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Assessment of perceived positive and negative outcomes in risky adolescent dating and peer situations: A descriptive analysis of risk and benefit perception

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Assessment of Perceived Positive and Negative Outcomes in Risky Adolescent Dating
and Peer Situations: A Descriptive Analysis of Risk and Benefit Perception

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by
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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Abstract

ASSESSMENT OF PERCEIVED POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE OUTCOMES IN RISKY ADOLESCENT DATING AND PEER SITUATIONS: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF RISK AND BENEFIT PERCEPTION

by Sarah W. Helms, M.S.

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Peer and dating violence perpetration and victimization are common experiences placing adolescents at-risk for maladaptive outcomes, yet little research has focused on specific problematic situations associated with these types of violence and other related risk-taking behaviors. Further, prevention programs have typically focused on changing beliefs, attitudes, and skill-deficits, with little attention to adolescents' motivations or perceptions of costs and benefits associated with risky situations, despite support for this type of research in other health-related fields (e.g., substance abuse, behavioral medicine). The current study assessed adolescents' perceptions of potential positive and negative outcomes associated with risky dating and peer situations, many of which may increase youths' risks for violence perpetration or victimization. Interviews were conducted with 82 predominantly African American adolescents living in an urban setting. At the conclusion of qualitative coding, 17 and 13 themes were identified for risky dating and peer situations, respectively. Content within these themes included potential positive and negative outcomes and associated processes and contextual factors

identified by youth, across topics such as aggression, victimization, and other risks for physical or psychological harm; interpersonal and intrapersonal processes associated with dating and peer relationships (e.g., communication, emotion, respect, pressure); and more concrete costs and benefits for youth (e.g., gain or loss of financial or material goods, opportunities for fun things to do). This research has important implications for improving the ecological relevance and credibility of youth violence prevention programs, and the discussion of decisional balances of potential costs and benefits may represent important targets for prevention programs.

Introduction

Adolescent health promotion is an important endeavor as patterns of risk-taking behavior (e.g., violence, sexual risk-taking) are concurrently and prospectively related to maladaptive outcomes (Arnett, 2007). For example, violence among adolescents represents a serious public health concern, with detrimental consequences for victims, perpetrators, and society in general. Increasing concern about youth violence has prompted the development of various violence prevention programs, many of which are designed specifically for adolescent populations and address issues such as problem-solving, conflict management, and social and emotional competence (Farrell & Camou, 2006). Adolescence is a developmental period that typically includes increased independence in decision-making, increased risk-taking behaviors, and the development of behavior patterns that are predictive of quality of health in adulthood (Reyna & Farley, 2006). Thus, it is imperative to understand the factors that may influence adolescent decision-making, particularly in social situations that pose significant risk for violence perpetration, victimization, or other maladaptive behaviors (e.g., sexual risk-taking, internalizing behaviors), in order to facilitate the development of health promotion programs that foster effective decision-making and healthy behavioral choices.

Adolescence is a particularly important developmental period in which to study factors that may impact decision-making to engage in risk-taking behaviors, given the cognitive, emotional, psychobiological, and social development occurring during this period (e.g., Boyer, 2006). Cognitively, youth develop abstract reasoning and metacognitive skills (Byrnes, 2003), and their decision-making typically shifts from more

1

child- to adult-like processes and heuristics (Boyer, 2006; Reyna & Farley, 2006). Concurrently, adolescents undergo emotional development including advances in emotional understanding, regulation, and expression (Rosenblum & Lewis, 2003), as well as related growth in autonomy and identity development (Kroger, 2003). From a neuropsychological perspective, adolescent brains undergo significant developmental shifts in structure and functioning that impact decision-making, planning, judgment, and impulse control (Beckman, 2004; Steinberg & Scott, 2003). Peer and romantic relationships emerge during adolescence with particular relevance to risk behaviors, as adolescents increasingly value peer acceptance and social status as they experience growing autonomy from parents (Brown, 2004). Within this context of cognitive, emotional, biological, and social development, decision-making related to risk-taking behaviors may function differently than at any other period in the lifespan, and also may impact life-course patterns of behavior with far-reaching implications for development in adulthood (Reyna & Farley, 2006).

