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Help-seeking and help-offering for teen dating violence among acculturating Mexican American adolescents

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Abstract

Help-seeking sources, motivations, and barriers concerning teen dating violence are rarely co-examined alongside help-offering processes and messages, and both are understudied among minority youth populations. This study sought the perspectives of Mexican American adolescents (ages 15 to 17) concerning their preferences and experiences with both help-seeking and help-offering. Twenty focus groups ($N = 64$ adolescents) were divided by gender and by acculturation level to allow for group comparisons. Friends and supportive family members were primary sources of help, although adolescents voiced a number of barriers to help-seeking. The most prominent barrier was fear they would be told to leave the relationship, an anticipated message that aligned with their tendency to tell others to do so. Help-seeking was viewed as a weakness, and help-offering was reserved for friends that asked for it. Recommendations for programs and practice with youth include promoting culturally and gender attuned teen dating violence services that emphasize confidentiality, and working at the family, peer, and school levels to foster healthy relationships.

Introduction

Romantic relationships are a significant normative developmental task of adolescence (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009). Data from the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance survey (YRBS; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014) indicate that 73.9% of adolescents reported involvement in a romantic relationship in the preceding 12 months. Such relationships, however, sometimes precipitate psychological and social problems, including parental conflicts over monitoring dating behaviors, and peer feelings of exclusion as a result of the adolescent becoming increasingly focused on the dyadic relationship (Rueda, Nagoshi, & Williams, 2014). Adolescent romantic relationships can also bring the threat of intimidation or violence by dating partners; data from the YRBS also found that 10.3% of the respondents had experienced physical dating violence, with female adolescents more likely to enact violence (13.0% compared with 7.4% males). Hispanic girls reported rates higher than girls of other ethnicities (13.6% Hispanic girls; 12.9% white; 12.3% black), and Hispanic boys reported rates higher than whites (7% as compared with 6.4% white; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Presently, much of what we know about adolescents' romantic relationships stems from European American samples (Collins et al., 2009), not excluding their experiences with help-seeking and -offering in the context of violent dating relationships.

The present study sought to expand the literature on help-seeking and social support behaviors with regard to adolescent dating violence among an understudied group, Mexican American (MA) adolescents. Adolescents, including Latinos, are more likely to turn to friends than to parents or formal sources for help (Sabina, Cuevas, & Rodriguez, 2014). Thus, our use of focus group methodology directly aligns with our research questions by facilitating dialogue among like-peers; this methodology holds the additional benefit of fostering openness and support among minority youth (Umaña-Taylor & Bámaca, 2004), in turn providing an empowering experience to feel heard through shared and difficult lived experiences (Letendre & Williams, 2014). Such experiences are shaped by acculturation, which shifts MA adolescents' relationship perceptions and expectations (Sabina et al., 2014); further, such adaptations differ by gender (Updegraff, Umaña-Taylor, McHale, Wheeler, & Perez-Brena, 2012) and compel consideration of acculturation and gender in the study design. The present study is an

analysis of MA adolescents' a) perceived barriers to help-seeking, b) sources from which they would seek help and motivations in doing so, and c) voiced processes involved in help-offering, including the content of messages that they would offer to others. Focus groups were homogenous by acculturation and by gender, allowing for comparisons across groups and suggesting moderating influences of gender role socialization in context of acculturative processes. We end with recommendations for the delivery of culturally-sensitive services stemming from adolescents' own perceptions of effective versus ineffective help-seeking and -offering understandings.

Sources and quality of support

Most adolescents do not seek help for dating violence (Ashley & Foshee, 2005). When they do, they tend to turn to friends and other informal help sources rather than to adults (Ashley & Foshee, 2005; Fry et al., 2014; Martin, Houston, Mmari, & Decker, 2012; Ocampo, Shelley, & Jaycox, 2007; Sabina et al., 2014; Weisz, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, & Black, 2007). Qualitative research has found that European American and Mexican American adolescents feel that parents and school figures are often unconcerned about dating, or minimize their experiences (Adams & Williams, 2011). Parents might not have experienced relational violence or have received appropriate support for it themselves, therefore not knowing how to respond to relational violence that they observe among their children (Weisz et al., 2007). Taken together, these factors likely contribute to adolescents' tendency to turn to peers for help with conflict and violence. Responses from peers vary. While most peers offer a nurturing response when presented with stories of violence, they also may avoid the friend in need of support, minimize the abuse, or blame the help-seeker for it (Weisz et al., 2007). Less studied are the actual messages offered in helping situations; Fry and colleagues' study suggests that most teens (80%) would advise their friend to leave the relationship, to talk to an adult about it (50%), or would become directly involved by talking to their friend's dating partner (50%). Simplistic advice to "just leave him" was viewed as a catalyst among females for seeking professional help. Other research suggests, however, that leaving a partner may be less likely after discussing violence with a peer (Jackson, 2002; Weisz et al., 2007). Moreover, Weisz et al.'s (2007) research suggests that adolescents' attitudes favor continued togetherness even after

incidences of dating violence. Nurturing responses by helpers were facilitated by help-seekers' disclosure of their emotional connection to the event, but helpers were more likely to avoid the help-seeker when the violence was more severe (Weisz et al., 2007).

Different sources of support offer various types of help-offering messages. Among a large sample of African—American, Caucasian, and Latino adolescents, Pernice-Duca (2010) found that the perceived quality of social support did not differ across ethnic groups or gender; however, the quality of different kinds of support varied across varying sources of support. The quality of self-enhancing assistance was found to be highest for mothers and best friends, with lower ratings for fathers, siblings, other relatives, and teachers. Ocampo et al. (2007) reported, on the other hand, that many adolescents voice shortcomings of relying on friends as primary sources of help, including their reluctance to help, blaming the victim, or minimizing the seriousness of the abuse. Further, Martin et al. (2012) found that urban African American adolescents recognize the likelihood that their friends are also experiencing relationship violence and perceive this as a barrier to receiving effective help.

Cultural and gender considerations

Mexican American females, as compared to European American, have been found to experience particularly troublesome conflicts with their parents over the latter's dismissal, disapproval, or restriction of their romantic relationships (Rueda et al., 2014). Mexican American youth may also be apt to experience conflict with friends as a result of their dating (e.g., too much time spent with a romantic partner at the expense of their friendships; Rueda et al., 2014), and MA youth also describe that friends may sabotage their romantic relationships through gossip about cheating (Williams & Hickle, 2011). When an MA adolescent is experiencing dating violence, these challenges may affect the situational contexts and reasons for which particular sources of help are sought out. Thus, help seeking and offering experiences may be understood among MA youth within contextualization of culture, including attention to gender.

