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# Teen Dating Violence: Adolescent Development and its Role in the Success of Prevention Programs

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**Regis University**  
College for Professional Studies Graduate Programs  
**Final Project/Thesis**

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Running head: TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

TEEN DATING VIOLENCE: ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT AND ITS ROLE IN THE  
SUCCESS OF PREVENTION PROGRAMS

by

Lisa Dougherty

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirement for the Degree  
Masters of Criminology

REGIS UNIVERSITY  
March 2013

TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

TEEN DATING VIOLENCE: ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT AND ITS ROLE IN THE  
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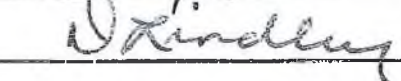
by

Lisa Dougherty

has been approved

March, 2013

APPROVED:

	<u>Faculty Facilitator</u>
	<u>Thesis Advisor</u>
	<u>Faculty Chair</u>

## ABSTRACT

Teen Dating Violence: Adolescent Development and its Role in the  
Success of Prevention Programs

This study was conducted to explore adolescent development and adolescent dating violence in order to determine if prevention programs need to be written to reflect the different stages of development. Research was gathered from four areas: adolescent development, adolescent romantic relationships, teen dating violence, and teen dating violence prevention programs. Using an inductive approach, a content analysis of the literature was used to answer the following questions: 1) After reviewing research on adolescent development and adolescent romantic relationships; are there stages in adolescent romantic relationships where conflict appears most often? 2) In the teen dating violence studies, what stage(s) of adolescent romantic relationships was the relationship in when the violence occurred? 3) Are the teen dating violence prevention programs effective across the age ranges for which they are written? An examination of the observations to search for any themes or patterns was performed and any patterns that appeared across the observations were documented. After analyzing the results of the studies, any observations made were summarized.

*Keywords:* adolescent development, adolescent romantic relationships, adolescent dating violence, teen dating violence, teen dating violence prevention programs

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Teen dating violence is a serious problem in the United States. According to the Center for Disease Control (2012), among adult victims who report rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by a partner, 22.4% of women and 15.0% of men first experienced some form of intimate partner violence between the ages of eleven and seventeen. Hamby, Finkelhor & Turner (2012) found that of those who reported teen dating violence on the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, 100% reported at least one other type of victimization. The Center for Disease Control (2012) reports other factors for perpetration of dating violence. They include: having a friend involved in dating violence, belief that dating violence is acceptable, exposure to inconsistent discipline, and lack of parental supervision. The goal is to stop teen dating violence before it starts and the goal of prevention programs is to change the attitudes and behaviors of the adolescents and give them the skills to develop healthy relationships.

Teen dating violence programs are traditionally written for both middle and high school aged youth. Little information is presented in the curriculum about how it could be adapted for levels of development (Kerig, Volz, Moeddel & Cuellar, 2010). Kerig, et al. (2010) found that it was important to adapt the curriculum to each group's age level and commented that prevention efforts would be more effective if they began at an earlier age. Comparison of the programs is limited by varying participant characteristics, type and length of treatment, and numerous variables (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007). There is a lack of outcome research evaluating the

effects of teen dating violence prevention programs on behavioral and attitude change (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007). Researchers express concern that the current literature is lacking and in need of improvement.

#### Statement of the Problem

Teen dating violence impacts not just the young couple but their families, friends, schools and communities. The effects on both the victim and the perpetrator can be long term. The CDC reported in 2006 that roughly 10% of high school boys and girls report physical violence in their dating relationships (Noonan & Charles, 2009). Today, nearly 1.5 million high school students nationwide experience physical abuse from a dating partner each year. Violent behavior in relationships begins as early as the age of 12. Prevention programs, however, are written for junior and high school students after the age at which the violence is already being reported. According to Cornelius & Resseguie (2007), adolescence is a time of exploration, transition, and social development, and prevention programs must be written within this context. Research was conducted to explore adolescent development and adolescent dating violence in order to determine if prevention programs need to be written to reflect the different stages of development, and also if the prevention programs should be offered at an earlier age.

#### Overview of the Problem

Teen dating violence has become a pervasive problem in our youth population. In the 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 9.4 percent of high school students reported being hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their partner in the twelve months prior to the survey (Center for Disease Control, 2012). Technologies or social media networking can be used to



intimidate, harass or threaten a current or ex-dating partner (Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, n.d.). Dating violence can have a negative effect on health and future relationships. They often do poorly in school and engage in unhealthy behaviors. Victims are more likely to have eating disorders, use drugs and alcohol (Center for Disease Control, 2012; Kerig, et al., 2010). Teens who are victims are more likely to be depressed, think about and even attempt suicide. According to the Center for Disease Control (2012), teens that are victims in high school are at a higher risk for victimization during college. The Center for Disease Control (2012) also reports that about one in five women and one in seven men who ever experienced rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner, first experienced some form of partner violence as an adolescent.

Adults are often unaware that teens experience dating violence. The nature of teen dating violence can be physical, sexual, or emotional. Forms of emotional violence include name calling, shaming, bullying or embarrassing on purpose. Perpetrators in violent teen dating relationships will keep the victim away from friends and even family members. Dating violence is a pattern of abusive behaviors used to exert power and control over a dating partner, meaning it usually involves a series of abusive behaviors over a course of time (Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, n.d.). In response to the concern over this growing problem, a number of adolescent dating violence prevention programs have been developed. Although many of these programs have received support, Kerig, et al. (2010) report that reviews of the dating violence prevention literature reveal a number of shortcomings. One of these is an absence of attention to

developmental levels in adolescence. As adolescents begin dating at a younger age, it is more important than ever to understand how to prevent this potentially life-altering experience.

#### Purpose of the Project

Over eighty percent of school counselors report being unprepared to address incidents of teen dating violence (Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, n.d.). Schools need to become better prepared and parents need to feel comfortable talking to their children about this epidemic. Before researchers can begin writing effective prevention strategies, they must first understand the dating experience from the youths' perspective in order to design efficient ways of reaching adolescents. "Focusing on youth who are beginning to initiate dating may be warranted to prevent the establishment of abusive beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral patterns of abusive interactions" (Noonan & Charles, 2009). Noonan & Charles (2009) also looked at healthy adolescent relationships as well as unhealthy, violent relationships.

Kerig, et al. (2010) suggest that dating violence prevention programs increase attention to the development stages of youth's abilities to relate to the program content, as well as the ways in which the process might be affected by youths' interest in and comfort with various kinds of group activities. "Developmentally appropriate accommodations to the materials are needed to ensure that dating violence prevention efforts are effective for both younger and more mature youth" (Kerig, et al., 2010, p. 162). The teens must have an interest in participating or the program will not be successful. If the material is not appropriate for their age group, they may not be willing or able to comprehend the purpose of the curriculum.

The purpose of this of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of teen dating violence prevention programs across the age ranges for which they were written. The bulk of research has been on risk factors for teen dating violence, predominately history of family violence (Hamby, et al., 2012). No research was found on the developmental stages of adolescence and its possible role in the violent teen relationship. Kerig, et al. (2010) commented that adolescent development was overlooked when developing prevention curriculum. It was also the intent of this study to add to the body of knowledge on this topic and encourage further research.

### Research Questions

This research proposal desires to answer exploratory questions; the questions will guide this study:

Research Question 1: After reviewing research on adolescent development and adolescent romantic relationships; are there stages in adolescent romantic relationships where conflict appears most often?