Adolescence is also a key developmental period for studying aggression and victimization in peer and dating contexts due to the prevalence of such behaviors in this period and their potential long-term negative impact. For example, trajectories of dating- and peer-based aggression increase at points during adolescence (e.g., Farrell, Sullivan, Esposito, Meyer, & Valois, 2005; Foshee et al., 2008), and empirical evidence demonstrates that aggression and victimization experienced in peer and dating contexts are associated with high levels of internalizing (e.g., anxiety and depression), externalizing (e.g., delinquency and substance use), and other health risk behaviors (e.g.,

2

sexual risk-taking), both concurrently and over time (e.g., Crick et al., 1999; Goldbaum, Craig, Pepler, & Connolly, 2003; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Holt & Espelage, 2005; Howard, Wang, & Yan, 2007a; Lavoie et al., 2002; Sullivan, Farrell, & Kliewer, 2006). In both peer and romantic contexts, youth victimization may contribute not only to a trajectory of ongoing victimization, but also to sequelae (e.g., internalizing behavior) with long-term negative implications for physical and psychological health (Goldbaum et al., 2003; Hanish & Guerra, 2002). Likewise, for some adolescents, youth-perpetration of violence exacerbated by high-risk social environments may contribute to persistent patterns of behavior that can carry forward and result in serious negative consequences in adulthood (Moffitt, Caspi, Harrington, & Milne, 2002).

Given these salient risks for youth, adolescent violence prevention programs typically address attitudes and beliefs related to peer and dating violence behaviors as an important target for impacting behavior change (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007; Farrell & Camou, 2006). Although experiences of violence (e.g., physical, verbal, sexual, and relational) are perceived as being both common and concerning by adolescents, these types of experiences are also often perceived by youth as being normalized and "acceptable" within at least some peer and dating contexts (e.g., lack of respect by a peer, infidelity in a relationship) (Black & Weisz, 2004; Chung, 2005). Perhaps as a result of this belief, or in combination with other adolescent norms and beliefs (e.g., norms about status, image, and reputation; beliefs about the effectiveness of non-violent responding), youth may choose to perpetrate violence when confronted with a problem situation rather than seeking help from teachers, parents, or other adults (Farrell et al., 2008). Further,

adolescents may be reluctant to intervene in peer conflicts (Ocampo, Shelley, & Jaycox, 2007; Rayburn et al., 2007) when called upon for assistance by peers, and also may have limited knowledge or skills from which to offer assistance (Ashley & Foshee, 2005; Black & Weisz, 2004; Ocampo et al., 2007). These problems with adolescent support-seeking may be exacerbated by embarrassment, lack of trust, or other institutional, cultural, or socioecological barriers, highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity and socioecological relevance in prevention and intervention programs (Black & Weisz, 2004; Ocampo et al., 2007; Sears, Byers, Whelan, Saint-Pierre, & The Dating Violence Research Team, 2006). To provide interventions with cultural sensitivity and socioecological relevance and credibility, researchers need to better understand how adolescents think about risky peer and dating situations that they commonly face.

A number of youth violence prevention efforts focus on effective problem-solving and decision-making when adolescents are faced with risky peer and dating situations (e.g., Foshee et al., 1996; Sullivan, Farrell, Bettencourt & Helms, 2008). Many of these programs draw heavily from components of social information processing (SIP) models (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1994; Huesmann, 1988). Several social-cognitive variables and components of SIP models have been associated with peer and dating violence in adolescence and represent important targets for prevention. For example, peer and dating violence have been associated with difficulties in encoding and interpreting social cues, as well as difficulty generating effective non-violent alternatives, based in part on youths' aggression expectancies, attitudes toward violence, self-efficacy for enacting aggressive responses, and sensitivity to interpersonal rejection (Brendgen, Vitaro, Tremblay, &