Traditional gender norms continue to exert influence, particularly for MA adolescent boys (Kulis, Marsiglia, & Nagoshi, 2012; Updegraff et al., 2012). Such norms include more rigid definitions of masculinity (Updegraff et al., 2012), which may impede

boys in particular from seeking help. Boys in general may be more likely to have their relationship violence minimized as compared to girls, particularly when the violence is less severe (Weisz et al., 2007). Disclosing violence may counter a desired reputation for masculinity and be more socially harmful to boys as compared with girls (Sabina et al., 2014), perhaps especially among MA boys, who remain stable over time in traditional gender role adherence (Updegraff et al., 2012). Additionally, studies suggest that ethnic minority boys may be less likely to seek help from formal sources (Martin et al., 2012; Sabina et al., 2014), whereas research with Caucasian youth has suggested formal help-seeking among boys (Ashley & Foshee, 2005). On the whole, studies of multi-ethnic youth find that girls are more likely to seek help than are boys (Black, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, & Weisz, 2008; Sabina et al., 2014; Weisz & Black, 2009). This includes Latino samples, such as that of Sabina et al. (2014), who found that *familismo* facilitated help-seeking among girls in particular. Further, Fry et al.'s (2014) study of urban high school students, many of whom were Latino, found that boys were less likely than girls both to seek and to offer help. Ethnic differences were noted such that foreign-born youth were less likely to offer verbal support or advice to a friend experiencing violence. When verbal support was offered, the most common message was to leave the relationship, followed by advice to talk to an adult. Of interest to the present study, Latino youth were significantly more likely than non-Latino youth to take action directly in help-offering situations, such as by talking to a violent relationship partner; there were no differences by birthplace in their tendency to do so.

Although most studies aggregate Latino youth, acculturation processes affect gendered attitudes about relationships in unique and understudied ways for youth residing in states that border Mexico and who are called upon to forge bicultural norms (Matsunaga, Hecht, Elek, & Ndiaye, 2010; Updegraff et al., 2012). For example, attachment to a romantic relationship has been found to vary as a function of Mexican orientation among a sample of MA youth living in a southwest border state. Specifically, youth that were more oriented towards Mexican culture were also more likely to be involved in a romantic relationship, as well as to experience greater attachment to their romantic partners (Tyrell, Wheeler, Gonzales, Dumka, & Millsap, 2014). Acculturation processes may also uniquely affect gendered attitudes about relationships. Another

longitudinal study of MA youth from a border state found that girls adopted egalitarian attitudes over time while boys remained stable in their endorsement of greater traditional view- points (Updegraff et al., 2012). Further, familism was found to be a source of emotional support, although it evidenced decline over time for both boys and girls (Updegraff et al., 2012). Familism in particular has been associated with formal help-seeking among Latino youth (Sabina et al., 2014), although MA youth have not been analyzed separately. Further research is needed concerning help-seeking and -offering among MA adolescent boys and girls and with attention to acculturation and gender.

In this study, we use focus group methods to delineate diversely acculturated MA adolescents' voiced barriers to help-seeking, who would they turn to for help, and the types of help-offering in which they would engage. Of relevance, the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) places an important role on adolescents' beliefs about dating violence: behaviors can be closely approximated based on attitudes and subjective norms towards the behavior. Subjective norms are estimated by perceptions of those close to the individual, particularly peers and peer norms, given the heightened relevance of peers in adolescence compared to adulthood (Furman, McDunn, & Young, 2008). To increase our understanding of the role of help-seeking beliefs and behaviors in response to dating violence, a dual perspective must be sought where adolescents are seen as potential victims and perpetrators, and as bystanders. Whether adolescents' perceptions of help-seeking are a result of personal or peer experiences as a victim or a perpetrator (or both), it is clear that motivations for behavior (or against behavior) are an important proximal factor in understanding various risk taking behaviors in adolescence (see Patrick & Maggs, 2010 for a review). Here, we asked about help-seeking and -giving amidst in-depth conversations about dating violence, thus enhancing our understanding of context-specific situations and motives.

Method

Sample and procedure

The Mexican American Teen Relationships (MATR) study took place in a large urban city of a Southwest state and consisted of both an online survey ($N = 305$) and focus groups of adolescents ($N = 20$ groups, 64 participants) divided by level of acculturation

and by gender. Youth were recruited through high schools, in collaboration with local community-based organizations (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs), and at community events (e.g., the monthly art walk). Data recruitment and collection took place across two academic years, between 2010–2011 and 2011–2012. Criteria for participation in both study components included identification as a Mexican American between the ages of 15 and 17. Following their completion of the survey, youth were invited to participate in a focus group. Surveys and focus groups were scheduled concurrently, meaning that adolescents that had denoted interest in both study components were called within two weeks to schedule their participation in a focus group. All youth were invited until saturation across group type was met, at which point purposive sampling was narrowed to include adolescents needed for each category. The governing Institutional Review Board approved all research activities, and a Certificate of Confidentiality was received from the U.S. Government. Parent consent was obtained for both study components (one form), and teen assent was also obtained for each individual study component. All materials, including permission forms and the on-line survey, were administered in Spanish and English. See Table 1 for a description of the sample. Over half of participants ($n = 35$) were in a dating relationship, a majority ($n = 31$) dating a partner of the other sex. Note that most adolescents had personal experiences with dating violence in their most recent relationship, as indicated by the online survey using the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (70 items; CADRI; Wolfe et al., 2001).

Youth were invited into their respective focus groups using acculturation scores from the surveys (i.e., Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican—Americans Short Form/ARMSA-SF; 12 items; Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995). This measure was chosen because, in addition to established concurrent and construct validity, it includes multiple social and linguistic acculturative indicators (e.g., “*I associate with White people*”; note that the term “White” replaced “Anglo” due to unfamiliarity with the latter in the present sample). Further, using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (“not at all”) to 5 (“very much or almost all the time”), two subscales (6 items each) indicate the degree of orientation to Mexican and American culture while allowing for consideration of both simultaneously. Other research indicates that most MA youth fall into categories as highly acculturated, bicultural, or low acculturated (Nieri, Lee, Kulis, & Marsiglia, 2011). In order

to group participants in this way, we created an overall acculturation score by subtracting an adolescent's average Mexican orientation score ($\alpha = .89$) from their average Anglo-orientation score ($\alpha = .70$). Using these scores, groups were divided as follows: b 0, low acculturated; between 0 and 1, bicultural; and N 1, high acculturated.

Table 1
Descriptive information of study participants.

