
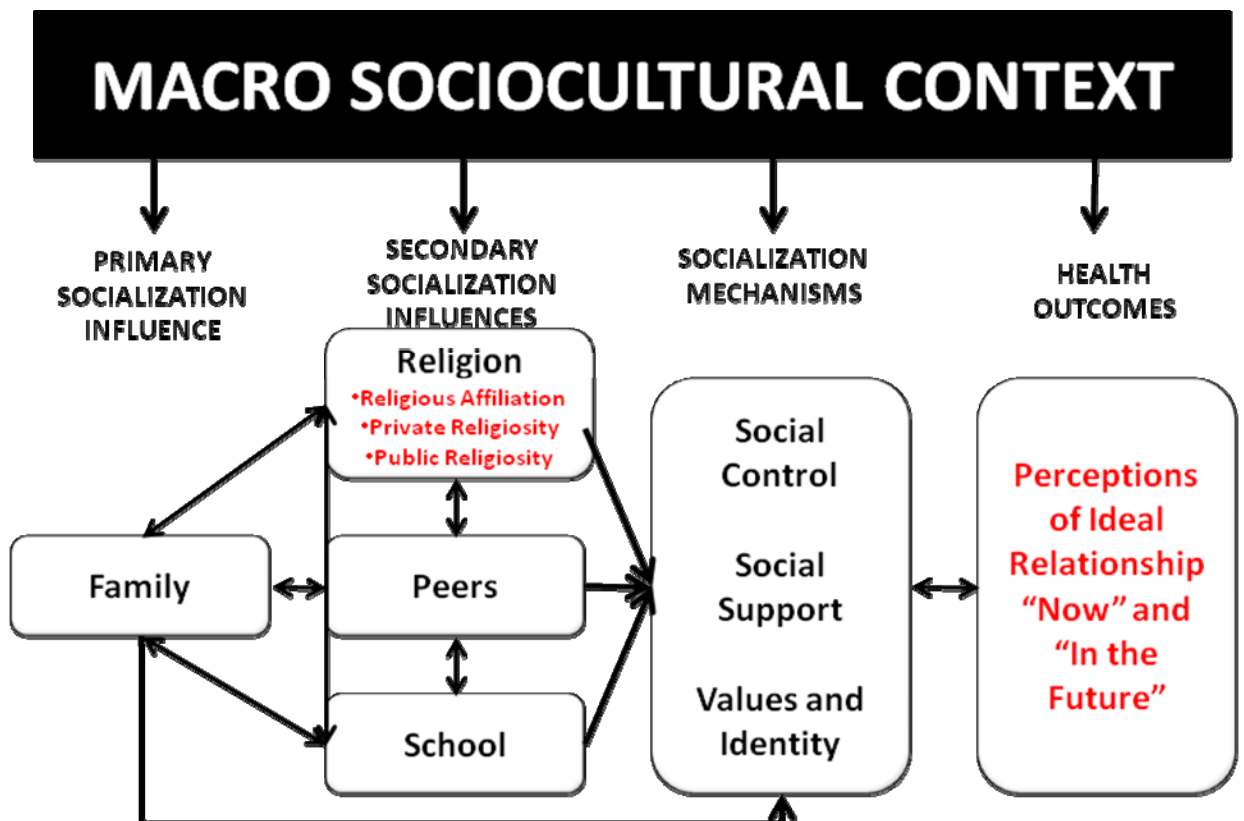
2004). These data are not easily accessible from a survey or questionnaire. This methodology is particularly useful when attempting to understand phenomenon that has multiple sources of influence and complex dynamics, like adolescent dating relationships. Qualitative methodology provides an opportunity for the researcher to respect and honor study participants by allowing them to "speak for" themselves (Becker, 1996). Furthermore, qualitative research attempts to probe and understand participants' experiences and beliefs to capture the meanings and emotions attached to the subject and their subjective appraisal of the environment, both in terms of opportunities and challenges, personal gains and losses (CDC, 2008).

There are several reasons why the semi-structured, in-depth interview method was particularly appropriate for the examination of this study's research questions. First, adolescent romantic relationships are highly personal and complex phenomena. In-depth

analysis was needed to explore what adolescents looked for in their partner, how they chose a partner, and what behaviors they engaged in during a relationship. Second, while adolescents are often asked to complete various surveys and questionnaires in school it is less often that they are invited to share their perspectives, in their language, to enable "meaning making" of dynamics that characterize their adolescent world behaviors. This study provided an opportunity for girls to discuss a topic that is central to their identity development and daily lives. Girls were able to speak freely about their relationship beliefs and experiences in a way that could not be captured in a survey or questionnaire. Little research had explored the factors that influence adolescents' perceptions of the ideal relationship. One-on-one interviews with girls allowed for deep probing to uncover the potentially complex ways in which religion influenced adolescent relationship ideas and aspirations.

Study Schools

This study was a part of a larger research study that aimed to examine perceptions of healthy and unhealthy dating relationships among girls attending high schools in the Baltimore metropolitan area. The parent study began as a seed grant funded by the University of Maryland, School of Public Health and included 20 girls from 2 high schools in the Baltimore area. Following additional funding from NIH (R03- *The Girls Healthy Dating Relationship Study*), the parent study included 6 high schools in the greater Baltimore area. Schools that participated in the parent study had diverse backgrounds and student populations (see below. A total of 50 girls from these 6 high schools were recruited to participate in the *Girls Healthy Dating Relationship Study*. Thus, a total of 70 semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with adolescent girls to explore their perceptions of healthy and harmful dating relationships and the role of religion as a socializing influence in their lives.

The parent study also included a series of 10 focus groups that were conducted across all participating schools to confirm emerging themes from the interviews and validate preliminary findings. Two focus groups were conducted at each participating school; one group included girls who participated in an interview and the other group included girls who did not participate in an interview but were interested in a discussion

School Demographics

School Name (grades)	Type	Enrollment	% African American
Chesapeake High School (9-12)	Public coed	1063	51%
Bryn Mawr School (Pre-kindergarten-12)	Private, all female	911	14%
The Catholic High School of Baltimore (9-12)	Private, Roman Catholic, all female	287	19%
Institute of Notre Dame (9-12)	Private, Roman Catholic, all female	317	21%
Shoshana S. Cardin High School (9-12)	Private, Jewish, coed	74	3%
Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School (Pre-kindergarten-12)	Private, Jewish, coed	900	Unavailable

about teen dating relationships. The purpose of the focus groups were twofold: 1) to ensure initial interpretation of what the girls have said is accurate; and 2) to make sure findings have captured their full range of opinions and achieved conceptual saturation (Bowen, 2008).

It is important to note that in addition to the funding provided by NIH for the parent study, the doctoral student received a Diversity Supplement grant from the National Institute for Child and Human Development (NICHD) to expand and enhance her research skills and conduct the dissertation research (Research Supplements to Promote Diversity in Health-Related Research PA-05-015). The Diversity Supplement provided an opportunity to investigate the theoretical underpinnings of religiosity constructs, receive training in qualitative data collection and analysis methodologies, and present this scientific work. In this capacity, the doctoral student was the primary contact person for participants and the primary interviewer for the parent study. She conducted approximately 54% of all participant interviews. The student was intimately involved in the development of both the coding dictionary for the parent study and this dissertation study. The student also co-facilitated all focus groups that were used to confirm findings for the parent study. For this dissertation study, the student conducted all coding of transcript interview data within Atlas.ti and consulted with the principal investigator of the parent study to during analysis of results.

Sampling

As this study was part of the larger Seed Grant and R03 funded study, sampling was pre-determined. Participants constituted a non-random, convenience sample. Adolescent girls were recruited directly from the participating schools. Sampling, recruitment and interview protocols all received approval from the University of Maryland Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Recruitment and Consent Process

The recruitment process consisted of several steps. First, the principal investigator and/or community collaborator/consultant contacted high schools in the Baltimore area with which they had personal contacts. Meetings were held with the school principals, Parent-Teacher Association, guidance counselors, and/or psychologists at each school to introduce the research team and the study objectives/logistics. Schools that agreed to participate in the study also consented to allow recruitment from their student population and the conduct of interviews on school grounds. To increase visibility of the study and encourage passive recruitment, schools were also given flyers to circulate to students and post in school hallways and classrooms. Flyers contained a brief description of the study, eligibility criteria, benefits to participating, and contact information for the Principal Investigatory (PI; see Appendix II). Once school personnel agreed to have their school participate, the PI and/or research team members (i.e. doctoral research assistant and two consultants) formally discussed the study with students during school assemblies, lunch periods or special class sessions. During these presentations, students were informed of the study goals, procedures, and consent process. Students who indicated an interest in participating in the study were asked to provide their contact information on index cards. The index cards were used to create electronic databases of interested students. All students who provided information were contacted.

Students who expressed interest were contacted by the PI or doctoral research assistant to evaluate eligibility (see Participant Eligibility section below). A standardized

script was used to confirm eligibility and discuss the consent process. Once eligibility was confirmed, students were sent an email with the appropriate consent forms (parent consent and child assent form or youth consent forms; see Appendix III) and were asked to review the consent forms with their parent/guardian. Students 18 years or older were sent the youth consent form for their review and approval. Students aged 15-17 were sent both a child assent form and a parental consent form. All students were instructed to review and complete the forms and then contact the research assistant. This was typically done via email.

If the research assistant did not hear back from students in a timely fashion (i.e., one week) she called or emailed to follow up. Prospective participants were told that there were a limited number of interviews that were being conducted and that interviews would be scheduled on a first come, first served basis. To ensure student confidentiality, school personnel were not informed of the names of the students participating in the study. School personnel received a list of appointment dates for the interviews and, as agreed upon, provided a private space, usually a conference room or unused classroom, for the interview to take place. Students were instructed to bring signed consent forms to the scheduled interview. All study procedures were received and approved by the University of Maryland IRB (IRB #09-0695; see Appendix IV).

Participant Eligibility

To be eligible for the parent study, girls must have met the following criteria: Asian, Caucasian or African American female high school student between the ages of 15 and 18 years old; enrolled in a participating high school and; agreed to have the interview tape recorded. Participants were asked to self-identify their race or ethnicity during the eligibility process and again in a socio-demographic survey completed immediately before the interview. While the parent study included Asian, Caucasian, African American students, only interviews with African American females were included in this study.

Informed Consent

As requested by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Maryland College Park, all informed consent forms included detailed information about the study procedures, risks, and benefits to participating (see Appendix III). First, the consent form discussed the purpose of the study and study procedures including examples of questions that are asked during the interview. A separate section discussed how the data is kept confidential, e.g. full name not used in recording, number assigned to each student, and storage of tapes in a locked file cabinet. In addition, the consent forms outlined the steps in place if a student disclosed she or someone she knew was in danger. If this occurred, the interviewer would contact one of the study consultants, psychologist Dr. Nancy Aiken. Dr. Aiken would then call the student to discuss the dating relationship or situation. Dr. Aiken would then make an assessment as to whether the student is in danger and may refer the student to appropriate counseling and support services and resources. In addition, if Dr. Aiken perceived that a student is in an abusive dating relationship she would notify a parent or guardian. Participants were also told that they did not have to talk about real life events or people. Finally, the consent forms provided information about the possible risks, benefits, compensation provided, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time.   In addition to being a part of the informed consent

process, these procedures were discussed with the students before the interview commenced.