4

Wanner, 2002; de Castro, Merk, & Koops, 2005; Lochman & Dodge, 1994; Pettit, 1997; Próspero, 2006). Also, specific steps of the SIP model, such as response generation and evaluation have been identified as important mechanisms related to the enactment of violence in peer and romantic relationships (Fite et al., 2008; Lansford et al., 2006). Finally, beliefs about traditional gender roles in relationships and beliefs and norms about identity and self worth in relation to one's romantic relationships may be specifically associated with dating violence, particularly during the adolescent developmental period (Goldstein, Chesir-Teran, & McFaul, 2008; Howard, Beck, Kerr, & Shattuck, 2005; Josephson & Proulx, 2008; Lichter & McCloskey, 2004; Sears, Byers, & Price, 2007).

Because of the significant overlap and co-occurrence of aggression across peer and romantic domains it is imperative that interventions attend to this dual-focus in violence among youth (Leadbeater, Banister, Ellis, & Yeung, 2008; Ozer, Tschann, Pasch, & Flores, 2004). Further, given the significant overlap in youth health-risk behaviors such as substance use, sexual risk-taking, and dating and peer-based violence perpetration and victimization, prevention programs have been called to "bridge the gap" among these various risks via intervention that changes norms and focuses on cultural and contextual appropriateness (Pittman & Wolfe, 2002). However, to date, most intervention programs continue to focus on the prevention of specific problem behaviors (e.g., physical aggression, dating violence, sexual risk-taking), with less attention devoted to identifying core protective factors and processes that may promote youth resiliency across various risk domains (DuRant, Pendergrast, & Cadenhead, 1994; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Pittman & Wolfe, 2002).

5

One of the key competency domains with promise for uniting intervention in just such a manner is the process of decision-making, for example, being able to identify a social situation with high risk for a negative outcome, evaluate possible alternatives, and select an effective response (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008). Although a variety of decision-making theories exist, one of the most prominent models with promise for applicability to a variety of problem behaviors is the SIP model, whereby youth are believed to proceed through a series of steps in encoding, interpreting, deliberating, and responding to social situations. This model accounts for both process-related variables (e.g., the process of response evaluation, consideration of expected outcomes, evaluation of efficacy in enacting responses) as well as individuals' underlying latent mental structures (e.g., schemas, beliefs, scripts) which may influence processing at various steps (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Huesmann, 1988).

SIP models provide frameworks for understanding how youth process information in risky situations (e.g., situations that may lead to aggression or victimization) and are an element of a number of violence prevention programs for youth. Within the SIP model, decision-making may be understood within a framework of understanding individuals' goals (Crick & Dodge, 1994), and specifically for adolescents, immediate rewards or pleasure may typically be prioritized in decision-making, rather than behaviors fostering longer-term success or positive outcomes (Reyna & Farley, 2006). However, little is known about students' perceptions of these potential positive or negative outcomes in contextually-relevant risky situations, despite research suggesting that adolescents' actual willingness to engage in risky behaviors may exceed their expectations to do so when

they perceive that the risks associated with real-life situations are acceptable or reasonable (Boyer, 2006; Reyna & Farley, 2006). In this way, the value estimations adolescents assign to potential positive or negative aspects of social situations (i.e., perceptions about how the situation may be associated with positive outcomes, negative outcomes, or both) may influence decision-making processes, including various steps of the SIP model. In fact, research suggests that perceptions regarding potential positive outcomes may be even more relevant to adolescent decision-making than risks insofar as adolescents may be willing to take on high levels of behavioral risk because the potential positive outcomes are deemed so highly desirable. However, research has more extensively evaluated outcome probability estimation (i.e., how *likely* is it that X will occur), while offering relatively little attention to outcome value estimations (e.g., the potential positive and negative outcomes that adolescents may consider as they approach decision-making processes) (Boyer, 2006).