	N	Frequency	M	(SD)
Sex				
Male	24	37.50%		
Female	40	62.50%		
Age			16.16	(.8)
15	15	25.00%		
16	22	34.38%		
17	27	40.63%		
Grade			10.75	(.96)
9	7	10.94%		
10	18	28.13%		
11	23	35.94%		
12	16	25.00%		
Generation Status				
1st	20	31.30%		
2nd	32	50.00%		
3rd	12	18.80%		
Relationship Status				
Going-out	31	48.44%		
Single	23	35.94%		
Other	10	15.62%		
Perpetrated Any Violence	26	91.67%		
Victim of Any Violence	47	92.13%		
Perpetrated Any Physical Violence	28	49.12%		
Victim of Any Physical Violence	28	50.00%		

Note. First generation denotes that the adolescent was born in Mexico, second generation that (a) parent(s) was born in Mexico, and third generation that both parents were born in the United States. A relationship status of "other" denotes that the adolescent was either casually dating, in a hookups relationships, or in a friends with benefits relationship. One adolescent in this category was married. Valid percentages were used when there was missing data. The Conflict in Relationships Dating Inventory (70 items, CADRI; Wolfe et al., 2001) was used to assess violence. Violence indicators denote that the adolescent had enacted violence against a dating partner or had been victim to violence at least one time by a dating partner in the past year. Emotional, relational, sexual, and physical violence are included in the measure of any violence.

We scheduled 3 to 5 participants per group, aligned with research pointing to smaller groups as more facilitative of discussion concerning sensitive experiences and empowering of minority youth who are then given more opportunity to talk in group (Letendre & Williams, 2014; Umaña-Taylor & Bámaca, 2004). As a result of ‘no shows’, and one group that mistakenly included two unscheduled friends (group not analyzed for acculturation comparisons), final group sizes ranged from 2 to 6 participants. See Table 2 for a complete description of groups by type, size, and mean acculturation scores. Groups were moderated by a bilingual and bicultural moderator (first author), and in the presence of an assistant moderator that kept notes using a smart pen (an audio recording device that corresponds with hand written notes). Adolescents were asked a series of key questions, kept consistent across groups in order to facilitate comparisons. See Table 3. All questions pertained to youth's perceptions of and experiences with teen dating violence, and the present analyses focus specifically on dialogue pertaining to help-seeking and -offering: *What would you do if you had a disagreement you considered violent? Would you seek help from a parent, friend, or another adult? Why or why not? Would you know where to get additional information? What would you do if you knew a friend was experiencing dating violence? Would you talk to your friend or stay out of it? Why or why not? Would you talk to someone else about it?* Groups were led in youth's preferred language, with more Spanish spoken in low acculturated groups.

Analysis

Digital recordings from focus groups were transcribed verbatim, and those containing Spanish were transcribed and translated by a bilingual member of the research team. Transcriptions were entered into QSR Nvivo (Gibbs, 2002) and analyzed using an open coding scheme that sought meaningful categories via inductive content analysis (Creswell, 2007). Themes and subthemes were identified and given priority by not only their repetition, but also by the extensiveness, emotionality, and specificity (i.e., personal nature) of examples offered (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Participants' responses were considered in the context of the group as a whole, and every effort was made to utilize adolescents' actual quotations in communicating the results. This is particularly

important in that it enhances the trustworthiness of the study; that is, adolescents' voiced barriers to seeking help and their messages to others in need of it are credibly reflected and valued in the presentation of findings (Padgett, 2008).

Table 2

Mexican-orientation, Anglo-orientation, and overall acculturation score means and standard deviations by focus group.

	N	MOS	SD	AOS	SD	ACC	SD
Acculturation	64	3.1	(1.05)	3.93	(.70)	0.82	(1.20)
Males	24	2.87	(1.16)	3.53	(1.12)	0.7	(1.14)
Low acculturated	7	4	(.71)	3.33	(.54)	-0.66	(.61)
Group 1	2	3.9	(1.27)	3	(0)	-0.9	(1.27)
Group 2	3	3.83	(.73)	3.22	(.69)	-0.61	(.48)
Group 3	2	4.34	(.23)	3.83	(.23)	-0.5	(0)
Bicultural	9	3	(1.11)	3.54	(1.14)	0.54	(.32)
Group 1	2	3.42	(.12)	3.84	(.23)	0.42	(.12)
Group 2	4	3.67	(.89)	4.29	(.67)	0.63	(.44)
Group 3	3	1.83	(.76)	2.34	(1.04)	0.5	(.29)
High acculturated	8	2.29	(.71)	4.27	(.49)	1.98	(.74)
Group 1	3	2.11	(.63)	4.5	(.6)	2.39	(.54)
Group 2	2	1.84	(.94)	4.34	(.6)	2.5	(.71)
Group 3	3	2.78	(.58)	4	(.5)	1.22	(.9)
Females	40	3.01	(1.14)	3.9	(.92)	0.91	(1.17)
Low acculturated	9	4.13	(.49)	3.65	(.57)	-.48	(.4)
Group 1	3	4.11	(.51)	3.28	(.68)	-0.83	(.44)
Group 2	3	3.89	(.51)	3.72	(.51)	-0.17	(0)
Group 3	3	4.39	(.51)	3.95	(.48)	-0.44	(.34)
Bicultural	15	3.62	(.59)	4.04	(.6)	0.45	(.51)
Group 1	4	3.61	(.59)	4.39	(.51)	0.78	(.09)
Group 2	2	3.57	(.79)	3.97	(.66)	0.4	(.51)
Group 3	6	4.09	(.12)	4.25	(.35)	0.17	(.23)
Group 4	3	3.46	(.44)	3.8	(.71)	0.42	(.78)
High acculturated	16	2.12	(.66)	4.28	(.39)	2.11	(.73)
Group 1	4	2.34	(.47)	4.08	(1.06)	1.75	(.59)
Group 2	5	1.53	(.84)	4.43	(.38)	2.9	(.7)
Group 3	5	2.53	(.32)	4.28	(.16)	1.75	(.3)
Group 4	2	2.21	(.32)	4.18	(.24)	1.75	(.5)

Note. Scores were computed using the *Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans Short Form/ARMSA-SF*; 12 items (Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995). MOS is the group's mean Mexican-orientation score, AOS is the group's mean Anglo-orientation score, and ACC is the group's mean acculturation score taking both subscales into account (i.e., AOS-MOS).