Research Question 2: In the teen dating violence studies, what stage(s) of adolescent romantic relationships was the relationship in when the violence occurred?

Research Question 3: Are the teen dating violence prevention programs effective across the age ranges for which they are written?

### Definitions

As is common in social research, variations in definitions account for variations in findings across studies. “Differences in how studies define romantic relationships”, for example, “may at least partially account for different findings across studies” (Meier & Allen, 2009, p. 314). Researchers tend to agree that the lack of consistent definitions is a problem. It is necessary for researchers to define for the subjects in their studies, in this case the adolescents or teenagers, what is meant by a “romantic relationship”, for example, in a way that young people can recognize and respond to (Connolly & McIsaac, 2011).

#### *Adolescence:*

Dahl (2004) defined adolescence as “that awkward period between sexual maturation and the attainment of adult roles and responsibilities”(p. 9). Adolescence begins with the physical/biological changes related to puberty, but ends with the onset of the social roles associated with adulthood. For the purposes of this study, early adolescence is defined as ages ten through twelve; middle adolescence as thirteen through fifteen; and late adolescence as sixteen through eighteen.

#### *Adolescent Romantic Relationships:*

Connolly & McIsaac (2011) define the adolescent romantic relationship as having three components: passion, intimacy, and commitment. These components may be present in varying degrees in different relationships. Meier & Allen (2009) define adolescent romantic relationships by two requirements: if the participant has had one or more special relationships and/or, has engaged in three affectionate behaviors: held hands, hugged, or kissed.

*Teen Dating Violence:*

The Center for Disease Control (2012) defines Teen dating violence as the physical, sexual or psychological/emotional violence within a dating relationship, as well as stalking. Dating violence is defined by Wolfe & Feiring (2000, p. 360) as “any attempt to control or dominate another person physically, sexually, or psychologically, resulting in harm” (Volz & Kerig, 2010).

*Teen Dating Violence Prevention Programs:*

Cornelius & Resseguie (2007) defined prevention programs as either primary or secondary prevention programs, or a combination of both. Primary prevention programs target the entire population within a school or target an at-risk population. Secondary prevention programs are designed for relationships where violence is already occurring, and are successful when either the victims leave the dating relationship or the perpetrator ceases initiating the violence (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007). For this study, the programs analyzed will be categorized as primary and secondary using the the same standards.

*Limitations/Delimitations*

Content analysis is not linear in fashion and is more complex and difficult than quantitative analysis because it is less standardized and formulaic (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Content analysis is limited when the documentation is limited. Documentation is sometimes not retrievable, or access to documents may be deliberately blocked. Content analysis may also be limited by the literature having insufficient detail. Documents are produced for some purpose other than research and may not provide sufficient detail to answer research questions (Bowen,

2009). This study is exploratory in nature and may not be generalizable. There is the potential for researcher bias due to the fact that the researcher is choosing the material to be reviewed.

Bowen (2009) refers to this as biased selectivity: an incomplete collection of documents.

Henwood & Pidgeon (1992) recommend a number of practices which can be used to guide the progress of qualitative research and improve the rigor of the study: 1) writing comprehensive definitions, 2) documentation of all phases of the research process, 3) negative case analysis (exploring cases which do not fit), and 4) transferability (rather than generalizability).

Bowen (2009) writes that there are several advantages to performing qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is less time-consuming therefore potentially more efficient than other methods of conducting research. Qualitative content analysis of documents is cost-effective and is often the method of choice when the collection of new data is not feasible (Bowen, 2009).

Examination of documents also offers stability, exactness, and can cover a long span of time.

Henwood & Pidgeon (1992) write that relying on correspondence with the empirical world as the ultimate arbiter of truth is both impractical and untenable. Research does, however, have the potential to be persuasive and inspirational.

### Chapter Summary

Adolescence is a time of dramatic biological, behavioral, and social changes. There are social forces on the outside and biological forces on the inside and the adolescent is struggling to find a balance. Adolescence is a time of increasing academic pressures, competition with peers, and difficulties learning to balance desires for immediate gratification (Forbes & Dahl, 2010).

The adolescent romantic relationship is when the skills are learned to maintain an adult romantic relationship (Meier & Allen, 2009). The Center for Disease Control (2012) has reported that violence in dating relationships can begin as young as age twelve, maybe even younger. Youth that were abused as children or were in homes where their parents were abusive towards each other are at a higher risk of entering into an abusive romantic relationship as a teenager (Hamby, et al., 2012). This study will explore the results of previous research in the topics of teen dating violence prevention programs, risk factors for teen dating violence, adolescent romantic relationships, and adolescent development in order to determine if it would be purposeful to blend the basis of these studies for future research.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Theoretical Framework

The most widely accepted criminological theory for teen dating violence is social learning theory. Social learning theory suggests that behaviors are learned through observation and imitation of others. In social learning theory, reinforcement is considered a facilitative rather than a necessary condition because there are factors that can influence what people will do other than consequences (Bandura, 1978). In terms of explaining violent behavior, social learning theory proposes that coercive and aversive interpersonal behaviors are learned through violent interactions in one's family of origin. Witnessing or experiencing violence in the home may teach the child that violence is potentially reinforcing (Shorey, Cornelius, & Bell, 2008).

Shorey, et al. (2008) writes that there is some evidence for increased risk of perpetration when family violence is reported, but the evidence is limited and suggests that there is a more complex set of factors that lead to dating violence. Social learning theory may explain the perpetrators behavior but is less effective in explaining the victim's behavior.

One theory for adolescent dating relationships that may explain the victim's behavior is attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980) which suggests that children form mental representations or relationships based on their experiences with primary caregivers during childhood (Shorey, et al. 2008). This theory speculates that adolescents tend to select dating partners based on these representations. Unhealthy relationships stem from inconsistent, aversive or unresponsive



childrearing where the adolescent is insecure and describes their dating relationships as jealous and emotionally labile. According to Shorey, et al. (2008), based on this theory, individuals with insecure attachment styles resulting from childhood mistreatment would be particularly at risk for dating violence, since their attachment models were formed along victim-victimizer dimensions. Adolescents may gravitate toward dating relationships that match their concept of a relationship. Shorey, et al. (2008) comment that there has been a relative neglect of theoretical framework to explain dating violence and it is a notable limitation.

#### Literature

This literature review was accomplished via Regis on-line Internet library resources. Multiple databases, including Academic Search Premier, Academic OneFile, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Gale Virtual Reference Library, among others, were searched. To search for relevant literature, databases mentioned above were queried by entering subject terms and key words such as *adolescent development*, *adolescent romantic relationships*, *adolescent dating violence*, *teen dating violence*, *teen dating violence prevention programs*. As a result, a thorough review was conducted including examination of empirical literature on teen dating violence and prevention programs, adolescent romantic relationships and adolescent development.

Recent research suggests that, with the age of initiation into sexual activity decreasing and rates of sexual assault against adolescents rising, adolescents are becoming increasingly vulnerable to the experience of teen dating violence (Kerig, et al., 2010). A review by Cornelius & Resseguie (2007) supports the findings that a large percentage of adolescents report either

perpetration or victimization of dating aggression in current or past dating relationships. When verbal aggression was included in the studies reviewed, rates were as high as seventy to eighty percent (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007). "Schools may serve as the training grounds for domestic violence and sexual assault through the public performance of sexual harassment and gendered violence" (Stein, 2005, p. 45). Stein (2005) recommends high quality, age-appropriate curricula about sexual violence to be added into the school curriculum over the course of the whole year, for all grades.