Primary Data Collection Strategy

All interviewers participated in a brief training session with the PI to cover the following topics: logistics of the interview process, IRB concerns/protection of human subjects, safety and liability issues, review and discussion of the interview guides, and proper use of digital recording equipment. All interviews were audio-recorded and lasted approximately 1 – 1.5 hours. Interviews were conducted in a private room at each school after school hours. After arriving for their interview, the girls were greeted, informed consent was reviewed and signed consent forms were collected. Girls were again informed about the purpose of the study and the situations that would necessitate a breach in confidentiality and a call to the study psychologist. Girls were also given an incentive "gift" bag that contained a two-page list of resources, hotlines, and websites regarding dating relationships and their monetary compensation ($20). As mentioned above, girls were asked to complete a brief, confidential socio-demographic survey to obtain their age, grade, and race/ethnicity. Next, the recorder was turned on and the interview commenced.

Interview Protocol

The interview guide for the parent study had 4 distinct sections (see Appendix V for full interview protocol). The first section began with an attempt to understand the world of dating in high school. Girls were asked to discuss what constituted a "dating relationship" in high school and other terms that were currently used to describe relationships. The section provided an opportunity for the girls to become relaxed talking to interviewer by discussing something they were comfortable with and knowledgeable about. The interview progressed into a discussion about their perception of an ideal relationship and how their perceptions would change in the future. The second section of the protocol explored girls' perceptions of a healthy relationship. Girls were probed to identify sources of influence on their beliefs about dating and dating behaviors. These sources of influence were based on the constructs in the SIF. That is, girls were asked about primary (i.e. parents and family), secondary (i.e. religious institutions, friends, and school), and macro socio-culture (i.e. television, movies, and the internet) sources of influence on their ideas regarding healthy and harmful dating relationships. The third section of the protocol investigated girl's religious beliefs and behaviors and the potential mechanisms through with religion operated to shape dating relationship ideas and behaviors. For example, girls described how their parent's religious beliefs influenced the type of schooling they have received (social control). This section also included closed ended questions to gauge girls' degree of religiosity. These questions measured adolescents' frequency of church attendance, participation in religious activities, frequency of prayer, and religious affiliation. The last section of the interview protocol explored girls' beliefs about unhealthy or harmful dating relationships. During this section of the interview, girls were asked to describe an unhealthy or harmful dating relationship and consider if religion influenced one's perceptions of a healthy or unhealthy relationship. They were also asked to discuss reasons why someone might stay in an unhealthy relationship. Finally, the girls were asked to consider if there were other questions that should be asked to better understand adolescent dating dynamics.

Relevant Interview Protocol Questions

Interview Sections	Sampling of Interview Questions
Section I - Dating Relationships	
Dating Relationships	*What does it mean to be "dating" someone or "going out" with someone?; What are the different terms you use to describe dating relationships? Are there differences in the meaning of these terms?*
Current Ideal Relationship	*How would you describe the "perfect" dating relationship, right now?*
Future Ideal Relationship	*Would you describe the "perfect" dating relationship differently if I was asking about the future? If so, why?*
Section II - Healthy Relationships and SIF Spheres of Influence	
Healthy Relationships	*What makes a relationship healthy?*
Primary Socialization: Family	*Have your parents and family influenced your ideas about dating and dating relationships? In what ways?*
Secondary Socialization: Religion	*What religious values, if any, have your parent's shared with you? Have your parents talked to you about how religion should be practiced? In what ways?*
Secondary Socialization: Peers	*Have your friends influenced your ideas about dating and dating relationships? In what ways?*
Secondary Socialization: School	*Do you think that where you go to school has influenced your ideas about dating and dating relationships? In what ways?*
Macro socio-cultural: Media	*Do you think movies, television, and internet, have influenced your ideas about dating and dating relationships? How so? In what ways?*
Section III - The role of religion and SIF Socialization Mechanisms	
Socialization Mechanism: Social control	*Do your parents' religious beliefs and practices influence or determine: a) what kind of schooling you have? b) what kinds of TV or movies you are allowed to watch? c) what kinds of friends you are allowed to have? d) what kinds of social activities you can engage in; e) whether you are allowed to date?*
Socialization Mechanism: Social support	*How well are you able to communicate with your___ about your ideas regarding dating and engagement in different dating behaviors? Do they support your ideas about dating?*

Socialization Mechanism: Values and identity	*Do your parents' religious beliefs and practices influence how you think about yourself? In what ways?*
Public Religiosity	*Do you participate in religious activities/ programs /services? If so, which ones? For each one, How often (once a week or more - less than yearly)?*
Private Religiosity	*What role does religion play in your life? (very important - not at all important); How often do you pray (once a week or more - less than yearly)?*
Religious Affiliation	*Do you have any religious affiliation? If so, what is it?*
Section IV – Unhealthy Dating Relationships	
Unhealthy Relationships	*How would you describe a dating relationship that was unhealthy or harmful?; Do you think what is thought of as a healthy or unhealthy dating relationship differs depending on how religious you are? In what ways?*
Reasons for staying in unhealthy Relationships	*Why might someone stay in an unhealthy or harmful relationship?; Do you think that religion may influence whether someone stays in an unhealthy relationship? If so, how? If not, why not?*

Privacy and Ethical Issues

Given the potentially sensitive nature of the interview questions, a clinical psychologist (Dr. Aiken) was part of the research team staff and available (via telephone and/or beeper) during all interviews. As required by the UMD IRB, if a student disclosed that she or someone she knows was in imminent harm or danger, the psychologist was contacted. All staff trained to conduct interviews were prepared to handle cases of imminent harm and potential for harm and were knowledgeable about mandatory reporting. In addition, participants' incentive bag included a detailed list of resources for teens and numbers to call if they would like more information regarding healthy and harmful relationships.

All efforts were made to protect the privacy of the participants. Each participant was assigned a unique identification number. This identification number was used on the participant socio-demographic survey, digital recording, and transcript. All paperwork with participant names, including consent forms were kept in a folder separate from the raw data. All identifiable data and paperwork associated with the parent study were kept in the principal investigator's locked file cabinet on the UMD campus. Additionally, identification numbers or pseudonyms were used in lieu of a participant's name in data analysis, and presenting results to the public.

Data Analysis Procedures for this Study

All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by students hired specifically by the parent grant for this purpose. Unlike quantitative data, the transcribed responses to interview questions could not be reduced to numbers that are then mathematically analyzed with statistical software. The words and thoughts of the participants, which constituted the verbatim transcripts were read and passages identified in a manner that

allows specific ideas to be made distinct. First, each transcript was read and marked identifying discrete passages of text. Each passage was then coded using terms from the coding dictionary (described below) that captured the people, ideas, or behaviors referenced.

Coding Dictionary

Creation of the coding dictionary for this study involved several steps. First, similar to the parent study, terms from the SIF (i.e., spheres of socialization influence: family, peers, school, religion) and research questions (e.g., current ideal relationship, future relationships) were used to develop a preliminary dictionary of codes. Next, terms identified by the Centers for Disease Control to describe healthy and unhealthy dating relationships were added to the dictionary. These included the 12 qualities which the CDC believes characterize healthy relationships, including: *mutual respect; trust; honesty; compromise; individuality; good communication; anger control; problem solving; fighting fair; understanding; self-confidence; and, being a role model* (www.chooserespect.org); along with "red flags" ", which were well-recognized warning signs that a dating relationship may be harmful; including, *excessive jealousy and/or possessiveness, controlling/coercive behavior* (Levy, 1998). Finally, a phenomenological approach was used to generate additional codes based on review of interview data. "Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences and the ways we understand those experiences to develop a worldview" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The phenomenological approach provided an opportunity for the addition of emergent and re-occurring codes from reading of transcripts that were not part of the initial dictionary. That is, after coding 10 transcripts, terms that were not originally in the coding dictionary, but reflect emergent themes related to the research questions, were added to the coding dictionary. All codes added to the dictionary of terms were given an operational definition to add clarity and rigor during the coding process (see Appendix VI).

Coding Procedures

Once an initial coding dictionary was created, a second person assisted the student conducting an inter-rater reliability check. A transcript was independently coded by the student and a second member of the parent research team, using the dictionary of terms. Differences in selection of coding terms were discussed until agreement was achieved. Once the dictionary was completed, each transcript was reread and coded using the dictionary terms. In addition, to strengthen reliability and consistency of coding across all transcripts, a second member of the parent research team extracted a random sample of data to evaluate the author's coding at regular intervals during the coding process.

Coding Transcripts in Atlas.ti

Atlas.ti is the qualitative-data management program that was used in this study to store, group and analyze interview data. Atlas.ti is similar to other qualitative software (e.g. NVIVO) in that the interview transcripts are embedded in a unique file that also contains the coding dictionary. To code a portion of narrative from the transcription, passages from the interview were highlighted and the appropriate coding dictionary terms were assigned to each statement, literally by dragging them over to the highlighted passage. Using Atlas.ti, codes were assigned to each passage of data that met its dictionary definition.

Analysis

Systematic coding of transcripts in Atlas.ti allowed for the conduct of "data reduction" (Berg, 2007). The term "data reduction" refers to the process in which raw qualitative data is simplified or reduced into meaningful codes. Through the process of coding each transcript the first step in data reduction was completed. Next, Atlas.ti was used in the "data display" process mode. That is, qualitative data was assembled by its assigned codes to help understand what is being said (Berg, 2007). Atlas.ti has several processes by which one can display coded data for analysis. Using what is referred to as the Query Tool, coded narrative segments were retrieved across multiple transcripts that met specific coding criteria. Using Boolean terms "and," "or," "not," coded data was extracted from the transcripts. For example when "healthy" was queried, Atlas.ti retrieved coded passages across all transcripts that were coded "healthy." Similarly, when "dating and healthy" were queried, Atlas.ti retrieved coded passages across all transcripts that were coded *both* "dating" *and* "healthy." These passages were then viewed in separate word documents, printed, read and reread to derive meaning and summarize the range of responses regarding healthy dating. Specific query strategies were used to guide analysis for each study (outlined below).

Analysis for Study 1

First, across all the transcripts, responses to the interview question, "*How would you define a healthy relationship?*" were extracted and saved in a separate word processing file. Next, individual queries were conducted using each of the CDC's recommended qualities of a healthy dating relationship. Thus, 12 queries were run in Atlas.ti to extract any text in the interview transcripts that contained the 12 CDC recommended qualities (e.g. *respect, equality, no fighting)* of a healthy relationship. All narrative passages from the different queries were saved as a separate word processing files, then read and reread for meaning to understand how the characteristics were being defined and were portrayed in a healthy relationship.

Analysis for Study 2

First, across all the transcripts, responses to the interview questions, "*How would you describe the "perfect" dating relationship, right now?*" and "*Would you describe the "perfect" dating relationship differently if I was asking about the future?*" were extracted and saved in a separate word processing file. Specific queries were conducted in order to capture perceptions of an ideal dating relationship in relation to girls' hopes and dreams for current and future relationships. Queries were completed using the following codes: "time_current," "time_future," and "ideal dating relationship." All narrative passages from the different queries were saved as a separate word processing files, then read and reread for meaning to understand if perceptions about an ideal dating relationship change as they describe current versus future relationships. Next axial coding was completed in which subcategories and categories were formed from the coded data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Main themes were identified through an iterative process of reading and rereading the data to increase comprehension.