We utilized analytic triangulation in our creation of the coding scheme (Padgett, 2008). The first and third authors first independently created an initial codebook and conducted a preliminary coding of all data; they then compared their conceptual themes and subthemes and collaboratively refined the codebook several times in order to capture the complexity and extensiveness of adolescents' dialogue. All data were thus coded multiple times, and the second author also offered input after each reiteration concerning the transparency and coherency that discussion of these topics also arose within the context of other related conversation on teen dating violence. An audit trail was kept in the development of each successive codebook. As discussed by Padgett (2008), the present study further demonstrates rigor via “evidentiary adequacy”; that is, 47 pages of focus group transcripts pertained specifically to help-seeking and -offering dialogue.

Results

Adolescents across groups offered rich and often detailed information concerning help-seeking and help-offering in the context of teen dating violence. Themes shed light on cognitive and interpersonal processes that influenced whether and from whom they would seek help, as well as on the types of help (i.e., messages, actions taken) they would offer to a friend. The reader will note that, although we asked youth what they ‘would do’ in order to facilitate comfort in sharing, some chose to share personal stories of help-seeking and -offering. Still, we advise the reader to bear in mind that our study design did not permit us to disentangle personal from bystander situations. Barriers to help-seeking are discussed first, followed by sources of help-seeking, and finally help-offering processes and messages. There were more commonalities than differences across level of acculturation; thus, differences are noted within each theme as they arose. Female groups dialogued in greater depth and more extensively than male groups; certain themes (e.g., fear of partner retaliation, fear of parental action or discipline) were evidenced primarily or exclusively by females as noted. See Table 4 for a summary of overall themes and subthemes. Quotations using pseudo names reflect adolescents' actual dialogue, and the following acronyms are in place to ease reading: HAM/HAF, high acculturated male/female; BIM/BIF, bicultural male/female; and LAM/LAF, low acculturated male/female.

Barriers to help-seeking

Adolescents across groups discussed numerous barriers to seeking help in the context of violent romantic relationships. Much of their dialogue reflected their own lived experiences or those of friends and family members. Three primary barriers precluded them from reaching out and are presented in order of saliency: adolescents did not want to leave the relationship and felt that a helper would tell them to do so; adolescents viewed help-seeking as a weakness; and adolescents feared partner retaliation. The first two barriers are supported by subthemes using quotations from youth.

Table 3
Focus group questioning route.

Key questions	Probes
<p>What does a healthy dating relationship look like?</p> <p>What are some signs that indicate a relationship may be unhealthy or abusive?</p>	<p>What does a happy dating relationship look like?</p> <p>What does dating violence look like?</p> <p>How would you know that you, or a friend, are experiencing dating violence?</p> <p>What are some things that might happen in a relationship that some people think is ok but other people might think is unhealthy or abusive?</p>
<p>What would you be willing to put up with to keep a relationship?</p> <p>How do you think guys and girls experience dating abuse differently? Similarly?</p>	<p>What are some things that keep people in unhealthy relationships?</p> <p>Who usually initiates dating violence?</p> <p>Is violence in a relationship more upsetting to males or females?</p>
<p>What kinds of violence exist in dating relationships? Give an example.</p>	<p>When is sexual pressure or coercion considered abusive?</p> <p>Are emotional, sexual, and physical abuse related?</p>
<p>What situations might provoke dating violence?</p>	<p>What types of relationship problems lead to violence?</p> <p>Why does abuse occur in romantic relationships?</p>
<p>What would you do if you had a disagreement you considered violent?</p>	<p>Would you seek help from a parent, friend, another adult? Why or why not?</p>
<p>What would you do if you knew a friend was experiencing dating violence?</p>	<p>Would you know where to get additional information?</p> <p>Would you talk to your friend about it or stay out of it? Why or why not?</p> <p>Would you talk to someone else about it?</p>
<p>What are the consequences of violence in a relationship?</p> <p>If you had a chance to give advice to other teens about dating violence what would you say?</p>	<p>How can dating violence affect other parts of your life?</p> <p>Has anyone ever given you good advice?</p> <p>Where or from whom did you learn the most about dating violence?</p>

Note. Although all data were analyzed for the themes in this study, results primarily emerged from analysis of bolded questions.

Table 4
Antithetical relationships between help-seeking barriers and help-offering messages/actions.

Help-seeking barriers	Help-offering messages/actions
<p>Adolescents did not want to leave the relationship. To the contrary, youth anticipated advice or demands to leave...</p>	<p>Parents and peers advised to "Leave and don't come back."</p>
<p>Adolescents viewed help-seeking as a weakness. Help-seeking was a source of shame... And youth felt they could handle it on their own... Adolescents were scared of partner retaliation.</p>	<p>Peers advised to "Get help", first from unspecified sources (e.g. "turn to people") and secondly, from parents or professionals.</p> <p>Some approached the third party directly, "I go to that person", including involvement of extended family.</p>

Adolescents did not want to leave the relationship

The primary reason that youth did not seek help was because they equated love for a partner with commitment; to the contrary, they anticipated that a helper might advise them to leave the relationship. Although this sentiment was similarly reiterated among males and females, it was more salient among bicultural and highly acculturated groups. Such youth felt that the ability to weather difficult times “*has to do with how strong the relationship is*” (Camila, HAF)—a mentality that negatively impacted their proclivity to seek help when the relationship became abusive. As couples persisted through difficult times, the aptitude to withstand more was apparent, as voiced by Valentino, HAM: “*They know that they've been through a lot and they know that they can go through more.*” This was described in the context of felt affection for a romantic partner: “*If there's love, find a way, and you care about the person, you'll do whatever it takes to make it work.*” Matthew, BIM; “*If you really like that person and want to be with them, you'll do anything just to be with them.*” Alan, BIM. Such a mindset compromised relationship standards, as described by Axel, HAM: “*They keep making chances for them, 'Oh maybe they'll do this.' They keep making excuses because they love the person.*” Relatedly, youth felt that sometimes simply being “*used to*” or attached to a partner warranted continued effort to keep the relationship going: “*It's probably not love but...*” Ivanna, LAF; “*They are used to them.*” Genesis, BIF. This was understood by some, including Luciana (HAF), as resulting from possessiveness and alienation, constitutive of the abuse itself:

Like, if a girl hangs out with her friends—like, the guy would get jealous because he's not with them...and then like, they stop hanging out with their friends...And it's just like, they get really attached to each other...if he starts hitting her or something, she doesn't want to leave him 'cause she doesn't want to be alone. She doesn't have anyone else.

“*They'll be like 'You know you should leave her.'*” In direct opposition to adolescents' commitment to and attachment for a partner, bicultural and highly acculturated males and females anticipated that helpers (primarily peers) would advise

them to leave their boyfriend or girlfriend. Jackie, HAF, described this in the context of her same-sex relationship: *"They'll be like, 'You know you should leave her' but like 'No, I love her.'"* Rafael, HAM, similarly stated, *"Cause if you talk to that person and they are just going to tell you to leave the person and find another one. That's not gonna get you nowhere."* Powerful feelings towards a romantic partner and an accompanying fear of loss were also most apparent among highly acculturated youth (e.g., *"They probably think that if they break up, they'll like never get over them."* Julieta, HAF), although exceptions were noted: *"They think they can't live without them, and then they actually can."* Carla, LAF.