#### Adolescent Development

With the age of victimization decreasing, it may be helpful to explore the physical and mental development of the adolescent. Dahl (2004) wrote what he called the "health paradox of adolescence". He found that adolescence is a period of development for growing stronger and gaining resilience to disease. Yet, despite this development the overall morbidity and mortality rates increase 200%. The source of death and disability in adolescence is related to poor control of behavior and emotion. This is what Dahl (2004) believed was the paradox. Adolescents have developed better reasoning capabilities and decision-making skills, but are prone to erratic and emotionally influenced behavior. Dahl (2004) asked if there are periods of "neural plasticity" during puberty and adolescence. Dahl (2004) described these as periods of time when a particular set of individual experiences can have longstanding effects on the "trajectory of development" (p.5). Dahl also questioned how this same type of plasticity might create unique opportunities to intervene during this time of development.

Forbes & Dahl (2010) found in their most recent review of pubertal influences on behavior during adolescence that many dramatic changes occur in behavior related to social re-orientation. Adolescence is a formative time for identity, status, and functioning, and it is also a time in which many long-term behavior patterns first emerge (Forbes & Dahl, 2010). Adolescence is a time when peer relationships become more intimate, and an increasing amount of leisure time is spent interacting with the peer group. During middle adolescence, young people form mixed-gender peer groups and dyadic relationships with romantic partners become increasingly important (Zimmer-Gembeck, Siebenbruner & Collins, 2001). The development of romantic relationships is a normative developmental task of adolescence, yet researchers have suggested that adolescents begin dating and forming relationships at a variety of ages (Zimmer-Gembeck, et al., 2001). Romantic relationships serve as an important context for playing out a variety of behaviors perceived as “adult”. Findings from research could inform parents, educators, and clinicians in how to guide adolescents safely through new romantic territories (Halpern, Kaestle & Hallfors, 2007).

#### Adolescent Romantic Relationships

Theories of romantic relationship development posit that there is a progression of involvement and intensity with age, relationship duration, and experience in romantic relationships (Meier & Allen, 2009; Connolly & McIsaac, 2011). Meier & Allen (2009) caution that adolescent romantic relationships are an integral part of the “social scaffolding” on which young-adult romantic relationships are built and they should not be trivialized. Connolly & McIsaac (2011) write that these initial romantic experiences are important first steps in the

journey toward establishing a loving romantic partnership in adulthood. Connolly & McIsaac (2011) proposed a developmental-contextual theory of adolescent romantic stages: 1) Entry into romantic attractions and affiliations in early adolescence; 2) Exploring romantic relationships in middle adolescence; and 3) consolidating dyadic romantic bonds in late adolescence. They found adolescents as young as eleven years of age entering into stage one. Connolly & McIsaac (2011) also comment that conflict occurs when partners have different perspectives and expectations in the relationship. Physical aggression can occur when conflict is handled with threats and coercion.

The adolescent romantic relationship becomes ever more important, as they fill a longer span of time as couples wait longer to get married in the U.S., possibly ten to twelve years or about half of a young adult's life span (Meier & Allen, 2009). Zimmer-Gembeck, et al. (2001) warned that the likelihood of negative consequences for adolescent development and functioning would be greatest if adolescents began to date very early or were overinvolved in dating. Nieder & Seiffge-Krenke (2001) found that the degree to which coping with stress in romantic relationships is related to relationship development. At the age of twelve, the adolescent will turn to peers and parents to cope with relationship stress, but as the adolescent progresses through the relationship the couple turns to each other to process the stress (Nieder & Seiffge-Krenke, 2001). Meier & Allen (2009) recommend that policy and program efforts that promote healthy marriages may be well served by considering what is learned in adolescent romantic relationships.

### Risk Factors for Teen Dating Violence

Childhood risk factors for teen dating violence victimization were examined by Maas, Fleming, Herrenkohl & Catalano (2010). They addressed the question of whether childhood stressors in the form of poverty, child maltreatment, and exposure to violence between parents predicted later teen dating violence victimization. Earlier research had established risk factors for teen dating violence, and in addition to understanding how teen dating violence victimization emerges from these risk factors, it is important to establish how later violence victimization can be avoided (Maas, et al., 2010). Strong social skills can increase a child's ability to form and maintain lasting relationships with peers. Little is known about the association between social skills and teen dating violence victimization. Maas, et al. (2010) found that the relationship between exposure to family violence and teen dating violence became insignificant when the protective variable of bonding to parents and pro social skills were entered into the equation. This could be significant when considering intervention and prevention programs.

Hamby, et al. (2012) examined the co-occurrence of teen dating violence and other forms of victimizations. It was hypothesized that physical teen dating violence would be associated with many other forms of victimization, including family violence, sexual victimization, and peer aggression. They found that 100% of the teen dating violence victims had experienced at least one other type of victimization. The association of teen dating violence with five major categories of youth victimization was explored. The five major categories of victimization were: conventional crime, maltreatment, peer and sibling violence, sexual victimization, and witnessing victimization.

One risk factor for involvement in violent relationships is exposure to violence in the family. Youth growing up in abusive homes learn from their families that violence and intimidation are tools for maintaining relationships and solving conflict (Volz & Kerig, 2010). These beliefs increase the likelihood that they will become involved in a violent romantic relationship, either as the victim or as the perpetrator. Two concepts: rejection sensitivity or the disposition to overreact to rejection, and relational insecurity, which refers to the desperation to maintain an intimate relationship at all costs, were proposed to predict dating violence for both males and females (Volz & Kerig, 2010). Volz and Kerig (2010) suggest that their results indicate that adolescent dating violence prevention programs might need to address victimization and perpetration in different ways.

Giordano, Soto, Manning & Longmore (2010) wrote that research on teen dating violence had focused on family and peer influences, but little research had been conducted on the relationship contexts within which violence occurs. Their study explored features of adolescent romantic relationships associated with physical violence. The objective of the analysis was to document variations in the qualities and dynamics of adolescent relationships, and the degree to which these dynamics are linked to teen dating violence. They measured relationship qualities such as: problematic features, rewards of the relationship, patterns of interaction and influence, traditional violence predictors, and socio-demographic variables. The dependent variable was the relationship violence. The findings supported their hypothesis that respondents who self-report violence perpetration are significantly more likely than the non-violent respondents to report greater verbal conflict, jealousy, cheating, and a lack of identity support. Giordano, et al.

(2010) also found that these relationships also demonstrated some positive dynamics. There were no statistically significant differences between violent and non-violent relationships in levels of love, and perceived partner caring.

### Prevention Programs

Prevention can be divided into two broad subtypes: primary and secondary prevention (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007). The goal of a primary prevention program is to circumvent violence in a dating relationship before it occurs. This works through either targeting the entire population within a school or utilizing risk markers to present the program to those most likely to become involved in a violent intimate relationship. Cornelius & Resseguie (2007) state that most practitioners target high school aged adolescents because the practitioners believe that this is the critical window of opportunity to “mold appropriate attitudes and behaviors, since teenagers are likely just beginning dating relationships” (p. 366). Secondary prevention programs are designed to address violence that is already occurring in a relationship. This approach is successful when the victim leaves the violent relationship or the perpetrator ceases initiating violence (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007). Cornelius & Resseguie (2007) found in their review that there was much variation regarding the targets of the prevention programs and often the researchers designed the programs to address both primary and secondary dating violence.