Further, dating and peer-based violence prevention programs typically target beliefs, attitudes, and skill-building (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007; Farrell & Camou, 2006), with less focus on specific problem situations for adolescents and reasons why adolescents may find themselves in such problematic or risky situations. Such prevention and intervention efforts often emphasize behavior change for youth via underlying assumptions of remediating skill-deficits or providing alternatives to negative outcomes, but offer little attention to adolescents' motivations or perceptions of benefits and risks associated with the problematic situations. In short, such interventions may assume a shared perception of "risk" within the risk behaviors being targeted, without focusing on

how students themselves perceive the behaviors or understanding the contextualization of situations with which they are associated. Despite the support within other health-related fields (e.g., behavioral medicine, substance abuse) for understanding such decisional balances of costs and benefits when attempting to promote change in risky or problematic behaviors (e.g., Miller & Rollnick, 2002), to date, the adolescent violence prevention literature has paid relatively little attention to such factors or to the potential underlying ambivalence that students may face when confronting the complexities of adolescent social risk-taking.

The extant literature reflects very little, if any, emphasis on understanding how adolescents conceptualize potential positive and negative outcomes in specific, contextually relevant social situations with peers and dating partners that may place them at-risk for engaging in problem behaviors or being victimized. The intra- and interpersonal context of adolescence represents a unique developmental period in which to study factors that may influence risk-based decision-making, particularly in light of the concurrent developmental factors that may influence decision-making processes at this time (Boyer, 2006). Understanding how students perceive situations that may place them at risk for negative outcomes is imperative in informing prevention and intervention that is grounded in youths' own experiences. Improved understanding of how youth conceptualize problematic situations, in particular perceptions of their potential positive and negative outcomes, may help to elucidate important factors associated with adolescents' decision-making processes and offer greater contextual relevance for health promotion programs that strive to reduce risky behaviors such as violence among teens.

Review of the Literature

The following sections review the literature on the multi-faceted nature of youth violence, related risk-taking behaviors, and processes associated with adolescent risk-based decision-making. First, the developmental period of adolescence is discussed as it relates to dating and peer relationships, as well as to risk-taking behaviors and related decision-making processes more generally. Next, adolescent peer-based violence is reviewed, followed by adolescent dating violence, including definitions, prevalence, age and gender differences, and the correlates, predictors, and outcomes with which these constructs have been associated. Subsequently, the literature on decision-making is reviewed, highlighting the importance of better understanding adolescent perceptions of positive and negative outcomes in relation to decision-making processes. Finally, violence prevention programs are reviewed, including programs designed to address peer and dating violence, with an emphasis on interventions that target social-cognitive information processing.

The Developmental Period of Adolescence

Within the fields of violence and related youth risk behavior prevention, researchers have expressed a central goal of addressing the developmental context in which risk-taking behaviors occur by utilizing information on youth development in the creation and implementation of prevention and intervention programs (Boxer, Goldstein, & Musher-Eizenman, 2005). Because of the primary importance of this focus on the context of youth development, general research on the developmental period of adolescence will be reviewed to emphasize the ongoing cognitive, emotional,

psychobiological, and social developmental factors that may influence adolescents' propensity to make risky behavioral choices (Boyer, 2006), including choices related to peer- and dating-violence. Adolescence is an important developmental period in which to study processes associated with decision-making in situations that carry risk for aggression and victimization or other risk-taking behaviors (e.g., risky sexual behavior, delinquency, or substance use). The study of these constructs within peer-based and dating situations may be particularly valuable given the increased relevance of peer networks as a context in which risk-taking may occur during adolescence (Brown, 2004). Further, this developmental period is marked by concurrent increases in independence in decision-making and risk-taking behavior, and the development of behavior patterns that are predictive of adjustment in adulthood (Reyna & Farley, 2006). Thus, understanding more about the processes that can impact behavioral decisions in potentially high-risk social situations is important and could contribute to the development of prevention efforts focused on positive adolescent development.