Part of the undesirability of this advice was the responsibility to leave that came from hearing it, as described by Ximena, BIF: *"But then you have that pressure—you are aware you are in abusive relationship."* Similarly, if an adolescent was not willing to take the advice to leave, that itself was a barrier: *"You have to want to like, not be abused. You have to want it and be willing to walk away from it."* Mia, HAF.

"It's gonna be like, 'Oh, I don't want you to be dating him.'" As an extension of the above subtheme, which captured teens' more general apprehension of being told to leave the relationship, youth across levels of acculturation and particularly females anticipated that relationship strain with their parents would result from their authoritative message to do so. Parents were described as being *"way too overprotective"* (Lola, BIF) and overly involved: *"If they notice they would try and go do something to that person."* Carla, LAF. Thus, youth across levels of acculturation sometimes avoided parents rather than viewing them as a source of help:

Carla: Like, you're not talking to them or like . . . Jazmin: Avoiding them. So they weren't all up in your problems. Moderator: Why do you think it'd be difficult to talk to any of your family? Carla: Well they would get in your business. (LAF)

I wouldn't talk to parents because parents just make it a bigger problem than what it is because obviously you're their child. It's gonna be like 'Oh I don't want you to be dating him' when they don't really know what you're going through kind of thing. (Lola, BIF)

Now a days, I just don't trust anybody...my mom, she'll take steps to like, 'Oh, well we're moving back to Las Vegas', or an older family member like my grandma would be like, 'Oh I think it's best that you move back out here with us.' Like it's just this big huge thing. (Abril, HAF)

As relationships with family members and friends became strained, the romantic partnership was solidified through increased alienation. This was described by Julieta, HAF:

I think it can affect your family and friends...they try and help you out and you're like 'No, like, I don't know'—you love him...and then like you and your family start arguing...and like, I don't know, with your friends, too...you just start arguing with everyone, and so you think all they are the only ones that are there for you.

Finally, this subtheme further captured fear of getting in trouble from other professional sources, including counselors or police: "*Would you talk to a counselor?*" Moderator, "*It's like they have something here that if you tell them they need to tell someone.*" Nadia, BIF; "*We could not call the police because I would get into trouble because I was underage.*" Ivanna, LAF. These contexts were discussed to a lesser extent, and primarily upon prompting.

Adolescents viewed help-seeking as a weakness

Particularly among more highly acculturated youth, being able to endure relationship difficulties was considered to be indicative of relationship commitment and strength. Seeking help was, therefore, viewed as an individual character weakness. This theme also held, however, among low acculturated youth who viewed help-seeking as embarrassing and contrary to their ability to be able to handle the relationship violence on their own.

"I was scared of what they thought." Adolescents across all group types reiterated that *"they'd be embarrassed or ashamed"* (Axel, HAM) to seek help, discussed primarily in context of friends and with parents. *"I would not tell a friend...because they would be like 'Oohhh.'"* Ivanna, LAF; *"They don't want their friends to find out."* Victoria; HAF; *"Like my mom didn't find out, I didn't want to tell her. I was scared of what they thought and stuff."* Malena, BIF. Their fear of embarrassment kept them from reaching out, even when they wanted to do so: *"They might not feel comfortable sharing their experiences...they would like, want the help—they just wouldn't want to be sharing."* Kimberly, BIF. Since parents *"might judge"*, one solution was to seek advice by pretending that it was a friend experiencing the abuse. Even this, however, was not a fully effective strategy to circumvent potential embarrassment: *"My mom or whoever I talk to will be like, 'Oh, it's probably you...that you're going through the same thing...You don't want to say it's you.'"* Ivanna, LAF. Further, females feared that confiding in friends would result in gossip: *"So I just don't tell anyone anything. Females run their mouths...guys run their mouths too."* Abril, HAF. Ultimately, fear of judgment contributed to complete discretion: *"Like if they're in an abusive relationship, they're quiet...they're not gonna go out for help."* Ian, BIM. Although females voiced more personal examples, this theme represented both males' and females' apprehensions.

"I can handle this." Rather than confront each of the above barriers to help-seeking, youth across group types either voiced directly that they could handle relationship violence on their own or portrayed this theme through their examples: *"I just solve problems by myself."* Josué, HAM; *"I wouldn't leave them but I would definitely make it*

right and tell them that could never happen again.” Isabella, HAF; *“I’ll just keep fighting until it ends.”* Abril, HAF. Many reiterated that they would simply *“tell him that I thought it was abusive”* (Julieta, HAF), or *“walk away”* (Arturo, LAM) from the argument if they were to experience violence. This sentiment not only pertained to self-directed help-seeking, but also when confronted by others about the abuse: *“Other people might be like ‘Oh you’re in an unhealthy relationship, I think you should get help’ but you’re like ‘No it’s fine, I can handle this.’”* BIF, Lola. For some female adolescents, the perceived severity of the abuse played a role in their propensity to seek help, particularly if the abuse became physical: *“I don’t know...if like he hurts me or something.”* Ariana, LAF. However, the following conversation excerpt among low acculturated females revealed that handling it oneself was prioritized—or at least popularized:

Moderator: What do you mean if you needed it? Like if you were in a relationship or only if you were in an abusive situation? Jazmin: Abusive relationship, even then I don’t think I would. Ariana: You want to get killed. (laughter) Jazmin: I don’t, but [I can] handle it on my own. **Moderator:** Okay, so you would handle it on your own. Do you all think you would handle it on your own? Jazmin: Yep. (others remain silent)

Adolescents were scared of partner retaliation

Although discussed less than other subthemes, some adolescents across group types would not seek help *“mostly because they’d be scared”* (Javier, BIM) that a partner might retaliate against them. Although both boys and girls discussed this theme, female pronouns were exclusively utilized. This manifested itself in the form of threats (e.g., *“They threaten them, like they’re going to keep on hitting them or their family or something.”* Malena, BIF) and in the increased likelihood that a partner’s abuse may become more violent if they were to seek help: *“Well like what happens if she says that ‘it’s over’— what do you think he’s going to do to her?”* Romina, LAF; *“...she was so afraid that if she knew he knew that she was telling that he would do it worse...”* Isabella, HAF.