A number of teen dating violence prevention programs have been developed as a result of communities recognizing that intimate partner violence is a significant risk to the mental and physical health of adolescents. Kerig, et al. (2010) discuss how the effectiveness of dating violence prevention programs can be enhanced by increasing their attention to issues of diversity

among participants, including developmental level. One of the prevention programs that Kerig, et al. (2010) reviewed was *Expect Respect*, a school-based program aimed at preventing dating and sexual violence and increasing healthy adolescent relationships. A main component to the program is a support group that is specifically targeted to youth deemed to be at risk for dating violence due to having experienced child maltreatment, sexual assault, domestic violence, or abuse in their dating relationships (Kerig, et al., 2010). The goal of the group is to heal from past abuse; to increase expectations for equality and respect in current and future relationships; to promote safe and respectful relationships in the school; and to encourage youths to become active in ending violence in their schools, homes, and communities (Volz & Kerig, 2010). Kerig, et al. (2010) faced challenges when implementing this program and they proposed practical strategies to increase flexibility, creativity, and adaptability of dating violence prevention efforts, which could increase the effectiveness of the programs.

The *Safe Dates Project*, developed by Foshee, et al. (1996), was designed as a primary and secondary prevention program to provide prevention of perpetration and victimization of dating violence in eighth and ninth graders (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007). The primary prevention portion of the program focused on changing dating violence norms, gender stereotyping, and conflict-management skills. The program's main focus is for those already involved in a violent relationship and the purpose is to alter the cognitive factors associated with help-seeking behavior (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007). After participation in the program, self-reported victims of dating violence were not more likely to terminate the relationship in the treatment group than the control groups, although help seeking did increase and awareness of



services did increase. The results suggested that there was some evidence that the Safe Dates Project may provide some attitudinal and self-reported behavioral changes in dating violence perpetration immediately following participation in the program (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007). The study also reported the long-term durability of self-reported reductions in perpetration and victimization associated with the Safe Dates Project.

### Chapter Summary

Intimate partner violence has been an area of interest for researchers for many years, but in the last few decades there has been an increasing interest in intimate partner violence that occurs among adolescent dating partners. Victims and perpetrators of physical violence often report lower self-esteem, reduced self-worth, and increased self-blame (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007). Teen victims of dating violence may often lack the communication and problem solving skills needed for the violent romantic relationship (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007; Noonan & Charles, 2009). Giordano, et al. (2010) found that, unlike what was previously thought, many of these violent relationships also had positive elements as well. Young people involved in relationships that contain a number of positive elements may not relate to programming that focuses heavily on the negative dynamics that are warning signs of an abusive relationship (Giordano, et al., 2010). “Given that dating violence begins to emerge in the middle school years, prevention efforts will be most effective when they begin at an early age” (Kerig, et al., 2010, p. 672).

There have been historical changes in the timing of some aspects of adolescent development. There is a great deal of historical evidence for changes in the average age of

pubertal onset over the past century (Dahl, 2004). When we talk about adolescence as an interval of development that begins with pubertal maturation, it may be misleading to use the common convention of interchanging the word teenager and adolescent (Dahl, 2004). In future research, it might be necessary to begin to distinguish between the two terms to avoid confusion. Noonan & Charles (2009) found from the focus groups in their study that most of the participants did not support dating violence. Prevention efforts should include programs to build and support attitudes that reject violence. Youth are lacking the skills necessary for addressing conflict in dating relationships. This showed in their attitude toward justification of verbal and emotional abuse in these situations (Noonan & Charles, 2009). These findings suggest that prevention programs need to address low-level abuse in hopes of preventing more serious conflicts in the future. Researchers have stated that there is a need for current studies on prevention programs. This literature review and subsequent study may add to the body of knowledge and to the new way of thinking towards preventing teen dating violence.

### Chapter 3

## RESEARCH PROCEDURES

### Research Methodology

A qualitative content analysis was conducted using the literature. A qualitative analysis is the non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations for the purpose of discovering meanings and patterns of relationships (Babbie, 2010). Content analysis is a research method for making replicable valid inferences from data to their context, with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representations of facts and a practical guide to action (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Conventional content analysis is appropriate when existing theory or research literature is limited, and researchers avoid using preconceived categories instead allowing the categories to flow from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). A conventional content analysis will be used to examine the literature in order to answer the research questions. An application for exempt status was submitted to the Institutional Review Board. The exempt status was approved IRB #: 13-115.

### Specific Procedures

The literature selection was gathered from several online databases. There are two approaches to content analysis; inductive and deductive, and if there is not enough former knowledge about the subject or if the knowledge is fragmented, the inductive approach is recommended (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). In the inductive approach, the categories are derived from the data and will move from specific observations that are combined into general statements.

The process follows three phases: preparation, organizing and reporting (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). The literature on the prevention programs was examined after a protocol was determined for assessing the programs. Four of the most common prevention programs were charted following this protocol. Then the literature on adolescent development, adolescent relationships, and teen dating violence were examined in detail. An examination of the observations to search for any themes or patterns was performed. The next step was to organize the qualitative data into categories. Patterns that appeared across the observations were documented. After the results of the studies were analyzed, observations made were summarized.

### Sample

Sampling was purposive and the selections were based on the research questions to be answered. Purposive sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling in which selections are made on the basis of the researcher's judgment about which ones will be the most useful (Babbie, 2010). Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study because the purpose of the study was to explore previous research. Research articles were gathered from four areas: adolescent development, adolescent romantic relationships, teen dating violence, and teen dating violence prevention programs. The literature selection was accomplished via Regis on-line Internet library resources. Multiple databases, including Academic Search Premier, Academic OneFile, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Gale Virtual Reference Library, among others, were searched. To search for relevant literature, databases mentioned above were queried by entering subject terms and key words such as *adolescent development*, *adolescent romantic relationships*, *adolescent dating violence*, *teen dating violence*, *teen dating violence prevention programs*. A thorough

review of scholarly articles was conducted on teen dating violence and prevention programs, adolescent romantic relationships and adolescent development to assemble a sample for this study.

### Data Collection

In this content analysis study, data selection was required rather than data collection. Literature and subsequent data were selected from multiple databases and determined to be useful by the researcher. One type of qualitative content analysis is relational analysis. Relational analysis is concerned with the relationship between concepts. This type of analysis is directly related to the researcher's question.

There were studies reviewed that used qualitative methods for collecting data. Noonan & Charles (2009) used a market research facility to recruit focus groups. Focus groups are a qualitative data collection method used to gain insight into study participants' awareness, beliefs, motivations, and experiences related to a particular topic (Noonan & Charles, 2009). Noonan & Charles (2009) used 12 groups that lasted 90 minutes. Using a structured guide, an experienced moderator asked questions surrounding the topic. Group conversations were audiotaped and transcribed. Detailed notes were taken during each group. Data analysis was facilitated by using "top line" summaries to capture main themes. Codes were developed after reviewing the data for themes discussed both within and across the groups.

There is research in teen dating violence where qualitative and quantitative approaches compliment one another. Giordano, et al. (2010) used both interviews and surveys in their

research. Maas, et al. (2010) also used both surveys and interviews in their research. The Maas, et al. (2010) study was a longitudinal study that used data from the Raising Healthy Children (RHC) project. The RHC was a study of the etiology of problem behaviors. Survey data were collected for all students enrolled in the project, and student interviews were conducted primarily in person. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies have strengths and weaknesses and using both allow for more reliable research.