Analysis for Study 3

First, across all the transcripts, responses to the interview questions, "*Do you think that people's particular religious faith or degree of religiosity affects their dating in any way?; How does religion shape people's dating relationships?*; and *How might your friend's religious faith have shaped their ideas about dating and dating relationships?*" were extracted and saved in a separate word processing file. In addition, in order to

capture data regarding how religion influences adolescent dating relationships that may have emerged elsewhere in the transcriptions, additional queries were conducted using the coding dictionary. Specifically, queries were conducted using the "religion" and "religious beliefs, values, and morals" codes. Next axial coding was conducted in which subcategories and categories were formed from the coded data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, main themes were identified through an iterative process of reading and rereading the data to increase comprehension.

Appendix II: Recruitment Flyer

WHAT DO *YOU* THINK ARE THE INGREDIENTS FOR A HEALTHY DATING RELATIONSHIP?

If you are a female, between the ages of 15 and 18, you may be eligible
to participate in a study being conducted by
Dr. Donna Howard at the University of Maryland, College Park.

This study is about teen dating and
the influence of religion on girls' ideas of
healthy and harmful dating relationships.

Interested in participating in an interview?
Want to learn more about this project? Please call:
Dr. Donna Howard at (301) 405-2520/dhoward1@umd.edu.

Participants will
receive $20

Interviews will
last 1 1/2—2 hours
and be tape-recorded

The number of
interviews we will
conduct is limited, so
call soon!

Dr. Donna Howard 301-405-2520 dhoward1@umd.edu	Dr. Donna Howard 301-405-2520 dhoward1@umd.edu	Dr. Donna Howard 301-405-2520 dhoward1@umd.edu	Dr. Donna Howard 301-405-2520 dhoward1@umd.edu	Dr. Donna Howard 301-405-2520 dhoward1@umd.edu	Dr. Donna Howard 301-405-2520 dhoward1@umd.edu	Dr. Donna Howard 301-405-2520 dhoward1@umd.edu	Dr. Donna Howard 301-405-2520 dhoward1@umd.edu	Dr. Donna Howard 301-405-2520 dhoward1@umd.edu	Dr. Donna Howard 301-405-2520 dhoward1@umd.edu

Appendix III: Interview Consent Forms

September 28, 2010

Dear *The Catholic High School Of Baltimore* Girls and their Parent/Guardian,

Thank you for your interest in this very exciting project: "*The Girls Healthy Dating Relationship Study*". Our goal is to better understand factors that shape adolescent girls' ideas of healthy and harmful dating relationships. We are particularly interested in how religion may shape girls' ideas of healthy and harmful dating relationships.

This project is funded by a grant from the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). *The Catholic High School Of Baltimore* is supporting this very important project. This project will involve interviews with 10 girls aged 15-18 who are enrolled at *The Catholic High School Of Baltimore*.

The attached consent form(s) will provide you with detailed information regarding the aims of this study, how we will select participants and what will happen if you do participate in an interview.

A member of the research team will be getting back in touch with you shortly to find out if you have any additional questions and see if you would like to schedule an interview. If you would like to ask questions about the project before you receive this phone call, please contact Dr. Donna Howard at: (301) 405-2520 or dhoward1@umd.edu..

Please remember that if you are going to participate in this project you <u>must</u> bring the signed consent form(s) to your scheduled interview. For those girls who are under 18 years of age, your parent/guardian must also read and sign the appropriate consent form.

On the next pages you will find further information about the project.

I look forward to speaking with you soon!

Sincerely,

Donna Howard
_____
Donna Howard, DrPH, MPH
Principal Investigator
Associate Professor
University of Maryland, School of Public Health

For *The Girls Healthy Dating Relationship Study* participants:

If you expect to earn more than $600 in taxable income this year, please provide your social security number in the space below and return this to project staff, with your consent forms, when you arrive for your scheduled interview.

Thanks!

Social Security #:   _____

Youth Assent Form- Catholic High School

Project Title: Girls Healthy Dating Relationship Study.

Purpose: This is a health education and behavior research project being conducted by Dr. Donna E. Howard at the University of Maryland College Park, School of Public Health. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you: 1) are a Caucasian or African American female high school student between the ages of 15 and 17 years old; 2) go to Catholic High School; and 3) agree to have your interview tape recorded. The purpose of this research is to better understand the factors that help shape adolescent girls' ideas about healthy and harmful dating relationships, particularly the role of religion.

Procedures: We are interested in interviewing 10 girls from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. If you are one of the first 5 Caucasian students and one of the first 5 African American students who meet the eligibility requirements, and decide to take part in this study, the following will occur:

In a one-on-one interview with a University of Maryland researcher, you will be asked questions regarding your ideas of what is a healthy and harmful dating relationship and the role of religion and other influences in shaping these ideas. Examples of questions that will be asked include the following: "*What do you value in a dating relationship?*"; "*What would be your own personal recipe for the ideal relationship?*"; "*Thinking about your own life and your friends and peers, do you think that people's particular religious faith or degree of religiosity affects their dating in anyway?*"; "*How does religion shape people's dating relationships?*"; "*Have your parents and family influenced your ideas about dating and dating relationships? In what ways?*"; "*Do you think movies, television, and internet, have influenced your ideas about dating and dating relationships? In what ways?*"; "*How would you describe a dating relationship that was unhealthy?*"

In addition, you will be asked to help identify what are important questions to ask about adolescent dating relationships. What you say will be tape recorded. The in-depth interviews will last for a total of 1 ½ to 2 hours.

Confidentiality: The research staff is committed to protecting your privacy and we will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. The research project involves making audiotape recording of the interview. These recordings are done to ensure we accurately report your comments. To help protect your confidentiality, your full name will not be identified on the tape. If you prefer, you can make up a name to be used during the interview. A code number will be used to label the tape. Through the use of an identification key, the researchers will be able to link your tape with your identity. Only the researchers will have access to the interview tapes and the identification key. The tapes will be kept separate from the identification key. All personal information will be kept under lock and key. Audio-tapes and other personal information will be destroyed 2 years after the study has been completed and all reports have been written. The information you provide will be grouped with information provided by other participants for the purpose of reporting and presentation.

___ I agree to be audio-taped during my participation in this study.

___ I do not agree to be audio-taped during my participation in this study.

If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger of if we are required to by law. This study is not about sexual abuse and the researchers will not ask about sexual abuse. Nevertheless, in accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities information that comes to our attention concerning child abuse, neglect, sexual abuse or potential harm to you or others.

If you tell us about real people or events that suggest that you, or someone else, may be in imminent danger of being harmed, we may need to follow-up on that information with you and/or report it to your parents and/or other appropriate individuals and/or authorities.

If, based on what you disclose during the interview, the researchers have concerns that you are in a harmful dating relationship we will take steps to determine the level of risk you are in. These steps will include our contacting the study Psychologist, Dr. Nancy Aiken. Dr. Aiken will then call you to discuss your dating relationship. She will make an assessment as to whether you are in danger and may refer you to appropriate counseling and support services and resources. If Dr. Aiken perceives that you are in an abusive dating relationship she will notify your parent.

 Possible Risks: You may feel uncomfortable answering questions about dating relationships. In the event that researchers observe intense discomfort on the part of the adolescent, the interview will be ended. Girls involved in this study may be at increased risk if they are in an abusive dating relationship and relate information about the study and what they have learned to their abusive partner.

Possible Benefits: You may receive insight into the role your family, friends and the larger culture play in the formation of your ideas about healthy and harmful dating relationships. Information gathered from this study may also help researchers develop programs to promote healthy teen dating relationships and prevent dating violence.

Costs: There are no costs to you if you wish to participate, except for your time.

Compensation: At the conclusion of the interview you will be given a bag that contains a gift of $20 and a listing of resources such hotlines, clinics and websites that you may want to contact to discuss issues related to healthy dating relationships and/or

dating violence. The gift is to let you know that your help in this study is important and appreciated.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may refuse to answer any question and stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you decide to stop participating, once the interview has begun, you will still receive the $20 gift and listing of resources.

Whether Medical Care is Available: The University of Maryland does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in the research study nor will the University of Maryland provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.

Ability to Ask Questions: This research is being conducted by Dr. Donna Howard, Department of Public and Community Health, at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-4212.** If you have any questions about the research and would like to discuss the study, prior to signing the forms, please contact Dr. Howard as follows: **Donna E. Howard, DrPH, Associate Professor, Department of Public and Community Health, University of Maryland College Park, School of Public Health, College Park, MD 20742; (e-mail: dhoward1@umd.edu); (telephone) 301-405-2520.**

This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Statement of Assent: Your signature indicates that the research has been explained to you, your questions have been fully answered and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.

Printed Name of Participant_____

Signature of Participant_____

Date_____

Parental Consent Form- Catholic High School

Project Title: Girls Healthy Dating Relationship Study.

Purpose: This is a health education and behavior research project being conducted by Dr. Donna E. Howard at the University of Maryland College Park, School of Public Health. We are inviting your child to participate in this research project because she: 1) is a Caucasian or African American female high school student between the ages of 15 and 17 years old; 2) goes to Catholic High School; and 3) agrees to have her interview tape recorded. The purpose of this research is to better understand the factors that help shape adolescent girls' ideas about healthy and harmful dating relationships.

Procedures: We are interested in interviewing 10 girls from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, proportional to the school make-up. If your child is one of the first 5 Caucasian students and one of the first 5 African American students who meet the eligibility requirements, and you give her permission to take part in this study, the following will occur:
In a one-on-one interview with a University of Maryland researcher, she will be asked questions regarding her ideas of what is a healthy and harmful dating relationship, how those ideas were shaped and if they have changed over time. Examples of questions that will be asked include the following: "*What do you value in a dating relationship?*"; "*What would be your own personal recipe for the ideal relationship?*"; "*Thinking about your own life and your friends and peers, do you think that people's particular religious faith or degree of religiosity affects their dating in anyway?*"; "*How does religion shape people's dating relationships?*"; "*Have your parents and family influenced your ideas about dating and dating relationships? In what ways?*"; "*Do you think movies, television, and internet, have influenced your ideas about dating and dating relationships? In what ways?*"; "*How would you describe a dating relationship that was unhealthy?*"

In addition, your daughter will be asked to help identify important questions to ask about adolescent dating relationships. What your child says will be tape recorded. The in-depth interviews will last for a total of 1 ½ to 2 hours.

Confidentiality: The research staff is committed to protecting your child's privacy and we will do our best to keep personal information confidential. The research project involves making audiotape recording of the interview. These recordings are done to ensure we accurately report your child's comments. To help protect confidentiality, your child's full name will not be identified on the tape. If your child prefers, she can make up a name to be used during the interview. A code number will be used to label the tape. Through the use of an identification key, the researchers will be able to link your child's tape with her identity. Only the researchers will have access to the interview tapes and the identification key. The tapes will be kept separate from the identification key. All personal information will be kept under lock and key. Audio-tapes and other personal information will be destroyed 2 years after the study has been completed and all reports

150

have been written. The information your child provides will be grouped with information provided by other participants for the purpose of reporting and presentation.