Helping-seeking source

In keeping with help-seeking barriers, adolescents discussed seeking help from family or friends whom they felt were most likely to offer supportive and nonjudgmental

advice, not embarrass them, gossip, or become angry. Despite earlier apprehensions (e.g., fear of getting in trouble), parents that evidenced these characteristics facilitated help-seeking: *"The relationship I have with my parents, I can see them as parents and I can see them as friends. I can talk to them about anything that goes on and they won't be like, 'Why did you do this and that?'"* Simón, HAM. Less acculturated (LA/BI) youth emphasized how close they felt to family as an important consideration in help-seeking: *"Would you seek help from a friend?"*, **Moderator**, *"More like closer family"* (Alex, LAM); *"And it just depends on the person, like if they're close to their immediate family and their parents."* (Valerie, LAF). When youth sought help from a friend, it was often because they did not feel they could approach parents: *"I think they would talk to their friends first."* Olivia, *"It just depends on their family."* Romina, LAFs; *"I feel like I could talk to my friends better than what I could talk to any one of my parents."* Luana, BIF.

Males' discussion of help-seeking sources was matter-of-fact, whereas females offered greater specificity and dialogued at length about the pros and cons of reaching out to various help-seeking sources. This included reflecting on potential messages or actions that might be taken if they were to (or did) approach one person versus another. When females wanted listener support, most preferred to talk to their mother. Importantly, some mothers became involved without having been approached but, rather, because their daughter was evidencing emotional upset: *"I got to the house. I did not say anything to my mom...de repente me levanté [all of the sudden, I got up] and started crying. My mom was like, 'What happened?'"* Ivanna, LAF. On the other hand, females preferred to involve extended family (e.g., *"I'd tell my uncle."* Jazmin, LAF), siblings (e.g., *"I would get my brothers involved."* Maribel, HAF), or "guy friends", including when they hoped that action would be taken or when the violence was more severe: *"I think if my boyfriend hit me, I would tell one of my guy friends and it would be like—they would go do something to him."* Luciana, HAF. An exception was noted concerning third party involvement for same-versus other sex relationships: *"I don't know probably get the big brothers involved. Well if Shelby [her female partner] did something, I would hit her back because she's a girl. If she hit me, I would hit her back."* Maribel, HAF. Extended family involvement was more characteristic of low acculturated youth, and at times reflected a way to circumvent having to talk to their parents: *"My cousins—let's go there first and see what happens."* Romina,

LAF. Others discussed father involvement if physical abuse were present: *“Well my dad always told me, ‘Just make sure no one hits you,’ and if they do to let him know.”*

Maribel, HAF.

Of note, and despite earlier described barriers concerning professional help, some teens also stated that they would talk to a counselor or police about the abuse, or search the internet; supportive dialogue was minimal, however, and examples suggested such sources as secondary to talking to family and/or friends. The following help-offering themes communicate the types of messages or actions that youth would take if a friend were experiencing relationship violence.

Help-offering motivations and messages

By and large, teens viewed help-offering as a privileged role reserved for trusted friends in need, and as desired by them. Aligning with the notion that they could *“handle it”*, help-offering dialogue portrayed an overarching norm that *“it’s their business.”* Diego, LAM. Youth that were less acculturated were more apt to state that they would *“stay out of it”* (Kimberly, BIF) since *“it’s [dating violence] a personal thing.”* Diego, LAM. Such youth felt that they would make themselves available to friends in need, but *“wouldn’t get into it too much though—it’s like, their problem.”* Manuel, BIM. Similarly, they felt that if they were to reach out to a friend that had not first approached them, it would result in a frustrating interaction: *“I would give advice to anyone who needs it, but I don’t want to waste my time if they’re not really gonna listen.”* Javier, BIM; *“It’s cause they don’t listen...they don’t even care.”* Ivanna, LAF. Some low acculturated teens felt strongly about not becoming involved in the situation (*“They should be able to handle it, and they should handle it.”* Joshua, LAM), a sentiment that may reflect that of family members whereby the ultimate responsibility was on the teen. This was evidenced in the following conversation among low acculturated females: *“My brother is like, ‘You’re stupid if you let a guy hit you.’”* Romina, LAF, *“If you let a guy—you’re dealing with it on your own.”* Valerie (stated from brother’s perspective), LAF, *“If a guy lays a hand on me, my dad would get ghetto. And if he keeps continuing he’d be like... ‘You take care of it yourself because that way you learn.’”* Romina, LAF.

Despite the notion that relationship violence was largely a personal matter, youth

across groups offered a number of ways that they would offer to help a friend, especially one that was open to receiving it. The following advice and help-offering processes follow in order of salience.

“Leave and don't come back.”

Across groups, adolescents' most prominent advice to others in abusive relationships was to leave their partner; this theme mirrors and contrasts their primary help-seeking barrier—the very anticipation of this message. This paradox is demonstrated first by Jerónimo and Alex, LAMs:

Jerónimo: If they're asking you for help then I'm pretty sure they're open to any suggestions you have on what they can do to improve the relationship or if they should just end it right there before it gets worse than it already is. So I'm pretty sure they're expecting you to tell them what you know or what you would do if you were in their situation. **Moderator:** What would you do? Alex: **I would just end it.**

Jerónimo: **I pretty much would tell them that too...**

Given the acknowledged difficulty, however, some youth embedded their advice to leave within other supportive dialogue: *“How would you help them?” Moderator, “Like by talking them, by giving them encouragement to leave them.”* Paula, HAF; *“I'd talk to them first, so like I'd get them to tell me what they're going through...then I would just advise them on what they need...the smart thing to do would be just to leave them.”* Manuel, BIM.

Most help-offering advice to leave did not acknowledge the severity of the abuse: *“Stay strong...leave his ass too.”* Alma, HAF. Maribel, HAF, discussed how time apart could benefit the couple: *“My best friend lives in Michigan, and would call me and tell me her boyfriend was hitting her...I told her to just get out of there for a while. They are good—now they're happy.”* Some dialogue suggested, however, that when the abuse was more severe, messages to leave also became more urgent and commanding: *“Don't risk it.”* Axel, HAM; *“If it's not fixable, get out.”* Favian, HAM. Ivanna, a LAF, dialogued at length as she told of her personal struggle with an abusive partner and her mother's attempts to help. Her story began with a message to leave:

My mom was like **'You have to leave him', but I couldn't leave him, I loved**

him. I did not want to leave him, I was with him a long time. He told me he was sorry. 'Ya sabes como te gusta' [You know how much I love you]. So I would get back with him, then he started again.