### Data Analysis

Through a process of analytic induction, themes and relationships are recorded in order to answer the research questions. The process involves a careful, focused review of the data. Literature analysis involves superficial examination, then thorough examination, and finally interpretation (Bowen, 2009). One risk in qualitative data analysis is to misclassify an observation so as to support a hypothesis. One technique for avoiding this error is to report whatever inconsistencies are discovered, any case that simply doesn't fit the hypothesis (Babbie, 2010).

### Chapter Summary

Qualitative content analysis, as defined by Babbie (2010), is a non-numerical examination for the purpose of discovering meanings and patterns of relationships. An inductive content analysis allowed for the process to flow as the examination of the research progressed. An inductive content analysis is appropriate when the research is limited and fragmented (Elo & Kyngas, 2008), which was the case with this study. Much of the research in adolescent dating violence is exploratory in nature. Most of the research in the field of dating violence has relied

on the same methodology, questionnaires with closed questions. Prevention curriculum writers need information gathered through empirical studies, but the perceptions of adolescents themselves with respect to explanatory models of dating violence will prove useful if they want valid and developmentally appropriate interventions (Noonan & Charles, 2009).

## Chapter 4

### RESULTS

One of the difficulties expressed by other researchers is the lack of a clear definition of adolescence. Adolescence has been defined in different ways by different groups of researchers and causes challenges when trying reach a consensus of opinion. As stated earlier, Dahl (2004) defines adolescence as a period of time between sexual maturation and the attainment of adult roles and responsibilities. This concept has adolescence begin with physical/biological changes that are related to puberty and ends with social roles. Other researchers define adolescence by age and there is no agreement as to when this period begins and ends. For the purposes of this study, an attempt was made to categorize the findings by early, middle and late adolescence as defined previously. Due to the lack of a consistent definition of adolescence among researchers precise categorization was not always possible, and any variations are noted.

#### Research Questions

*Research Question 1:* After reviewing research on adolescent development and adolescent romantic relationships; are there stages in adolescent romantic relationships where conflict appears most often?

Historically the onset of puberty is occurring earlier which results in earlier physical development and earlier activation of some neurobehavioral changes such as drives and emotional changes (Dahl, 2004). Even if physical development and sexual maturation occur early, it is not reasonable to expect cognitive development to occur early as well. Cognitive development has been shown to follow age and experience even when puberty is delayed (Dahl,



2004). Cognitive development includes planning, logic, reasoning, inhibitory control, problem solving, and understanding consequences. Cognitive development continues to develop long after puberty has occurred. Some behavioral changes have been associated with puberty. These affective measures include romantic motivation, sexual interest, emotional intensity, changes in sleep and arousal regulation, increase in risk taking, rewards seeking (Dahl, 2004). Physically mature adolescents who are capable of intense motivations and passions, do not yet have the skills to manage these strong feelings.

The implications of the pubescent youth with a sexually mature body and brain that is activated for sexual and romantic interests, but an immature set of self-control and affect regulation skills are complex. Risks for behavioral and emotional problems can be predicted by this struggle between these two systems where the cognitive abilities of logic and reason lag behind the physical maturity caused by puberty. The youth may be able to handle difficult decision making when emotions are calm, but have a much more difficult time in making a responsible decision when emotions are more intense (Dahl, 2004). Adolescents in romantic relationships report experiencing more conflict than other adolescents report and mood swings are more extreme for those involved in romantic relationships (Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009).

Romantic relationships are an integral part of the adolescent years. Romantic relationships are a new social experience bringing with it the challenge of learning how to express feelings of love, passion, and sexuality. These early relationships, despite being relatively short lived, are when adolescents learn how to establish a loving romantic relationship in adulthood (Connolly & McIsaac, 2011; Meier & Allen, 2009). The contributions of social

expectations, especially age-graded behavior norms, have an influence on the initiation of dating in Western countries (Collins, et al., 2009). Culture may also affect the expectations within the dating relationships.

Accounting for the progression of romantic relationships has been a goal of researchers. A phase-based model allows for the identification of four phases: initiation, affiliation, intimate, and committed (Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999)(Meier & Allen, 2009). This is similar to the phases described by Nieder & Seiffge-Krenke (2001): initiation, status, affection, and bonding. Connolly & McIsaac (2011) proposed a three-stage model of romance: 1) Entry into romantic attractions and affiliations in early adolescence, 2) Exploring romantic relationships in middle adolescence, and 3) Consolidating dyadic romantic bonds in late adolescence. Meier & Allen (2009) also used a similar three-stage model. These theories represent a normative adolescent relationship where the adolescent progresses through each phase/stage in order. There will be adolescents that deviate from this idealized progression model because of individual, social, and cultural conditions.

The first stage of romantic development occurs in early adolescence, which, according to Connolly & McIsaac (2011) and Neider & Seiffge-Krenke (2001) is triggered by the onset of puberty. The researchers in the studies reviewed agree that the adolescent relationship experience begins in early adolescence with a short-lived relationship. Duration of relationships in this stage is a few weeks but no more than a few months. Meier & Allen (2009) include group dating in the early adolescent category, whereas Connolly & McIsaac (2011) include group dating in the second stage. Forbes & Dahl (2009) saw increased risk-taking in early adolescence

when both sensation seeking and impulsivity are high. It is reasonable to question if the sensation seeking and impulsivity contribute to conflict in adolescent romantic relationships of very young dating couples.

Nieder & Seiffge-Krenke (2001) conducted a longitudinal study of fourteen year olds and followed them until age seventeen. Nieder & Seiffge-Krenke (2001) used a four-phase model of adolescent romantic development: initiation, status, affection, and bonding. They found age differences in coping strategies when dealing with romantic stress. In the first phase of romantic involvement, the adolescents focus on themselves to broaden their self-concept and to gain confidence in their capacity to relate to potential partners. Nieder & Seiffge-Krenke (2001) found that the fourteen year olds experienced high levels of romantic stress. The high levels of stress were related to identity concerns, peers, and the romantic relationship itself. The adolescents frequently looked to peers to cope with the stress. In early adolescence, having a boyfriend or girlfriend improves social status and popularity. In the study by Connolly & McIsaac (2011), fifty percent reported the experience of breaking up in the first stage. The most common trigger of the first episode of a major depressive disorder is break-up in a romantic relationship. Break-ups, rather than involvement in romantic relationships, may explain the reports of higher than normal depressive symptoms (Collins, et al., 2009). Adding to the list of reasons to understand the dynamics of the early romantic relationship; it is possible that depressive symptoms are carried into future relationships and take with it an increased risk for violence in the adolescent romantic relationship.

The second stage of romantic development occurs during middle adolescence, approximately 14-16 years of age. Middle adolescence is a time of exploring romantic relationships where the casual dating takes place in a peer context. Connolly & Allen (2011) found that romantic relationships are heavily linked to social status in peer groups, and lower-status youths are less likely to be involved in dating. Romantic relationship activity in early and middle adolescence is associated with general social competence with peers (Collins, et al., 2009). Romantic relationships in this stage continue to be relatively short-lived and last only a few months or up to around six months. Meier & Allen (2009) report that as adolescents move into this stage they progress to multiple short relationships that are decreasingly group-focused and increasingly characterized by both sexual and, to a lesser extent, emotional intimacy.