___ My child's responses may be audio-taped during her participation in this study.

___ My child's responses may not be audio-taped during her participation in this study.

If we write a report or article about this research project, your child's identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your child's information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if your child or someone else is in danger of if we are required to by law. This study is not about sexual abuse and the researchers will not ask about sexual abuse. Nevertheless, in accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities information that comes to our attention concerning child abuse, neglect, sexual abuse or potential harm to your child or others.

If your child tells us about real people or events that suggest that she, or someone else, may be in imminent danger of being harmed, we may need to follow-up on that information with your child and/or report it to you and/or other appropriate individuals and/or authorities.

If, based on what your child discloses during the interview, the researchers have concerns that your child is in a harmful dating relationship we will take steps to determine the level of risk she is in. These steps will include our contacting the study Psychologist, Dr. Nancy Aiken. Dr. Aiken will then call your child to discuss her dating relationship. She will make an assessment as to whether your child is in danger and may refer your child to appropriate counseling and support services and resources. If Dr. Aiken perceives that your child is in an abusive dating relationship she will notify you.

Possible Risks: Your child may feel uncomfortable answering questions about dating relationships. In the event that researchers observe intense discomfort on the part of the adolescent, the interview will be ended. Girls involved in this study may be at increased risk if they are in an abusive dating relationship and relate information about the study and what they have learned to their abusive partner.

Possible Benefits: Your child may receive insight into the role her family, friends and the larger culture play in the formation of her ideas about healthy and harmful dating relationships. Information gathered from this study may also help researchers develop programs to promote healthy teen dating relationships and prevent dating violence.

Costs: There are no costs to you or your child if you wish to participate, except for your child's time.

Compensation: At the conclusion of the interview your child will be given a bag that contains a gift of $20 and a listing of resources such hotlines, clinics and websites that she may want to contact to discuss issues related to healthy dating relationships and/or dating violence. The gift is to let your child know that her help in this study is important and appreciated.

Right to Withdraw: Your child's participation in this research is completely voluntary. Your child may choose not to take part at all. If your child decides to participate in this research, she may refuse to answer any question and stop participating at any time. If your child decides not to participate in this study or if she stops participating at any time, your child will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which she otherwise qualifies. If your child decides to stop participating, once the interview has begun, she will still receive the $20 gift and listing of resources.

Whether Medical Care is Available: The University of Maryland does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in the research study nor will the University of Maryland provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.

Ability to Ask Questions: This research is being conducted by Dr. Donna Howard, Department of Public and Community Health at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have questions about your child's rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-4212. If you have any questions about the research and would like to discuss the study, prior to signing the forms, please contact Dr. Howard as follows: Donna E. Howard, DrPH, Associate Professor, Department of Public and Community Health, University of Maryland College Park School of Public Health, College Park, MD 20742; (e-mail: dhoward1@umd.edu); (telephone) 301-405-2520.**
This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Statement of Age of Subject and Consent: Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age, the research has been explained to you, your questions have been fully answered and you freely and voluntarily choose to allow your child to participate in this research project.

Printed Name of Participant's
Parent/Guardian_____ Date_____
Name of Child _____

Signature of Participant's
Parent/Guardian_____

Youth Consent Form- Catholic High School

<u>Project Title:</u> Girls Healthy Dating Relationship Study.

<u>Purpose:</u> This is a health education and behavior research project being conducted by Dr. Donna E. Howard at the University of Maryland College Park, School of Public Health. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you: 1) are a Caucasian or African American female high school student 18 years of age or older; 2) go to Catholic High School; and 3) agree to have your interview tape recorded. The purpose of this research is to better understand the factors that help shape adolescent girls' ideas about healthy and harmful dating relationships, particularly the role of religion.

<u>Procedures:</u> We are interested in interviewing 10 girls from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. If you are one of the first 5 Caucasian students and one of the first 5 African American students who meet the eligibility requirements, and decide to take part in this study, the following will occur:

In a one-on-one interview with a University of Maryland researcher, you will be asked questions regarding your ideas of what is a healthy and harmful dating relationship and the role of religion and other influences in shaping these ideas. Examples of questions that will be asked include the following: "*What do you value in a dating relationship?*"; "*What would be your own personal recipe for the ideal relationship?*"; "*Thinking about your own life and your friends and peers, do you think that people's particular religious faith or degree of religiosity affects their dating in anyway?*"; "*How does religion shape people's dating relationships?*"; "*Have your parents and family influenced your ideas about dating and dating relationships? In what ways?*"; "*Do you think movies, television, and internet, have influenced your ideas about dating and dating relationships? In what ways?*"; "*How would you describe a dating relationship that was unhealthy?*"

In addition, you will be asked to help identify what are important questions to ask about adolescent dating relationships. What you say will be tape recorded. The in-depth interviews will last for a total of 1 ½ to 2 hours.

<u>Confidentiality:</u> The research staff is committed to protecting your privacy and we will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. The research project involves making audiotape recording of the interview. These recordings are done to ensure we accurately report your comments. To help protect your confidentiality, your full name will not be identified on the tape. If you prefer, you can make up a name to be used during the interview. A code number will be used to label the tape. Through the use of an identification key, the researchers will be able to link your tape with your identity. Only the researchers will have access to the interview tapes and the identification key. The tapes will be kept separate from the identification key. All personal information will be kept under lock and key. Audio-tapes and other personal information will be destroyed 2 years after the study has been completed and all reports have been written. The information you provide will be grouped with information provided by other participants for the purpose of reporting and presentation.

___ I agree to be audio-taped during my participation in this study.

___ I do not agree to be audio-taped during my participation in this study.

If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger of if we are required to by law. This study is not about sexual abuse and the researchers will not ask about sexual abuse. Nevertheless, in accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities information that comes to our attention concerning child abuse, neglect, sexual abuse or potential harm to you or others.

If you tell us about real people or events that suggest that you, or someone else, may be in imminent danger of being harmed, we may need to follow-up on that information with you and/or report it to your parents and/or other appropriate individuals and/or authorities.

If, based on what you disclose during the interview, the researchers have concerns that you are in a harmful dating relationship we will take steps to determine the level of risk you are in. These steps will include our contacting the study Psychologist, Dr. Nancy Aiken. Dr. Aiken will then call you to discuss your dating relationship. She will make an assessment as to whether you are in danger and may refer you to appropriate counseling and support services and resources. If Dr. Aiken perceives that you are in an abusive dating relationship she will notify your parent.

 Possible Risks: You may feel uncomfortable answering questions about dating relationships. In the event that researchers observe intense discomfort on the part of the adolescent, the interview will be ended. Girls involved in this study may be at increased risk if they are in an abusive dating relationship and relate information about the study and what they have learned to their abusive partner.

Possible Benefits: You may receive insight into the role your family, friends and the larger culture play in the formation of your ideas about healthy and harmful dating relationships. Information gathered from this study may also help researchers develop programs to promote healthy teen dating relationships and prevent dating violence.

Costs: There are no costs to you if you wish to participate, except for your time.

Compensation: At the conclusion of the interview you will be given a bag that contains a gift of $20 and a listing of resources such hotlines, clinics and websites that you may want to contact to discuss issues related to healthy dating relationships and/or

dating violence. The gift is to let you know that your help in this study is important and appreciated.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may refuse to answer any question and stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you decide to stop participating, once the interview has begun, you will still receive the $20 gift and listing of resources.

Whether Medical Care is Available: The University of Maryland does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in the research study nor will the University of Maryland provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.

Ability to Ask Questions: This research is being conducted by Dr. Donna Howard, Department of Public and Community Health at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-4212. If you have any questions about the research and would like to discuss the study, prior to signing the forms, please contact Dr. Howard as follows: Donna E. Howard, DrPH, Associate Professor, Department of Public and Community Health, University of Maryland College Park School of Public Health, College Park, MD 20742; (e-mail: dhoward1@umd.edu); (telephone) 301-405-2520.**

This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Statement of Age of Subject and Consent: Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years old, the research has been explained to you, your questions have been fully answered and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.

Printed Name of Participant_____

Signature of Participant_____

Date_____

Appendix IV: IRB Approval

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 22, 2009

MEMORANDUM

Application Approval Notification

To: Dr. Donna Howard
Public and Community Health

From: Joseph M. Smith, MA, CIM

IRB Manager

University of Maryland, College Park

Re: **IRB Application Number:** 09-0695

Project Title: "Girls Healthy Dating Relationship Study"

Approval Date: October 22, 2009

Expiration Date: October 22, 2010

Type of Application: Initial

Type of Research: Non-Exempt

Type of Review for Application: Expedited

The University of Maryland, College Park Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved your IRB application. The research was approved in accordance with the University IRB policies and procedures and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. Please include the above-cited IRB application number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

Recruitment/Consent: For research requiring written informed consent, the IRB-approved and stamped informed consent document is enclosed. The expiration date for IRB approval has been stamped on the informed consent document. Please keep copies of the consent forms used for this research for three years after the completion of the research.

Continuing Review: If you intend to continue to collect data from human subjects or to analyze private, identifiable data collected from human subjects, after the expiration date for this approval (indicated above), you must submit a renewal application to the IRB Office at least 45 days before the approval expiration date. If IRB approval of your project expires, all human subject research activities including the enrollment of new subjects, data collection, and analysis of identifiable private information must stop until the renewal application is approved by the IRB.

Modifications: Any changes to the approved protocol must be approved by the IRB before the change is implemented, except when a change is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. If you would like to modify the approved protocol, please submit an addendum request to the IRB Office. The instructions for submitting a request are posted on the IRB web site at : http://www.umresearch.umd.edu/IRB/addendum app.htm.

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks: You must promptly report any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others to the IRB Manager at 301-405-0678 or jsmith@umresearch.umd.edu.

Student Researchers: Unless otherwise requested, this IRB approval document was sent to the Principal Investigator (PI). The PI should pass on the approval document or a copy to the student researchers. This IRB approval document may be a requirement for student researchers applying for graduation. The IRB may not be able to provide copies of the approval documents if several years have passed since the date of the original approval.

Additional Information: Please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 if you have any IRB-related questions or concerns or email at irb@umd.edu.

Appendix V: Interview Guide

Healthy Girls Relationship Study Interview Guide

Greet the student.

Introduction: I would like to thank you in advance for your participation in this interview. I will begin by asking that you turn off your cellular phone, pager, and any other audible device. My name is (interviewer name). I am with the Department of Public and Community Health at the University of Maryland, College Park. You have been asked here today because you go to _____ (insert school) High School and I am interested in your ideas about healthy and harmful dating relationships and the role of religion in shaping your ideas. Please understand that there are no right or wrong answers. I am hoping you will help me figure out what questions researchers should be asking to better understand teen dating relationships and their meaning.