As the relationship continued, Ivanna's boyfriend began stalking her. He also abused drugs and had gone to jail. Her mother responded to the increased severity of the abuse by continuously checking up on her, and feared he had gotten out of jail early:

He still sends me letters—he says that when he comes out I am not going to go out with another [boy] because then he is going to kill him. He is going to come out in like two months... My mom is all scared because "He is probably going to kill the one you're with"... "No! Maybe he is out already. Where you at?..."
[imitating mother]

"Get help."

Teens did not always know how to help a friend in need, other than to tell them to leave the relationship. Adolescents' messages were sometimes to seek outside help or to seek help for them, particularly when a friend was experiencing more severe forms of violence. However, some also recognized that the abuse might escalate should a friend leave their partner: "*Well, like what happens if she says that 'it's over'—what do you think he's going to do to her?*" Romina, LAF. This theme was largely supported by female dialogue; however, when specific types of abuse were discussed as part of this theme, teens (including males) typically recommended that females get outside help for physical violence experienced by a male dating partner. Moreover, adolescents sometimes shared personal examples amidst stories of friends, as evidenced by this group of LAFs:

Romina: Like if you see bruises constantly that's when you know you need to do something...Olivia: It like he's grabbing your wrist, he leaves bruises there. Like how are you going to explain that, when you have finger marks on your hand and on your arm? **Moderator**: What would you do if that happened? Romina: I would talk to them **and try to convince them to get help** and if they didn't want to then I would probably try to find a way to help them...**Moderator**: Would you know where to turn for information or help? Olivia: Probably teachers, counselors,

parents, basically anybody.

Youth often lacked clarity in their message to seek help from an un- specified source: *“They need to get help”* Isabella, HAF; *“turn to people”* Emilia, HAF; and *“find somebody to talk to”* Jazmin, LAF, such as *“someone older that you could trust, or someone that’s been through it”* Ariana, LAF. When a specific source was advised, it was most commonly parents (e.g., *“Usually when bad things happen you go to your best friend and like maybe to your mom. They [your friend] make you.”* Rosa, LAF), or a professional source: *“Yeah, just make them get help, and like, tell ‘em to go to a group, you know those groups they have.”* Luciana, HAF. Indeed, personal examples pointed to both parents and professional sources as having been utilized for severe incidences of violence: *“There was this one girl I knew who was traumatized about her boyfriend beating on her....like her mom took her to counseling and everything.”* Malena, BIF; *“We go outside, someone calls the police, police comes, they can’t even separate them.”* Matthew, BIM. However, domestic violence occurring in some of the adolescents’ homes contextualized some of the their own experiences with help-seeking and -offering for TDV. For example, the notion that help-seeking was especially relevant to physical versus other forms of violence was modeled by the parents of Isabella, HAF, who described the following scenario: *“I’ve seen verbal and emotional abuse in my own house, but for the physical, I had a lot of the men on my dad’s side of the family are like that...and I’ve had many talks with my mom about why I can’t see them, how wrong it is...and how they need to get help.”*

“I go to that person.”

Although the help-offering message was primarily targeted towards a help-seeking friend, some adolescents stated that they would approach the perpetrator as a result of the abuse. Their action or message varied as a result of whether they perceived the abuse to be emotional or physical. Emotional or verbal abuse resulted in a face-to-face discussion with the third party peer: *“I would probably talk to the person who was making the other person feel bad.”* Dante, LAM; *“Just be like, ‘What was the point of that? It’s stupid.’ ...I’d for sure let it be known that it wasn’t cool what they did, so they didn’t think it was okay.”* Stephanie, HAF. Physical violence was perceived as more severe, however, and

girls in particular felt that it warranted physical confrontation. Their examples reflected a male perpetrator that had enacted such violence against his female partner: *"I would tell her... 'You you need to go regulate.' And then if she didn't, then I would."* Julieta, HAF. A group of low acculturated females further communicated that extended family would involve themselves directly if they heard of the abuse: *"If the guy lays a hand, the cousins will get involved."* Romina, LAF, *"Yea, all sorts of family members... 'I heard you did this, so this is what we are going to do to you.'"* Olivia, LAF. A majority of this dialogue communicated a desire for the third party to stand up for someone they cared about, and in doing so, to punish the perpetrator. Other times, however, the intention of help-offering was to make a lasting and positive impact on the perpetrator's behaviors: *"Once she got the family involved they set him straight, and he realized what he was doing was wrong and he tried to change himself and he did."* Isabella, HAF.

Discussion

Social workers and other professionals have long been concerned about the availability and accessibility of adolescents' helping services. How can we deliver our best evidence based interventions if we are unable to access the population most in need? The results of the present study indicate quite clearly a need for helping services around teen dating violence, the barriers adolescents face in accessing helping services, and likely avenues of support from the perspectives of Mexican American youth. Primarily, adolescents were averse to accessing help because of the anticipated message that they should "just leave". The underlying significance is that, while adolescents may have some awareness that their relationship is unhealthy, overriding is the importance of the relationship itself. Romantic relationships in adolescence, while typically short-lived, are emotionally intense and highly prioritized (Collins et al., 2009). However, simplistic messages to leave may reflect that peers and parents do not know how to effectively intervene. Results further suggest that professionals, including school-based counselors and social workers, need to have a developmental understanding of the role of romantic relationships in adolescence in order to be effective helpers. That is not to say that they should encourage unhealthy romantic relationships, but rather uphold the value of experiencing romantic relationships in adolescence as important and, when healthy, as

developmentally appropriate.

Findings concerning help-seeking and -offering point to more similarities than differences across Mexican American adolescents of diverse levels of acculturation, although a few important distinctions emerged. First, although adolescents across groups preferred to seek help from trusted allies (i.e., friends and family members) over professional sources, involving third parties, including extended family members, was a more prominent theme among less acculturated youth. Second, bicultural and highly acculturated youth contributed more to themes having to do with leaving the relationship (i.e., not wanting to leave and their feared anticipation of being told to do so) although we interpret this with caution in light of our difficulty recruiting low acculturated youth and males in particular. There is some evidence that Mexican American youth hold particularly high commitment values to their relationships (Rueda & Williams, in press; Tyrell et al., 2014). The less acculturated youth in our sample voiced opposition to helping a peer without first being approached, and their reasons aligned with Mexican cultural norms that value privacy (*“it’s a personal thing”*) and traditional forms of masculinity (*“they should handle it”*).

In relation to gender, females were particularly fearful of punitive messages from their parents to leave the relationship. Both boys and girls communicated that girls were more likely to be hurt by physical violence stemming from partner retaliation, lending an understanding to why parental messages may have sought to protect female adolescents. Although severity of violence was often not considered in adolescents' simplistic messages to leave the relationship, many voiced that increased severity warranted outside help, or third party involvement—including the notion of “regulating” on a dating partner. In addition, and contrary to research (Capaldi, Kim, & Shortt, 2007), dialogue reiterated a unidirectional sense of male initiated violence. Also of interest for future research, severity of female violence amidst a same-sex relationship was described as less problematic since both girls could defend themselves equally.