Nieder & Seiffge-Krenke (2001) found an overall reduction of stress, and an increase in coping activity at age fifteen and sixteen. The adolescents in the second phase perceived peer-related stressors and stressors relating to the romantic relationship as equally stressful. Coping strategies for romantic stressors come from friends and family. Problems arise when the adolescent becomes overinvolved in the romantic relationship. Over involvement in dating, especially at an early age, is associated with behavioral problems and lower psychosocial functioning. Over involvement in early adolescence may exacerbate problems and/or escalating problems during middle adolescence may lead to over involvement (Zimmer-Gembeck, et al., 2001). Over involvement may be a way to compensate for failures in other areas such as academics.

Adolescent romantic relationships in the late adolescence stage are characterized by the formation of dyadic romantic bonds. These relationships resemble the relationships of couples in adulthood (Connolly & Allen, 2011). Meier & Allen (2009) found that adolescents entering this stage progress to a single, committed, intimate relationship of longer duration. Relationships last one year or more and are described by the adolescent as serious and exclusive. As the romantic relationship becomes increasingly involved, and as the adolescent struggles with identity, the relationship can interfere with the adolescents' need to maintain a separate sense of self. Differences in perspective and expectations of each other or the relationship can lead to conflict. Frequency of conflict between romantic partners increases with age, following the same pattern as intimacy (Shulman, Tuval-Mashiach, Levran, & Anbar, 2006) (Connolly & McIsaac, 2011). Adolescents in this stage experience high levels of intimacy and affection. Negotiating closeness and separateness may become a critical and challenging task for the romantic partners. The adolescents report increases in conflicts in this stage when the romantic partners are attempting to clarify basic relationship issues (Nieder & Seiffge-Krenke, 2001). When conflict is handled by using coercion and threats, it can become destabilizing and can escalate into physical aggression.

*Research Question 2:* In the teen dating violence studies, in what stage(s) of adolescent romantic relationships was the relationship when the violence occurred?

The literature reviewed in this study did not directly address the incidence of dating violence with the stages of adolescent romantic relationships. Several alluded to or acknowledged that there were stages of adolescent development and/or stages of adolescent

romantic relationships, but did not separate the samples into different age groups in their studies. Giordano, et al. (2010) used a convenience sample of 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> graders, but stated the socio-demographic variable of age was a continuous variable. Hamby, et al. (2012) also used a convenience sample of 12-17 year old from the National Survey of Children's Exposure Study, and again did not differentiate their results according to the development stages. To accurately measure the developmental stages, the samples need to be divided into groups.

Most of the literature on teen dating violence addresses risk factors, but most focus on history of exposure to violence or environmental factors such as socioeconomic status. Very few researchers address the context of the relationship or development stage of the youth when the violence occurred. Meier & Allen (2009) found that while low-income adolescents are more likely to have no relationships, if they are involved, they are more likely to progress to steady relationships skipping earlier developmental stages. Black adolescents, when compared with whites, are more likely to have no relationships, but if they are romantically involved, instead of initiating or remaining in short-term relationships they are more likely to progress to steady relationships. Youth from lower socio-economic status tend to date and form romantic involvement somewhat earlier than the general population (Zimmer-Gembeck, et al., 2001). Perhaps their relatively quicker progression to steady relationships can partially explain their earlier age of first sexual encounter. Research in the risk factors of teen dating violence note that adolescents in a lower socioeconomic status tend to have a higher risk of being in a violent relationship. Youth who have this risk factor may not have the support system needed to progress through the developmental stages of romantic relationships.

There is literature on teen dating violence that provides possible explanations for conflict and aggression, but either do not acknowledge stages in adolescent romantic relationships or do not measure for them in their studies. Inexperience in communicating and relating to a romantic partner may lead to the use of poor coping strategies, including verbal and physical aggression (Mulford & Giordano, 2008). Adolescents who have not fully developed their capacity for intimacy or ability to communicate may be more susceptible to using physical aggression. Pepler (2012) writes that youth that engage in teen dating violence do not have the essentials for a healthy relationship. These include: self regulation, constructive and non-violent conflict resolution strategies, an understanding of consequences, and sensitivity that playful aggression is harmful, and an understanding of what constitutes a healthy relationship. Youth that engage in intimate partner violence failed to develop an understanding of the elements of a healthy relationship: belief in nonviolent conflict resolution, effective communication skills, ability to negotiate and adjust to stress, belief in partner's right to autonomy, shared decision-making, and trust (Pepler, 2012). The skills and knowledge needed for a healthy relationship are learned from family and peers. Youth that do not progress through the developmental stages may not have the opportunity to learn the skills necessary for a healthy relationship avoiding violence in the adolescent romantic relationship.

*Research Question 3:* Are the teen dating violence prevention programs effective across the age ranges for which they are written?

Four teen dating violence prevention programs were examined in the literature: Safe Dates, Expect Respect, Fourth R, and Youth Relations Project. A protocol for assessment was

established and included: primary prevention, secondary prevention or both; if it was primary prevention – universal or for at-risk youth; school-based, community based or both; and target age group (early, middle or late adolescence). The theoretical basis for the program, the focus or specific goals of the program, and the types of activities were also recorded. A second protocol was established for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the prevention programs: sample, including age and gender; follow-up period; measures used such as attitudinal, behavioral, knowledge, and skills; and intervention results.

The prevention programs were categorized as primary if the target population is the entire school or pre-determined at-risk youth, or secondary if the program is targeted for the youth who are already in a violent intimate relationship. Two of the programs reviewed were categorized as primary and two were both primary and secondary. Of the four prevention programs, three were universal and introduced to the whole school or a specific age group within the school. The fourth, the Youth Relationship Project, was a primary program targeted for at-risk youth. The Youth Relationship Project was also the only program that was strictly community based. The Fourth R program was school-based and both Safe Dates and Expect Respect had both school-based and community components. The literature discussed very little on the theoretical orientation of the prevention programs. The Youth Relationship Project is based on social learning theory and there was mention of Safe Dates having an emphasis on ecological systems theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of multiple systems in the etiology of teen dating violence, including the family, peers, and the community (DeGrace & Clarke, 2012). All four



prevention programs were introduced to children in middle adolescence, which was defined as 13-15 year olds. In the literature reviewed, the samples were in 8<sup>th</sup> and/or 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Safe Dates aims to prevent teen dating violence by focusing on improving peer relationships, teaching conflict-management skills, changing gender stereotyping, and raising awareness of support services available to increase help-seeking behavior for students in violent relationships. The curriculum includes ten 45-minute sessions with a 3-hour training curriculum for the facilitator. Safe Dates incorporates various teaching methods including a formal theater production, didactic lessons, interactive worksheets, writing person stories, role-play, and a poster contest. The variety of methods promotes change in many ways and in several aspects such as peer relationships, interactions with dating partners, and making connections to community support (DeGrace & Clarke, 2012). The Expect Respect program focuses on addressing the needs of students experiencing violence as well as increasing knowledge. Expect Respect offers three program components: 1) school wide prevention strategies to establish school policies and conduct an awareness campaign, 2) youth leadership training to motivate youth to get involved in preventing sexual harassment and teen dating violence, and 3) support groups that are provided at school for students who have already been involved in abusive dating relationships. The support groups meet for 24 weekly sessions and meet in separate gender groups.