This interview will last between one and a half hours to two hours. It will be audio-taped. The tape will be used to make sure that all of your comments are recorded (in your own words) and to assist the research team in reviewing your remarks during the analysis of this interview. You will not be identified in any way during the analysis, and the responses you provide will remain confidential. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may decide not to talk or answer any question and you can decide to leave at any time. Only first names will be used on the tape and if you prefer, you can make up a name to use instead of your own.

At the conclusion of the interview you will be given a bag that contains a gift of $20 and a listing of resources such hotlines, clinics and websites that you may want to contact to discuss issues related to healthy dating relationships and/or dating violence. The gift is to let you know that your help in this study is important and appreciated.

It is possible that you may become uncomfortable or upset as a result of discussing dating relationships. In the event that I observe intense discomfort on your part, the interview will be ended. Also, while not expected, girls involved in this study may be at increased risk if they are in an abusive dating relationship and relate information about the study, and what they have learned, to their abusive partner. If desired, I can have our study Psychologist, Dr. Nancy Aiken call you to discuss any concerns you may have.

Before we being, I want to remind you of our legal and professional responsibilities regarding reporting of information you share that might suggest you, or someone you know, is in danger. We are interested in your thoughts and opinions about healthy and harmful dating relationships. We are not asking you to tell us about real people and events.

If you tell us about real people or events that suggest that you, or someone else, may be in imminent danger of being harmed, we may need to follow-up on that information with

you and/or report it to your parent and/or other appropriate individuals and/or authorities.

If, based on what you disclose during the interview, we have concerns that you are in a harmful dating relationship we will take steps to determine the level of risk you are in. These steps will include our contacting the study Psychologist, Dr Nancy Aiken. Dr Aiken will then call you to discuss your dating relationship. She will make an assessment as to whether you are in danger and may refer you to appropriate counseling and support services and resources. If Dr. Aiken perceives that you are in an abusive dating relationship she will notify your parent.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Are you comfortable continuing?

(Start tape now.)

What does it mean to be "dating" someone or "going out" with someone?

What are the different terms you use to describe dating relationships? Are there differences in the meaning of these terms?

Is there a difference between "hooking up", "dating", "going out", "talking to each other" and being in a committed relationship? I mean are there different kinds of dating relationships that teens have? Can you describe them?

Are there different things that girls and boys want from dating relationships?

How would you describe the "perfect" dating relationship, right now? Would you describe the "perfect" dating relationship differently if I was asking about the future?

What do you value in a dating relationship?

What makes a relationship *healthy?*

How did **you** develop your ideas about dating and dating relationships?

Have **your parents** and family influenced your ideas about dating and dating relationships? In what ways?

Have **your friends** influenced your ideas about dating and dating relationships? In what ways?

Do you think that going to _____ (insert name of high school) High School has influenced your ideas about dating and dating relationships? In what ways?

Do you think that going to **single sex school**, as opposed to a coed school (and vice versa), would change how you think about and engage in dating relationships? In what ways?

Do you think **movies, television, and internet**, have influenced your ideas about dating and dating relationships? How so? In what ways?

III. Discussion of the Role of Religion in Shaping Girl's Ideas about Dating Relationships:

Do you have any religious affiliation? If so, what is it?

Do you think it is important to date someone of the same faith as you?

Family
What **religious values**, if any, have your parent's shared with you? Have your parents talked to you about how religion should be practiced?

Do your parents' religious beliefs and practices influence how you think about yourself?

Do you think it is important to <u>your parents that </u>you date someone of the same faith as you?

Institutionalized Religion
Thinking about your own life and your friends and peers, **do you think that people's particular religious faith or degree of religiosity affects their dating in any way**? How does religion shape people's dating relationships?

Peers
How might your friend's religious faith have shaped <u>their</u> ideas about dating and dating relationships? How have your friends shaped <u>your</u> ideas about dating and dating relationships?

School
Do you think that where you go to school has influenced your ideas about dating and dating relationships?

Do you think that going to a religious school, as opposed to non-religious school (and vice versa), would change how you think about and engage in dating relationships? In what ways?

Social control
Do your parents' religious beliefs and practices influence or determine what kind of <u>schooling</u> you have? (Day school and/or religious school)

Do your parents' religious beliefs and practices influence or determine what kinds of <u>TV or movies</u> you are allowed to watch?

Do your parents' religious beliefs and practices influence or determine what kinds of <u>friends</u> you are allowed to have?

Do your parents' religious beliefs and practices influence or determine what kinds of <u>social activities</u> you can engage in?

Do your parents' religious beliefs and practices influence or determine <u>whether you are allowed to date</u>?

Values and identity, Personal Religiosity
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement.
"I don't need religion to have good values"
Strongly Agree- Agree- Neutral- Disagree- Strongly Disagree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement.
"God has nothing to do with what happens to me personally"
Strongly Agree- Agree- Neutral- Disagree- Strongly Disagree

What role does religion play in your life
Very important- Somewhat Important- Neutral- Somewhat Unimportant-Not at all important?

Do you participate in religious activities/ programs /services?

If so, which ones? <u>For each one, How often?</u>
Once a week or more- Once a month or less- Less than yearly

How often do you pray?
Once a week or more- Once a month or less- Less than yearly

Do you think it is important to date some who is as religious as you, regardless of their religious affiliations?

Do you think it is important to <u>your parents that </u>you date some who is as religious as you, regardless of their religious affiliations?

Communication

How well are you able to communicate with your **<u>parents</u>** about your ideas regarding dating and engagement in different dating behaviors?

<u>Do they support</u> your ideas about dating?

How well are you able to communicate with your **siblings** about your ideas regarding dating and engagement in different dating behaviors? <u>Do they support</u> your ideas about dating?

How well are you able to communicate with your **friends** about your ideas regarding dating and engagement in different dating behaviors?

<u>Do they support</u> your ideas about dating?

How well are you able to communicate with your **religious teachers** about your ideas regarding dating and engagement in different dating behaviors? <u>Do they support</u> your ideas about dating?

How well are you able to communicate with your **teachers** about your ideas regarding dating and engagement in different dating behaviors?

 <u>Do they support</u> your ideas about dating?

How well are you able to communicate with **other adults** about your ideas regarding dating and engagement in different dating behaviors?

<u>Do they support</u> your ideas about dating?

III. Discussion of Harmful Dating Relationships:

How would you describe a dating relationship that was *unhealthy or harmful*?

When I say *unhealthy or harmful*, what kinds of things do you think of?

Why might someone stay in an unhealthy or harmful relationship? Is it different for boys and girls?

Do you think what is thought of as a healthy or unhealthy dating relationship differs depending on your religion?

Do you think what is thought of as a healthy or unhealthy dating relationship differs depending on how religious you are?

Why might it be hard to leave an unhealthy or harmful relationship?

Do you think that religion may influence whether someone stays in an unhealthy relationship? If so, how? If not, why not?

Have your ideas about healthy dating relationships changed over time? In what ways?

Wrap-Up:

Are there other questions you think researchers should be asking teens to *really* understand different types of dating relationships?

What do you hope your future dating relationships will be like?

I wish you the very best!
Thank you very much for your participation. In addition to your gift, I am giving you written information about healthy and harmful dating relationships and a listing of resources that you may want to contact if you wish to discuss issues related to dating violence. Remember, you can call Dr. Donna Howard, at (301) 405-2520 if you want to share any additional information or have any additional questions.

Appendix VI: Coding Dictionary

Code	Definition	Source
!Private Religiosity	Individual practices that are not seen by others, such as personal prayer, scripture study, attempts to live by religious principles, and personal commitment to religious ideals	Bahr et al., 1998
!Public Religiosity	Attending church, praying in public, and participating in other group activities and rituals	Bahr et al., 1998
!Religious affiliation	Religious affiliation. i.e., Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Quaker; or lack of religious affiliation i.e., atheism/agnostic	GHRS
!Religious beliefs, values, morals	Reference to specific religious beliefs and values that were instilled, taught, or developed	GHRS
!Religious rules/doctrine	Rules that come from the scripture that pertain to homosexuality, evolution, abstinence, virginity, sexual behavior, dress, abortion, interfaith coupling/dating; interpretation of rules/doctrine	GHRS
&Dating relationship	Direct mention of being in a relationship with someone	GHRS
&Healthy	Direct reference to healthy relationship	GHRS
&Healthy relationship characteristics	Other healthy ingredients/descriptors/attributes of relationship not mentioned by CDC (e.g., love, common interests)	KD
&Ideal relationship	Direct reference to ideal or perfect relationship	KD
&Unhealthy relationship characteristics	Other unhealthy ingredients/descriptors/attributes of relationship not mentioned by CDC as red flags (e.g., anger, fighting)	KD

Code	Definition	Source
&Unhealthy/harmful	Reference to unhealthy, harmful, abusive (e.g. physical, emotional, psychological, sexual) relationship	GHRS
+anger control	Direct mention of anger control or healthy ways of expressing anger	CDC, Choose Respect
+communication	Direct mention of communication or speaking honestly and openly to avoid miscommunication (verbal, non verbal, or ecommunication)	CDC, Choose Respect
+compromise	Direct mention of compromise or reference to acknowledging different points of view and be willing to give and take.	CDC, Choose Respect
+fighting fair	Direct mention of fighting fair or being fair, sticking to the subject, avoiding insults	CDC, Choose Respect
+honesty	Direct mention of honesty or reference to no lies or not lying, commitment	CDC, Choose Respect
+individuality	Direct mention of individuality or reference to not having to compromise who they are, his or her identity not be based on partner's, maintaining current friends and interests, supporting pursuit of new hobbies or new friends.	CDC, Choose Respect
+problem solving	Direct mention of problem solving or referencing process of identifying new solutions by breaking a problem into small parts or by talking through the situation.	CDC, Choose Respect
+mutual respect	Direct mention of respect or reference to each person valuing who the other is and understands the other person's boundaries.	CDC, Choose Respect
+role model	Direct mention of being a role model, having a role model, someone who you base your beliefs and/or behavior on,	CDC, Choose Respect

Code	Definition	Source
	inspiring each other	
+self-confidence	Direct mention of self-confidence, allowing others to express their opinions without forcing their own opinions on them.	CDC, Choose Respect
+trust	Direct mention of trust, being trustworthy, or reference to giving each other the benefit of the doubt.	CDC, Choose Respect
+understanding	Direct mention of understanding, taking time to understand other's feelings, or putting self in the others shoes	CDC, Choose Respect
-control	Direct mention of control, controlling, or reference to someone making all the decisions, telling the other what to do, wear, or spend time with	CDC, Choose Respect
-dependence	Direct mention of dependence, being dependent, or reference to someone feeling like they cannot live without the other	CDC, Choose Respect
-dishonesty	Direct mention of dishonesty, or reference to someone keeping information from the other, stealing from the other, including cheating and uncommitted	CDC, Choose Respect, Phenom
-disrespect	Direct mention of disrespect, or reference to someone making fun of the other partner, destroying something that belongs to the other partner	CDC, Choose Respect
-hostility	Direct mention of hostility, or reference to someone having to "walk on egg shells," antagonizing the other partner	CDC, Choose Respect
-intimidation	Direct mention of intimidation or reference to someone making partner fearful or timid by using threats	CDC, Choose Respect
-physical violence	Direct mention of physical violence, or reference to hitting, slapping, grabbing, shoving	CDC, Choose Respect

Code	Definition	Source
-sexual violence	Direct mention of sexual violence or reference to pressuring into sexual activity against will or consent, *pressure to send sexual or nude pictures*	CDC, Choose Respect & KD
S_Family	Reference to family, including extended family members (cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents) influence on ideas about relationships and dating behaviors	KD
S_Media	Reference to broader socio-cultural context, including all kinds of mass communication – Facebook, internet, TV, movies, music, cell phone, text messaging influence on ideas about relationships and dating behaviors	GHRS
S_Parents	Reference to parents, mother, father, or other parental figure influence on ideas about relationships and dating behaviors	KD
S_Peers/Friends	Reference to friends, peers influence on ideas about relationships and dating behaviors	KD
S_Religion	Reference to religion, or faith, religious beliefs influence on ideas about relationships and dating behaviors	KD
S_School	Reference to school, high school influence on ideas about relationships and dating behaviors	KD
Time_Current	Right now, present time, while in high school	GHRS
Time_Future	Sometime in the future (e.g. 3-5 years in college or beyond), projections	GHRS

Note. GHRS = Girls Healthy Relationship Study; KD = defined specifically for this study; CDC, Choose Respect = http://www.cdc.gov/chooserespect/understanding_dating_violence/healthy_vs_unhealthy_relationships.html

Bibliography

Ackard, D. M., Eisenberg, M. E., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2007). Long-term impact of adolescent dating violence on the behavioral and psychological health of male and female youth. *J Pediatr, 151*(5), 476-481. doi: S0022-3476(07)00362-9 [pii]10.1016/j.jpeds.2007.04.034.