Including questions about both barriers and motivations to seek and offer help in the context of teen dating violence elucidated perhaps overly basic messages from parents (*“You take care of it yourself because that way you learn”*), understood within minimized stories told on behalf of teens that were scared of what their parents might think, say, or do (*“I was scared of what they thought”*). Of importance, they also pointed to parents,

extended family, and friends as preferred sources of help—and to counselors, social workers, teachers, and police as outlets for severe forms of violence. Helping professionals can capitalize on built-in support networks by working with the whole family or peer group to reduce dating violence. Further, if dating violence is occurring in one adolescent-couple relationship, it is likely that it is occurring in other relationships within the peer group, as well (Foshee, Linder, MacDougall, & Bangdiwala, 2001). In one study, boys who were victims of violence were more likely to seek friends who were also victims (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004). Particularly for Latino boys, a link was established between early involvement with antisocial peers and later perpetration of dating violence (Schnurr & Lohman, 2008). Professionals should work to cultivate school climates that foster healthy relationship norms. Programs should also be designed to use language that is inclusive of teens as both help-seekers and help-givers, as well as in dyadic contexts where they are both a victim and a perpetrator (Capaldi et al., 2007). Specifically, using language that refers to victims only may isolate youth that have also perpetrated, and youth in violent relationships are also being asked by friends to offer advice concerning TDV. Finally, in recognition that females are more likely to be seriously injured from incidences of dating violence (Archer, 2000), it is important to work individually with adolescent girls that fear partner retaliation in order to create a safety plan and to complement friends' messages to leave the relationship.

Developmentally, adolescents are navigating identity development and have a heightened desire for autonomy (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). Therefore their preference for handling their personal relationships on their own is developmentally aligned. Within this context, it is understood why feeling embarrassed or ashamed for not being able to handle such a personal affair is experienced, particularly when coupled with cultural norms that value privacy (Sabina, Cuevas, & Schally, 2011). Helping professionals can support this developmental goal, while also intervening to stop unsafe or unhealthy dating behaviors, by offering adolescents a space to come up with their own solutions in collaboration with the professional. Youth's help-seeking barriers can also be taken into account. For example, fear of getting into trouble (females across levels of acculturation), having their stories shared with outside parties (females across levels of acculturation), or being told simply to leave (males and females across levels of

acculturation) are not issues that the student would need to worry about when working with a professional rather than a family member or a friend. These myths should be addressed up front with youth, emphasizing the confidential nature of services and keeping in mind that less acculturated youth may be particularly resistant to help-offering services that do not value their agency. Parents should be included in TDV prevention efforts; professionals can share that youth are more likely to turn to parents when they are able to validate their children's need for autonomy in decision-making, and to offer non-judgmental listener support. Cultural values, such as not being allowed to date, should also be included at the family level in order for youth to work through solutions with their parents rather than hide their dating lives (Rueda et al., 2014).

Study limitations

The strengths of the study include the rigorous methodological approach. A total of 20 focus groups were created based on previous knowledge of adolescents' acculturation. By grouping adolescents with like-peers (by gender and by acculturation), we were able to create a shared safe place through which they could dialogue about a highly personal and sensitive topic (Morgan, 1996; Umaña-Taylor & Bámaca, 2004). As such, less acculturated youth dialogued more in Spanish and using code-switching between Spanish and English. The focus groups allowed for the inclusion of peer perceptions and a broad question base for participants to generate their own ideas about TDV and help-seeking from their unique perspectives; however, this approach is limiting in that participants were not directed to respond to whether they were the victim or the perpetrator of dating violence or had witnessed dating violence, due to the group environment (they chose to volunteer this information or not). Many youth did, in fact, choose to share highly personal stories. Still, it is important to note that adolescents were not separated by whether they had personally experienced TDV, and the questions were worded in a manner that reflected what they would do versus what they actually did. These issues would be better explored in studies using individual interviews. Despite an established link between attitudes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) and motivations (Patrick & Maggs, 2010) for behaviors, adolescents' perceptions of their behaviors may still differ from their actual behaviors, particularly regarding responses to

dating violence. How one thinks they will feel and how they actually will feel is not as easily predicted as perhaps deciding to engage in a behavior. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain whether scenarios of hypothetical versus lived help-seeking and -offering were differentially trustworthy. Relatedly, some dialogue reflected a hesitancy to utilize the first person voice, even when communicating personal stories (e.g., “*There is this girl that—her boyfriend hits her’...but you don’t want to say it’s you.*”). This has important implications for educating potential help-offering sources (e.g., family, friends) and mirrors help-seeking barriers, such as a fear of parental discipline. We also did not ask youth directly about how the severity of violence impacted their help-seeking or -offering experiences and perceptions. Future research should examine this variable more systematically, as this and other literature have suggested important implications (Weisz et al., 2007). In addition, we had difficulty recruiting low acculturated youth, particularly males. Perhaps our requirement to participate in multiple study components deterred some youth from participation. Finally, the acculturation mean in this sample reflected greater Anglo-orientation, although this may be typical of bicultural youth from a border state (Matsunaga et al., 2010). Thus, findings should be considered exploratory and as limited in transferability to other youth populations.

Conclusion

This research yielded some interesting insights into help-seeking and help-offering by examining them together. Teens by and large felt that TDV was their own to handle—an attitude that both kept them from seeking help and from reaching out to friends experiencing violent relationships. Similarly, help-seeking was contextualized by feelings of love and attachment towards a partner and the popularized notion that individuals in a “strong” relationship do not get help; in conjunction with facets of the abuse itself, youth were impeded from reaching out. Paradoxically, teens’ advice to others was to leave unhealthy relationships; while their fear of this message kept them in silence about personal experiences with abuse, it may have reflected an internal struggle (e.g., “*But then you have that pressure*”) of whether they should take their own advice. TDV preventative interventions should move away from a limited focus on warning signs of abuse and instead encourage modeling and discussion that energize a desire for healthy

relationships while validating youth's struggles to leave unhealthy relationships. The latter would include help-seeking as a normative part of relationships, with emphasis on the quality and messages received from various help-offering sources as important. Indeed, when stressful romantic experiences are reconstructed as opportunities for personal and relationship growth, help-seeking is increased (Seiffge-Krenke, 2011). Finally, attending to developmental and cultural considerations is critical in order to optimize the quality of help-offering services provided to youth.

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