Fourth R is a program that focuses on developing youth competencies while targeting negative behaviors. The Fourth R is a classroom-based curriculum with 21 lessons complete with lesson plans, video resources, role-play, rubrics and handouts. There were seven lessons

each on three topics: violence prevention, substance abuse, and sexual behavior, taught in ninth grade health and physical education classes. This program differs from other programs that teach adolescents to use prosocial, assertive responses to peer pressure. Fourth R teaches peer resistance responses: negotiation, delay, yielding to pressure, refusal, and compliance (Wolfe, Crooks, Chiodo, Hughes & Ellis, 2011). Wolfe, et al. (2011) explains that responses considered less prosocial (such as sarcasm or passive avoidance) may be more effective in certain situations. Youth Relationships Project trains youth to use non-violent methods of communication and teaches skill building. The Youth Relationships Project is very different from the others because it only targets at-risk youth and is only community based. The approach involves guest speakers, videos, behavioral rehearsals, visits to community agencies, and social action projects. Youth Relationship Project uses a health promotion approach that focuses on alternatives to aggression-based problem solving and gender-based role expectation (Whitaker, Morrison, Lindquist, ..., 2006).

The samples used in the evaluations reflected the target populations of the prevention programs. Sample sizes ranged from 191 participants in the Youth Relationship Project to 1964 in the Safe Dates study. The average age of the three reporting age was 14. The Expect Respect study reported that their sample was middle school and high school students but did not give specific grades or ages. All four studies included both male and female students, and in three of the studies the gender distribution ranged from 50% to 56% females. The Expect Respect study was 68% female. The follow up periods ranged from three months to five years. The Expect

Respect study did not specify a time period and may have been conducted immediately following the program. The study does make a general comment about a two-year follow-up that showed positive results but no details were provided. All four studies included some measure of intimate partner violence knowledge and attitude, and skill building.

Foshee, Bauman, Ennett, ... (2005) concluded that less reported psychological, moderate physical, and sexual dating violence perpetration and less moderate physical dating violence victimization followed after participation in Safe Dates. The Safe Dates program did not prevent or reduce psychological victimization or prevent or reduce severe physical victimization or perpetration. Foshee, et al. (2005) believes that the programs emphasis on physical violence may be the leading factor in the lack of program effectiveness on psychological victimization. Overall, Safe Dates prevented and reduced dating violence among adolescents, even at three years (Foshee, et al., 2005).

Participants reported a wide range of positive experience in their Expect Respect support groups (Ball, 2009). The study documented an increase in relationship skills: the boys reported being able to communicate better and girls had improved help-seeking skills and learned how to stand up for themselves in the romantic relationship. Results reported increased knowledge about abusive and healthy relationships and showed positive for increased understanding. A change in attitude was most notable in the boys group in juvenile detention. The Expect Respect program had increased self-awareness and the girls experienced increased self-confidence. The last measure was awareness of abuse in the peer group. The participants reported an increased awareness of abusive behavior in their groups.

Fourth R instructs students in positive relationship skills. The measures of delay response, negotiation, and yielding are labeled specific peer resistance responses. These measures had a positive response. After receiving the intervention program, participants were seven times more likely to show a delay response, two times more likely to demonstrate negotiations. The study reports that the control group was four times more likely to respond to pressure than the intervention group. The global peer resistance measures of refusal and compliance demonstrated no significant effect. Wolfe, et al. (2011) explains that the result of the global peer resistance responses may be the “just say no” approach is not effective for adolescents. A two-year follow-up reported an impact on skills acquisition for girls, and impact on reducing negative behavior with boys.

The Youth Relationship Project measured behavior, healthy relationship skills, trauma symptoms, and hostility. The writers of the Youth Relationship Project comment that the success of the program should be defined in terms of its ability to meet stated goals (Whitaker, et al., 2006). The Youth Relationship project reported that there was significantly less physical violence perpetration in subsequent dating relationships for the participants (Whitaker, et al., 2006). There was a positive effect on physical abuse at 16 month follow up, and the effect was stronger for girls than for boys. The effect on relationship skills and hostility was null. There was a favorable effect for the measurement of trauma symptoms.

### Summary

Information in the development of the adolescent, both physically and cognitively was found in the literature reviewed. There is research available that defines the progression of

adolescent romantic relationship by stages or phases and most were similar. However, a different set of measures was used in each one to come to their conclusions. Physical and relational aggressions increase from early to middle adolescence (Collins, et al., 2009). Forbes & Dahl (2009) found that children as young as ten were displaying sensation seeking behavior. Literature that specifically addressed conflict or aggression in a romantic relationship was limited.

The literature reviewed did offer information on the characteristics of the romantic relationships that may lead to teen dating violence. However, the specific stage of development can only be inferred when descriptions given included language that is also given in the literature on the stages of adolescent romantic relationships. Valuable information can be gleaned from the research on the development of romantic relationship, even when the stages are not measured or the samples are not separated into early, middle, and late adolescence. Collins, et al. (2009) investigated the quality of the relationship and found low-quality relationships are marked by: irritation, antagonism, and high levels of conflict or controlling behavior. Physical aggression may be more common when adolescents have not fully developed their ability to communicate (Mulford & Giordano, 2008). The skills needed for a healthy relationship, including communication, may not be learned if the youth does not progress through the developmental stages of adolescent romantic relationships.

Strong conclusions about the effectiveness of the prevention programs across the ages for which they were written could not be made. The researchers did, however, report that each program did show some success with the sample chosen. The prevention programs are written

for, and presented to a range of ages, except the Fourth R curriculum written for presentation to only 9<sup>th</sup> graders in health class. The results of the studies were not broken down by age groups of early, middle or late adolescence. For example, the Safe Dates program study sample included 12-17 year olds, but the study did not record results by age group. Therefore, it is not known if the program was as successful for the 12 year olds as it was for the 17 year olds. It can be said the Fourth R program did show some success for the age group that it was written for because it was only given to ninth graders.

Much of the literature claim that there is a lack of behavioral measures in the research on prevention programs. Of the four programs reviewed, three measured behavior, but the Fourth R project used a completely different set of measures. The Youth Relationship Project study noted that the evaluation of the sample did not measure presence or absence of behavior such as abuse or violence. The Expect Respect program did not measure behavior post presentation of the program. All four of the studies reported at least one positive effect of the intervention, and most often those were positive effects on either attitudes or knowledge. Attitudes and knowledge are generally easier to measure and change than behavior. Whitaker, et al. (2006) questioned why each of the programs worked and their generalizability.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION

#### Future Research

Greater scientific research is needed to understand the maturational processes of the adolescent to provide insight into how to guide the adolescent through the intense passion and emotions that often incapacitate the ability to think, reason, and understand consequences. The role of age-graded societal norms in relation to biological maturation, are poorly understood (Collin, et al., 2009). Large-scale long-term studies designed to address developmental change processes are necessary. Gaining an understanding of these processes may allow investigators to identify ways to intervene in high-risk youth at a time when the developmental systems are more amenable to change. Researchers need to learn what kinds of interventions will work with which problems and when is the best time to apply these interventions (Dahl, 2004). Prior research examined in this study did not cover a wide age range across a span of time. Little evidence is available regarding common assumptions of consistency in aggression across adolescent romantic relationships (Collin, et al., 2009).