Ackard, D. M., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2002). Date violence and date rape among adolescents: associations with disordered eating behaviors and psychological health. *Child Abuse Negl, 26*(5), 455-473.

Adams, H. L., & Williams, L. R. (2011). Advice from teens to teens about dating: Implications for healthy relationships. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*(2), 254-264. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.09.008.

Akers, A. Y., Yonas, M., Burke, J., & Chang, J. C. (2010). "Do you Want Somebody Treating Your Sister Like That?": Qualitative Exploration of How African American Families Discuss and Promote Healthy Teen Dating Relationships. *J Interpers Violence*. doi: 0886260510383028 [pii]10.1177/0886260510383028.

Arriaga, X. B., & Foshee, V. A. (2004). Adolescent dating violence: do adolescents follow in their friends', or their parents', footsteps? *J Interpers Violence, 19*(2), 162-184. doi: 10.1177/0886260503260247.

Auslander, B. A., Rosenthal, S. L., & Blythe, M. J. (2007). Understanding sexual behaviors of adolescents within a biopsychosocial framework. *Adolesc Med State Art Rev, 18*(3), 434-448.

Ayyub, R. (2000). Domestic violence in the South Asian Muslin immigrant population in the United States. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless, 9*, 237-248.

Bahr, S. J., Maughan, S. L., Marcos, A. C., & Li, B. (1998). Family, religiosity, and the risk of adolescent drug use. *Journal of Marriage & the Family, 60*(4), 979-992. doi: 10.2307/353639.

Banister, E., & Leadbeater, B. J. (Eds.). (2007). *To stay or to leave? How do mentoring groups support healthy dating relationships in high-risk girls?* New York: New York University Press.

Banyard, V. L., Cross, C., & Modecki, K. L. (2006a). Interpersonal Violence in Adolescence: Ecological Correlates of Self-Reported Perpetration. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 21*(10), 1314-1332. doi: 10.1177/0886260506291657.

Barber, B., & Eccles, J. (2003). The joy of romance: Healthy adolescent relationships as an educational agenda. In P. Florsheim (Ed.), *Adolescent romantic relations and sexual*

behavior: Theory, research, and practical implications. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associations, Inc., Publishers.

Barrington, D. S. (2010). The Increasing Protection of Marriage on Infant Low Birth Weight Across Two Generations of African American Women. *Journal of Family Issues, 31*(8), 1041-1064. doi: 10.1177/0192513x10366005.

Bearman, P. S., & Bruckner, H. (2001). Promising the future: Virginity pledges and first intercourse. *American Journal of Sociology, 106*, 859-912.

Becker, H. (1996). The Epistemology of Qualitative Research. In R. Jessor, A. Colby & R. A. Schweder (Eds.), *Ethnography and Human Development: Context and Meaning in Social Inquiry* (pp. 53-72). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Berg, B. L. (2007). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences (sixth ed.).* Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Berkel, L. A., Vandiver, B. J., & Bahner, A. D. (2004). Gender role attitudes, religion, and spirituality as predictors of domestic violence attitudes in White college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 45*, 119-133.

Berry, M. F., & Blassingame, J. W. (1982). *Long memory: The Black experience in America.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Bersamin, M. M., Walker, S., Waiters, E. D., Fisher, D. A., & Grube, J. W. (2005). Promising to wait: virginity pledges and adolescent sexual behavior. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 36,* 428-436.

Biederman, D. J., Nichols, T. R., & Durham, D. D. (2010). Maternal navigation strategies: Examining mother-daughter dyads in adolescent families of color. *Journal of Family Nursing, 16*(4), 394-421.

Black, M. C., Basile, K. C., Breiding, M. J., Smith, S. G., Walters, M. L., Merrick, M. T., . . . Stevens, M. R. (2011). *The national intimate partner and sexual violence survey (NISVS): 2010 summary report.* Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Borzekowski, D. L., & Rickert, V. I. (2001). Adolescent cybersurfing for health information: a new resource that crosses barriers. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med, 155*(7), 813-817. doi: poa00477.

Bowen, G. A. (2008). Naturalistic inquiry and the saturation concept: A research note. *Qualitative Research, 8*(1), 137-152. doi: 10.1177/1468794107085301.

Bruckner, H., & Bearman, P. (2005). After the promise: the STD consequences of adolescent virginity pledges. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 36,* 271-278.

Bukowski, W. M., Gauze, C., Hoza, B., & Newcomb, A. F. (1993). Differences and consistency between same-sex and other-sex peer relationships during early adolescence. *Developmental Psychology, 29*, 255-263.

Byrne, D. (1971). *The attraction paradigm.* New York: Academic Press.

Campbell, M. K., Hudson, M. A., Resnicow, K., Blakeney, N., Paxton, A., & Baskin, M. (2007). Church-based health promotion interventions: evidence and lessons learned. *Annu Rev Public Health, 28,* 213-234. doi: 10.1146/annurev.publhealth.28.021406.144016.

Carver, K., Joyner, K., & Udry, J. R. (2003). National Estimates of Adolescent Romantic Relationships. In P. Florsheim (Ed.), *Adolescent romantic relations and sexual behavior: Theory, research, and practical implications.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associations, Inc., Publishers.

CDC. (2008). *Youth Risk Behavior Survieillance - United States, 2007.* Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report, 57(SS-4), 1-131.

CDC. (2010a). Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships, from http://www.cdc.gov/chooserespect/understanding_dating_violence/healthy_vs_unhealthy_relationships.html.

CDC. (2010b). Intimate Partner Violence: Prevention Strategies, from http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/intimatepartnerviolence/prevention.html.

CDC. (2010c). Understanding Teen Dating Violence, from www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention.

CDC. (2011). *Teen Pregnancy: Improving the lives of young people and strengthening communities by reducing teen pregnancy.* Atlanta, GA: National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

CDC. (2012a). 1991-2009 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data, from http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline.

CDC. (2012b). Dating Matters Initiative, from http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/DatingMatters/.

CDC. (2012c). The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention, from http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/overview/social-ecologicalmodel.html.

Cercone, J. J., Beach, S. R., & Arias, I. (2005). Gender symmetry in dating intimate partner violence: does similar behavior imply similar constructs? *Violence Vict, 20*(2), 207-218.

Champion, H., Foley, K. L., Sigmon-Smith, K., Sutfin, E. L., & DuRant, R. H. (2008). Contextual factors and health risk behaviors associated with date fighting among high school students. *Women & Health, 47*(3), 1-22. doi: 10.1080/03630240802132286.

Collins, W. A. (2003). More than myth: The developmental significance of romantic relationships during adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 13*(1-24).

Collins, W. A., Welsh, D. P., & Furman, W. (2009). Adolescent romantic relationships. *Annu Rev Psychol, 60,* 631-652. doi: 10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163459.

Denton, M. L., Pearce, L. D., & Smith, C. (2008). *Religion and spirituality on the path through adolescence, research report number 8:* National Study of Youth and Religion, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Devers, K. J. (1999). How will we know "good" qualitative research when we see it? Beginning the dialogue in health services research. *Health Serv Res, 34*(5 Pt 2), 1153-1188.

Dishion, T. J., & Kavanagh, K. (2000). A multilevel approach to family-centered prevention in schools: process and outcome. *Addict Behav, 25*(6), 899-911. doi: S030646030000126X.

DuRant, R. H., Champion, H., & Wolfson, M. (2006). The relationship between watching professional wrestling on television and engaging in date fighting among high school students. *Pediatrics, 118*(2), e265-272. doi: 118/2/e265 [pii]10.1542/peds.2005-2098.

Eaton, D. K., Kann, L., Kinchen, S., Shanklin, S., Ross, J., Hawkins, J., . . . Wechsler, H. (2009). *Youth risk behavior surveillance - United States, 2009.* Surveillance Summaries, 59(SS-5).

Ehrensaft, M. K., Cohen, P., Brown, J., Smailes, E., Chen, H., & Johnson, J. G. (2003). Intergenerational transmission of partner violence: A 20-year prospective study. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 71*(4), 741-753. doi: 10.1037/0022-006x.71.4.741.

Ellison, C. G., & Anderson, K. L. (2001). Religious involvement and domestic violence among U.S. couples. *Journal for the Scientifc Study of Religion, 40*(2), 269-286.

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Escobar-Chaves, S. L., Tortolero, S. R., Markham, C. M., Low, B. J., Eitel, P., & Thickstun, P. (2005). Impact of the media on adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviors. *Pediatrics, 116*(1), 303-326.

Fehringer, J. A., & Hindin, M. J. (2009). Like parent, like child: Intergenerational transmission of partner violence in Cebu, the Philippines. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 44*(4), 363-371. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2008.08.012.

Foshee, V. A., Bauman, K. E., Arriaga, X. B., Helms, R. W., Koch, G. G., & Linder, G. F. (1998). An evaluation of Safe Dates, an adolescent dating violence prevention program. *Am J Public Health, 88*(1), 45-50.

Foshee, V. A., Bauman, K. E., Ennett, S. T., Suchindran, C., Benefield, T., & Linder, G. F. (2005). Assessing the effects of the dating violence prevention program "safe dates" using random coefficient regression modeling. *Prev Sci, 6*(3), 245-258. doi: 10.1007/s11121-005-0007-0.

Foshee, V. A., Benefield, T. S., Ennett, S. T., Bauman, K. E., & Suchindran, C. (2004). Longitudinal predictors of serious physical and sexual dating violence victimization during adolescence. *Prev Med, 39*(5), 1007-1016. doi: S0091743504002087 [pii]10.1016/j.ypmed.2004.04.014.

Foshee, V. A., & Langwick, S. A. (2011). Safe Dates: Prevention program for dating abuse, from http://www.hazelden.org/web/public/safedates.page.

Foshee, V. A., Linder, G. F., Bauman, K. E., Langwick, S. A., Arriaga, X. B., Heath, J. L., . . . Bangdiwala, S. (1996). The Safe Dates Project: theoretical basis, evaluation design, and selected baseline findings. *Am J Prev Med, 12*(5 Suppl), 39-47.

Foster, H., Hagan, J., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2004). Age, puberty, and exposure to intimate partner violence in adolescence. *Ann N Y Acad Sci, 1036,* 151-166. doi: 1036/1/151 [pii]10.1196/annals.1330.009.

Furman, W., & Shaffer, L. (2003). The role of romantic relationships in adolescent development. In P. Florsheim (Ed.), *Adolescent romantic relations and sexual behavior: Theory, research, and practical implications* (pp. 3-22). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associations, Inc., Publishers.

Furrow, J. L., King, P. E., & White, K. (2004). Religion and positive youth development: Identity, meaning, and prosocial concerns. *Applied Developmental Science, 8*, 17-26.

Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. In C. Geertz (Ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (pp. 3-30). Basic Books: Basic Books.

Giger, J. N., Appel, S. J., Davidhizar, R., & Davis, C. (2008). Church and spirituality in the lives of the African American community. *J Transcult Nurs, 19*(4), 375-383. doi: 1043659608322502 [pii]10.1177/1043659608322502.

Giordano, P. C., Manning, W. D., & Longmore, M. A. (2005). The romantic relationships of African American and White Adolescents. *The Sociological Quarterly, 46*(3), 545-568.

Giordano, P. C., Phelps, K. D., Manning, W. D., & Longmore, M. A. (2008). Adolescent academic achievement and romantic relationships. *Social Science Research, 37,* 37-54.

Glass, N., Fredland, N., Campbell, J., Yonas, M., Sharps, P., & Kub, J. (2003). Adolescent dating violence: prevalence, risk factors, health outcomes, and implications for clinical practice. *J Obstet Gynecol Neonatal Nurs, 32*(2), 227-238.

Good, M., & Willoughby, T. (2007). The identity formation experiences of church-attending rural adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 22*, 387-412.

Gover, A. R. (2004). Risky lifestyles and dating violence: A theoretical test of violent victimization. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 32*, 171-180.

Gowen, L. K., Feldman, S. S., Diaz, R., & Yisrael, D. (2004). A Comparison of the Sexual Behaviors and Attitudes of Adolescent Girls with Older Vs. Similar-Aged Boyfriends *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 33,* 167-175.

Green, K. M., Doherty, E. E., Fothergill, K. E., & Ensminger, M. E. (2012, online first). Marriage trajectories and health risk behaviors throughout adulthood among urban African Americans. *Journal of Family Issues,* 1-24.

Guzman, L., Ikramullah, E., Manlove, J., & Peterson, K. (2009). Teen perspectives on healthy romantic relationships among racial/ethnic minorities. *Child Trends.*

Hafen, C. A., Laursen, B., Burk, W. J., Kerr, M., & Stattin, H. (2011). Homophily in stable and unstable adolescent friendships: Similarity breeds constancy. *Personality and Individual Differences, 51*(5), 607-612. doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2011.05.027.

Hajjar, L. (2004). Religion, state power, and domestic violence in Muslim societies: A framework for comparative analysis. *Law & Social Inquiry, 29*, 1-38.

Halpern, C. T., Joyner, K., Udry, J. R., & Suchindran, C. (2000). Smart teens don't have sex (or kiss much either). *Journal of Adolescent Health, 26,* 213-225.

Halpern, C. T., Oslak, S. G., Young, M. L., Martin, S. L., & Kupper, L. L. (2001). Partner violence among adolescents in opposite-sex romantic relationships: findings from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *Am J Public Health, 91*(10), 1679-1685.

Halpern, C. T., Spriggs, A. L., Martin, S. L., & Kupper, L. L. (2009). Patterns of intimate partner violence victimization from adolescence to young adulthood in a nationally representative sample. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 45*, 508-516.

Hassouneh-Phillips, D. (2003). Strength and vulnerability: Spirituality in abused American Muslim women's lives. *Issues Ment Health Nurs, 24*, 681-694.

Haynie, D. L. (2002). Friendship networks and delinquency: The relative nature of peer delinquency. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology, 18*(2), 99-134.

Horwitz, A. V., White, H. R., & Howell-White, S. (1996). Becoming married and mental health: A longitudinal study of a cohort of young adults. *Journal of Marriage & the Family, 58,* 895-907.

Howard, D., Wang, M. Q., & Yan, F. (2007). Psychosocial factors associated with reports of physical dating violence among U.S. adolescent females. *Adolescence, 42*(166), 311-324.

Howard, D. E., & Wang, M. Q. (2003). Risk profiles of adolescent girls who were victims of dating violence. *Adolescence, 38*(149), 1-14.

Jain, S., Buka, S. L., Subramanian, S. V., & Molnar, B. E. (2010). Neighborhood predictors of dating violence victimization and perpetration in young adulthood: A multilevel study. *American Journal of Public Health, 100*(9), 1737-1744. doi: 10.2105/ajph.2009.169730.

Jeffords, C. R. (1984). The impact of sex-role and religious attitudes upon forced marital intercourse norms. *Sex Roles, 11*, 543-552.

Johnson, J. D., Adams, M. S., Ashburn, L., & Reed, W. (1995). Differential gender effects of exposure to rap music on African American adolescents' acceptance of teen dating violence. *Sex Roles, 33*(7-8), 597-605. doi: 10.1007/bf01544683.

Johnson, S. B., Frattaroli, S., Campbell, J., Wright, J., Pearson-Fields, A. S., & Cheng, T. L. (2005). "I know what love means." Gender-based violence in the lives of urban adolescents. *J Womens Health (Larchmt), 14*(2), 172-179. doi: 10.1089/jwh.2005.14.172.

Johnston, L. D., Bachman, J. G., & O'Malley, P. M. (2010). *Monitoring the future: Questionnaire reponses from the nation's high school seniors.* Ann Arbor, Michigan: Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan.

Jouriles, E. N., Platt, C., & McDonald, R. (2009). Violence in adolescent dating relationships. *The Prevention Researcher, 16*, 3-7.

Karney, B. R., Beckett, M. K., Collins, R. L., & Shaw, R. (2007). *Adolescent romantic relationships as precursors of health adult marriages.* Santa Monica: The RAND Corporation.

Kimmel, D. C., & Weiner, I. B. (1995). *Adolescence: A developmental transition* (Second ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

King, A. E. O., & Allen, T. T. (2009). Personal characteristics of the ideal African American marriage partner: A survey of adult Black men and women. *Journal of Black Studies, 39,* 570-588.

King, P. E., & Roeser, R. W. (2009). Religion and spirituality in adolescent development. In R. M. Lerner & L. Steinberg (Eds.), *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology* (Third ed., Vol. 1). Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Knoester, C., Haynie, D. L., & Stephens, C. M. (2006). Parenting Practices and Adolescents' Friendship Networks. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 68*(5), 1247-1260. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00326.x.

Koball, H., Moidduddin, E., Henderson, J., Goesling, B., & Besculides, M. (2010). What do we know about the link between marriage and health? *Journal of Family Issues, 31,* 1019-1040.

Kroger, J. (2007). *Identity development: Adolescence through adulthood* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

LaVeist, T. A., Zeno, T. L., & Fesahazion, R. G. (2010). The Effects of Mother's Marital Status on Adolescent and Young Adult Health and Economic Well-Being Among African Americans. *Journal of Family Issues, 31*(8), 1065-1080. doi: 10.1177/0192513x10365828.

Levitt, H. M., & Ware, K. N. (2006). Religious leaders' perspectives on marriage, divorce, and intimate partner violence. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 30*, 212-222.

Lincoln, C. E. (1984). *Race, religion, and the continuing American dilemma*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Lincoln, C. E., & Mamiya, L. H. (1990). *The black church in the African American experience.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Lincoln, K. D., & Chae, D. H. (2010). Stress, Marital Satisfaction, and Psychological Distress Among African Americans. *Journal of Family Issues, 31*(8), 1081-1105. doi: 10.1177/0192513x10365826.

Linden-Andersen, S., Markiewicz, D., & Doyle, A.-B. (2009). Perceived similarity among adolescent friends: The role of reciprocity, friendship quality, and gender. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 29*(5), 617-637. doi: 10.1177/0272431608324372.

Linder, J. R., & Collins, W. A. (2005). Parent and peer predictors of physical aggression and conflict management in romantic relationships in early adulthood. *Journal of Family Psychology, 19*(2), 252-262.

Maas, C. D., Fleming, C. B., Herrenkohl, T. I., & Catalano, R. F. (2010). Childhood predictors of teen dating violence victimization. *Violence Vict, 25*(2), 131-149.

Malik, S., Sorenson, S. B., & Aneshensel, C. S. (1997). Community and dating violence among adolescents: perpetration and victimization. *J Adolesc Health, 21*(5), 291-302. doi: S1054-139X(97)00143-2 [pii]10.1016/S1054-139X(97)00143-2.

Manganello, J. A. (2008). Teens, dating violence, and media use: a review of the literature and conceptual model for future research. *Trauma Violence Abuse, 9*(1), 3-18. doi: 9/1/3 [pii]10.1177/1524838007309804.

Manning, W. D., Giordano, P. C., Longmore, M. A., & Hocevar, A. (2009). *Romantic relatioships and academic/career trajectories in early adulthood.* Working Paper Series 2009-02. Department of Sociology and The Center for Family and Demographic Research. Bowling Green State University. Bowling Greeen, OH.

Manning, W. D., Giordano, P. C., Longmore, M. A., & Hocevar, A. (2011). Romantic relationships and academic/career trajectories in early adulthood. In F. D. Fincham & M. Cui (Eds.), *Romantic Relationships in Emerging Adulthood* (pp. 317-334). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Manolson, G. (2002). *Head to heart: What to know before dating and marriage*. Southfield, MI: Targum Press.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2006). *Designing Qualitative Research* (fourth ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Martinez, R., Rosenfeld, R., & Mares, D. (2008). Social disorganization, drug market activity, and neighborhood violent crime. *Urban Affairs Review, 43*(6), 846-874.

Martino, S. C., Elliott, M. N., Collins, R. L., Kanouse, D. E., & Berry, S. H. (2008). Virginity Pledges Among the Willing: Delays in First Intercourse and Consistency of Condom Use. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 43*(4), 341-348.

Mason, W. A., & Windle, M. (2001). Family, religious, school and peer influences on adolescent alcohol use: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 62*(1), 44-53.

McCabe, K., & Barnett, D. (2000). First comes work, then comes marriage: Future orientation among African American young adolescents. *Family Relations, 49*, 63-70.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Milot, A. S., & Ludden, A. B. (2009). The effects of religion and gender on well-being, substance use, and academic engagement among rural adolescents. *Youth & Society, 40,* 403-425.