Differences in how researchers define romantic relationships may at least partially account for different findings across studies. No standard operational definition of adolescent romantic relationship exists even though conceptualizations of adolescent romantic relationships

have been consistent across studies (Collins, et al., 2009). There may be a need to differentiate between adolescent and teenager. When adolescence is defined as an interval of development that begins with pubertal maturation, it may quite misleading to use the common convention of interchanging the word “teenager” and “adolescent” in the literature (Dahl, 2004). Researchers recognize that there are limitations in the studies of adolescent romantic relationships and dating violence. Studies on the topics are sparse and have weaknesses: restricted age ranges, samples are too homogenous, and rarely do they examine both the individual and the dynamics of the relationship. If local norms and culture condition adolescent behavior and experiences, using subjects in a limited geographical area will limit generalizability. The language used in the programs presented is deserving of investigation and clarification. The language used by youth and the meanings of these words change over time, and writers of prevention programs need to be aware of this and willing to update the programs as needed. The social landscape of adolescence is constantly changing, making it a moving target for investigators (Meier & Allen, 2009).

Existing theories of relationship development are relatively simplistic and do not hypothesize about variations in adolescents’ relationship experiences (Meier & Allen, 2009). Research on adolescent romantic relationships is guided by two theories: attachment theory and developmental-contextual theory. Adolescent relationship research is just beginning and rigorous testing of its foundational theories is critical to advancing the field (Meier & Allen, 2009). Different theories are associated with each topic, but one theory that appears across the



topics of adolescent development, adolescent romantic relationship, and teen dating violence is attachment theory. Attachment theory emphasizes the personal beliefs and expectation the adolescent has about romantic relationships, whereas developmental-contextual theories emphasize experiences in relationships including those with friends and family.

Whitaker, et al. (2006) called for more research on each of the prevention programs to find out how they work, the critical components, and generalizability. There appears to be some debate as to what the risk factors are for teen dating violence. Historically, teen dating violence has been attributed to exposure to violence, child maltreatment, and attachment problems. However, McCloskey and Lichter (2003) found that violence in the home was related to peer violence, but not partner violence (Whitaker, et al., 2006). A better understanding of how the prevention programs work and the risk factors for teen dating violence is crucial to effective prevention and intervention. Not only is it important to know how the programs work, it is also important to be able to identify those adolescents who at risk for this type of violence.

### Conclusion

This study was exploratory in nature and not intended to be generalizable. It was the intent of this study to add to the body of knowledge on this topic and encourage further research. The purpose of this of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of teen dating violence prevention programs across the age ranges for which they were written. Foshee (2004) reported that over 700 requests had been made for the Safe Dates curriculum, and that the program was being implemented with a variety of populations, despite the fact that the only evaluation data have been collected with a population that is primarily white and in a rural setting (Whitaker, et

al., 2006). Foshee, et al. (2005) also claimed that Safe Dates prevented and reduced dating violence among adolescents. However, it may not be in the best interest of the youth to assume that the program will work for other demographics or all age groups.

The literature evaluated for this study did not offer any indication that the prevention programs are adaptable for different age groups or developmental stages. Also, writers of prevention programs need to acknowledge that the dynamics of the adolescent community change over time and the prevention programs may need to reflect those changes. Teaching important relationship skills such as communication to adolescents who are still in school may be much more efficient and productive than trying to assemble a class of betrothed young adults (Meier & Allen, 2009). Dating Matters is a new prevention program that may address the development stages of adolescent romantic relationships. Dating Matters claims to “deliver high doses of developmentally appropriate prevention across levels of the social ecology” (Tharp, 2012, p. 400). Dating Matters is a universal primary prevention program focusing on eleven to fourteen year olds in order to build a foundation of healthy relationship skills among all youth before they start dating (Tharp, 2012).

Dahl (2004) believed it was important to increase our knowledge of how behavioral, social, and familial influences interact with the development of adolescent biological systems. Does adolescent development have an effect on the behavior of the adolescent in the romantic relationship? Does the development of the adolescent have an effect on the risk of violence in the adolescent romantic relationship? History has shown that puberty is beginning earlier and that transitions into adulthood are taking longer, and adolescence often reach various steps to

adulthood out of sequence common to prior generations (Dahl, 2004; Meier & Allen, 2009).

How does this affect the dynamics of the adolescent romantic relationship and does it play a part in the incidence of violence within the relationship?

A multidisciplinary approach may be able to answer these questions. There needs to be an emphasis on the interactions of brain, behavior, and social context in the developmental pathways to positive and negative outcomes in youth in the construction of a conceptual framework (Dahl, 2004). The goal is to write effective programs and prevent this growing and potentially life-changing tragedy. The researchers evaluating the success of the four most popular prevention programs write that the programs are successful, or at least partially successful. In a report by the CDC in February, 2013, results of the 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Study suggest that “only” 9.4 percent of high school students report being hit, slapped or physically hurt intentionally by their boyfriend or girlfriend. Include emotional and verbal abuse and the percentage can be as high as 50 percent. Data from the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported 8.9 percent of students reported physical dating violence (CDC, 2006). Are these numbers high because the prevention programs aren’t working or are there other factors involved? Continued research is needed to better understand and more efficiently prevent the incidents of teen dating violence. A multidisciplinary approach to research may be the key to providing a better understanding of the violent relationship. A dialogue between social scientists, neuroscientists and criminologists would allow for opportunities to better understand the phenomena of teen dating violence.

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The role of any mission statement is to provide a guiding foundation of an organization's long-term objectives. The mission statement should establish the founding principles of how the organization will achieve those goals by providing a source of guidance to those within the organization. Upon reflecting upon the Regis University Mission, I have found several common threads of thoughts and ideals between the University's Mission and my personal beliefs. These common threads are woven into my daily interactions with various groups including faculty, staff and students. As a professor, I serve as a leader to those I instruct and advise; therefore, I am an example of what I teach: the development of (1) critical thinking skills, (2) a high standard of personal values and (3) social responsibility.

Critical thinking skills are essential in order to be competitive in today's work environment. Within the classroom, one of the main components of my teaching strategy is to assist students in developing their critical thinking skills. The application of this strategy requires me to use my critical thinking skills to develop ideas that complement material covered within the given textbook and foster a positive attitude toward all students' efforts. To develop these skills, students need to be able to identify the connection between the textbook learning and the "real-world" application and expectations. My attitude towards a student response is crucial in fostering their ability to develop to new ideas, and to think beyond the information directly given. As a result, I attempt to not tell a student directly that their thinking process is inaccurate but instead point in another direction.

A set of personal standards are created by each and every individual. There are many influences upon an individual's personal standards such as peer groups, professionals, environment, and education. As a professor, I establish high standards or expectations within the classroom for students to adhere with the desire that the core of these standards will become a

part of the personal standards for each individual student. I serve as a role model for these standards in abiding by the expectations I have established. This is also seen in the fair and equitable manner I treat students both in the classroom and in evaluating their work.

Social responsibility is a role that everyone should play. As individuals, we have social responsibility to our personal and professional communities. As I often explain to students, social responsibility does not stop at the office door but is demonstrate in everything we do. Actions seen outside the workplace or classroom are incorporated into our overall role of social responsibility. As an example, I take pride in the role I serve in my community and workplace. When the opportunity is available, I like to involve students within the classroom to participate in activities that encourage social responsibility as well as allow them to get involved.

The components I have identified from the Regis University Mission Statement are key components within my life. As a result, I have no doubt that I can uphold and demonstrate these objectives in the interactions I have with faculty, staff, and students. These components are interwoven into my teaching strategy to develop students with strong critical thinking skills and high personal standards that exhibit the overall mission of Regis University.