Monroe, S. M., Rohde, P., Seeley, J. R., & Lewinsohn, P. M. (1999). Life events and depression in adolescence: relationship loss as a prospective risk factor for first onset of major depressive disorder. *J Abnorm Psychol, 108*(4), 606-614.

Morgan, M. Y. (1987). The impact of religion on gender-role attitudies. *Pschology of Women Quarterly, 11*, 301-310.

Mulford, C. G., P. C. (2008). Teen dating violence: A closer look at adolescent romantic relationships. *National Institute of Justice(261).*

Nason-Clark, N. (1997). *The battered wife: How Christians confront family violence.* Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press.

Nason-Clark, N. (2004). When terror strikes at home: The interface between religion and domestic violence. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 43*(3), 303-310.

Nason-Clark, N. (2009). Christianity and the experience of domestic violence: What does faith have to do with it? *Social Work & Christianity, 36*(4), 379-393.

National Conference of State Legislatures. (2011a). Positive Youth Development Retrieved February 28, 2012, from http://www.ncsl.org/issues-research/human-services/positive-youth-development-pyd.aspx.

National Conference of State Legislatures. (2011b). Teen Dating Violence Retrieved December 20, 2011, from http://www.ncsl.org/?tabid=17582.

NIH. (2003). *Strong religious views decrease teens' likelihood of having sex: Teens' attitudes towards sex hold more sway than religious views.* National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Retrieved from http://www.nichd.nih.gov/news/releases/religious_views.cfm.

Nonnemaker, J., McNeely, C. A., & Blum, R. W. (2006). Public and private domains of religiosity and adolescent smoking transitions. *Soc Sci Med, 62*(12), 3084-3095. doi: S0277-9536(05)00659-3 [pii]10.1016/j.socscimed.2005.11.052.

Nonnemaker, J. M., McNeely, C. A., & Blum, R. W. (2003). Public and private domains of religiosity and adolescent health risk behaviors: evidence from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *Soc Sci Med, 57*(11), 2049-2054. doi: S0277953603000960.

Plichta, S. B., & Falik, M. (2001). Prevalence of violence and its implications for women's health. *Womens Health Issues, 11*(3), 244-258. doi: S1049-3867(01)00085-8.

Ragin, C. C., Nagel, J., & White, P. (2004). *Workshop on Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research.* Washington, DC: National Science Foundation, Sociology Program.

Raiford, J. L., Wingood, G. M., & Diclemente, R. J. (2007a). Prevalence, incidence, and predictors of dating violence: A longitudinal study of African American female adolescents. *Journal of Women's Health, 16*(6), 822-832. doi: 10.1089/jwh.2006.0002.

Regan, P. C., & Joshi, A. (2003). Ideal partner preferences among adolescents. *Social Behavior and Personality, 31,* 13-20.

Regnerus, M., Smith, C., & Fritsch, M. (2003). *Religion in the Lives of American Adolescents: A Review of the Literature.* A Research Report of the National Study of Youth and Religion (pp. 53): National Study of Youth and Religion, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, CB# 3057, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3057.

Robbins, R. N., & Bryan, A. (2004). Relationships between future orientation, impulsive sensation seeking, and risky behavior among adjudicated adolescence. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 19*, 428-445.

Rostosky, S. S., Wilcox, B. L., Wright, M. L. C., & Randall, B. A. (2004). The impact of religiosity on adolescent sexual behavior: A review of the evidence. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 19*(6), 677-697.

Rotunda, R. J., Williamson, G., & Penfold, M. (2004). Clergy response to domestic violence: A preliminary survey of clergy members, victims, batterers. *Pastoral Psychology, 52*, 353-365.

Sampson, R. J., Raudenbush, S. W., & Earls, F. (1997). Neighborhoods and violent crime: a multilevel study of collective efficacy. *Science, 277*(5328), 918-924.

Sassler, S. (2010). Partnering across the life course: Sex, relationships, and mate selection. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 72,* 557-575.

Sawyer, R. G., Howard, D. E., Brewster-Jordan, J., Gavin, M., & Sherman, M. (2007). We didn't have sex...did we? College students perceptions of abstinence. *American Journal of Health Studies, 22,* 46-55.

Schafer, C., Coyne, J. C., & Lazarus, R. S. (1981). The health-related functions of social support. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 4,* 381-406.

Schvaneveldt, P. L., Miller, B. C., Berry, E. H., & Lee, T. R. (2001). Academic goals, achievement, and age at first sexual intercourse: longitudinal, bidirectional influences. *Adolescence, 36*(144), 767-787.

Schwartz, K. D. (2006). Transformations in parent and friend faith support predicting adolescents' religious faith. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 16*(4), 311-326. doi: 10.1207/s15327582ijpr1604_5.

Seiffge-Krenke, I., Overbeek, G., & Vermulst, A. (2010). Parent–child relationship trajectories during adolescence: Longitudinal associations with romantic outcomes in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Adolescence, 33*(1), 159-171. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2009.04.001.

Shaffer, D. R. (2009). *Social and Personality Development* (sixth ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

Shulman, S., & Scharf, M. (2000). Adolescent romantic behaviors and perceptions: Age- and gender-related differences, and links with family and peer relationships. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 10*, 99-118.

Sieving, R. E., McNeely, C. S., & Blum, R. W. (2000). Maternal expectations, mother-child connectedness, and adolescent sexual debut. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med, 154*(8), 809-816.

Silverman, J. G., Raj, A., Mucci, L. A., & Hathaway, J. E. (2001). Dating violence against adolescent girls and associated substance use, unhealthy weight control, sexual risk behavior, pregnancy, and suicidality. *JAMA, 286*(5), 572-579. doi: joc02015.

Simon, V. A., Aikins, J. W., & Prinstein, M. J. (2008). Romantic partner selection and socialization during early adolescence. *Child Development, 79*(6), 1676-1692.

Smith, C. (2003). Theorizing religious effects among American adolescents. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 42*(1), 17-30. doi: 10.1111/1468-5906.t01-1-00158.

Smith, C., & Denton, M. L. (2005). *Soul searching: The religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Smith, C., & Faris, R. (2002). *Religion and the life attitudes and self-images of American adolescents:* National Study of Youth & Religion, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Smith, P. H., White, J. W., & Holland, L. J. (2003). A longitudinal perspective on dating violence among adolescent and college-age women. *Am J Public Health, 93*(7), 1104-1109.

Socialization. (2011). *Merriam-Webster.com*, from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/socialization.

Somers, C. L., & Gizzi, T. J. (2001). Predicting adolescents' risky behaviors: The influence of future orientation, school involvement, and school attachment. *Adolescent & Family Health, 2*, 3-11.

Sorensen, S. (2007). http://www.actforyouth.net/resources/rf/rf_romantic_0707.pdf.

Sprecher, S., & Chandak, R. (1992). Attitudes about arranged marriages and dating among men and women from India. *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology, 20,* 59-69.

Steinberg, L., & Morris, A. S. (2001). Adolescent development. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52,* 83-110.

Sullivan, Erwin, E. H., Helms, S. W., Masho, S. W., & Farrell, A. D. (2010). Problematic situations associated with dating experiences and relationships among urban African American adolescents: a qualitative study. *J Prim Prev, 31*(5-6), 365-378. doi: 10.1007/s10935-010-0225-5.

Sullivan, H. S. (1953). *The interpersonal theory of psychiatry.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Taylor, E. M., Adimora, A. A., & Schoenbach, V. J. (2010). Marital Status and Sexually Transmitted Infections Among African Americans. *Journal of Family Issues, 31*(9), 1147-1165. doi: 10.1177/0192513x10365829.

Thoresen, C. E. (1998). Spirituality, health, and science: The coming revival? In S. Roth-Roemer & S. R. Kurpius (Eds.), *The Emerging Role of Counseling Psychology in health care* (pp. 409-431). New York: W. W. Norton.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion). Healthy People 2020, from http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives2020/default.aspx.

US Bureau of the Census. (2010). Table56: Marital status of the population by sex, race, and Hispanic origin: 1990 to 2008, from http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2008/cats/population.html.

US Department of Education. (2005). Helping your child become a responsible citizen. Washington, DC 2005: Office of Communications and Outreach.

Vezina, J., & Hebert, M. (2007). Risk factors for victimization in romantic relationships of young women: A review of empirical studies and implications for prevention. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 8*, 33-66.

Villani, S. (2001). Impact of media on children and adolescents: A 10-year review of the research. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 40*(4), 392-401.

Wallace Jr., J. M., & Williams, D. R. (1997). Religion and adolescent health-compromising behavior. In J. Schulenberg, J. L. Maggs & K. Hurrelmann (Eds.), *Health risks and developmental transitions during adolescence* (pp. 444-470). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Watson, J. M., Cascardi, M., Avery-Leaf, S., & O'Leary, K. D. (2001). High school students' responses to dating aggression. *Violence Vict, 16*(3), 339-348.

Wekerle, C., & Wolfe, D. A. (1999). Dating violence in mid-adolescence: theory, significance, and emerging prevention initiatives. *Clin Psychol Rev, 19*(4), 435-456. doi: S0272-7358(98)00091-9.

West, C. M., & Rose, S. (2000). Dating aggression among low income African American youth. *Violence Against Women, 6*(5), 470-494.

Williams, L. R., & Hickle, K. E. (2011). "He cheated on me, I cheated on him back": Mexican American and White adolescents' perceptions of cheating in romantic relationships. *Journal of Adolescence, 34*(5), 1005-1016. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2010.11.007.

Wilson, N., Minkler, M., Dasho, S., Wallerstein, N., & Martin, A. C. (2008). Getting to social action: The youth empowerment strategies (YES!) project. *Health Promotion Practice, 9,* 395-403.

Wolitzky-Taylor, K. B., Ruggiero, K. J., Danielson, C. K., Resnick, H. S., Hanson, R. F., Smith, D. W., . . . Kilpatrick, D. G. (2008). Prevalence and correlates of dating violence in a national sample of adolescents. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry, 47*(7), 755-762. doi: 10.1097/CHI.0b013e318172ef5fS0890-8567(08)60030-1.

Wood, R. G., Avellar, S., & Goesling, B. (2008). *Pathways to adulthood and marriage: Teenagers' attitudes, expectations, and relationship patterns*. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

Yan, F. A., Howard, D. E., Beck, K. H., Shattuck, T., & Hallmark-Kerr, M. (2010). Psychosocial correlates of physical dating violence victimization among Latino early adolescents. *J Interpers Violence, 25*(5), 808-831. doi: 0886260509336958 [pii]10.1177/0886260509336958.

Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J. (2002). The development of romantic relationships and adaptations in the system of peer relationships. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 31*, 216-225.

Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., Siebenbruner, J., & Collins, W. A. (2001). Diverse aspects of dating: associations with psychosocial functioning from early to middle adolescence. *J Adolesc, 24*(3), 313-336. doi: 10.1006/jado.2001.0410S0140-1971(01)90410-5.

Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., Siebenbruner, J., & Collins, W. A. (2004). A prospective study of intraindividual and peer influences on adolescents' heterosexual romantic and sexual behavior. *Arch Sex Behav, 33*(4), 381-394. doi: 10.1023/B:ASEB.0000028891.16654.2c487859.