One of the most widely studied developmental factors associated with adolescent risk-based decision-making is cognitive development because of its significant impact on risk-perception and decision-making processes (Boyer, 2006). During adolescence, abstract reasoning skills develop, including increased capacity for inductive and deductive reasoning, and the ability to suspend one's own beliefs and reason about abstract, subjective arguments. Metacognitive skills emerge and develop during adolescence, including the ability to think about, reflect upon, and evaluate knowledge, thoughts, and decision-making processes. Relativism of thought and multiple

perspective-taking skills begin to replace childlike objectivism of thought (Byrnes, 2003). It is within this cognitive developmental context that researchers have begun to assess risk-evaluation and factors related to risk-based decision-making (Boyer, 2006).

Several researchers have assessed decision-making processes and effectiveness of their execution across age groups. Self-awareness (e.g., insight into one's own desired outcomes), emotion regulation (e.g., ability to manage internal arousal sufficiently so as to generate, evaluate, and implement adaptive behavior choices), and metacognitive insight into the processes of decision-making may all influence the effectiveness with which an adolescent is able to process and evaluate risk-related data (e.g., data associated with interpersonal interactions, data associated with perceived positive and negative outcomes) and implement adaptive decision-making and behavioral responses (Byrnes, 2003). Some evidence suggests that older adolescents are cognitively more capable than children and younger adolescents of evaluating multiple goals and corresponding response options, as well as anticipating wider-ranging consequences of those response options (Byrnes, 2003). However, despite these cognitive developmental issues, some research suggests similarities across adolescent and adult decision-making. For example, adolescent cognitive egocentrism was once suggested as a primary explanation for adolescent risk-taking behaviors, insofar as misperceptions of personal invulnerability were assumed to relate to risk outcome underestimation. However, more recent research suggests that purely cognitive probability assessment and perceived invulnerability does not adequately explain differences in adolescent and adult risk-taking (Boyer, 2006).

A paradox exists in regard to the relation between adolescent cognitive development and risk-taking behaviors: although developmental theory suggests that cognitive development proceeds from a point of lesser to greater sophistication (and increased cognitive sophistication should be associated with decreased risk-taking), a great deal of research suggests that risk-taking behaviors actually increase from childhood to adolescence (Boyer, 2006). One explanation of this paradox may involve dual-processing theories, which note the development of automatic, heuristic, and reflexive systems as well as explicit, logical, and computational systems. Based in such a theory, adolescents may be seen as committing more biased decision-making than children as a result of these heuristics that sacrifice meticulousness for efficiency (Boyer, 2006). Further, whereas the developmental theory of cognitive sophistication might predict decreased risk-taking based on improved cognitive abilities for risk-assessment, such prediction neglects other relevant developmental factors, such as emotional, biological, and social contextual factors. In other words, "all else being equal" one might assume cognition should explain risk-assessment in social situations and subsequent behavior, but for adolescents, all else may not be equivalent (Boyer, 2006, p. 301).

In addition to ongoing cognitive development, adolescent emotional development has been described as both quantitatively and qualitatively different than at other stages of development. Some components of cognitive development may influence emotional development, such as the activation of emotions by abstract ideas and emotional reactions to the metacognitive realization of subjectivity of thought. Increasing awareness of and control over contextually-appropriate emotional display and the ability to articulate the

experience of "mixed emotions" emerges in adolescence (Rosenblum & Lewis, 2003). Additionally, adolescents' introspection on emotion and reflection on others' emotions, particularly in the context of peer and dating relationships, may intensify during this developmental period. Important emotional developmental tasks occur in adolescence, including developing abilities in emotion awareness and regulation, understanding of consequences of emotional expression, cognitive reframing of emotional stimuli, separation of emotional fluctuation from stable sense of identity, separation of thought—emotion fusions of reasoning (e.g., "if I feel X then Y must be true"), negotiation of interpersonal relationships in the face of intense emotions, and the management of empathic and sympathetic responses (Rosenblum & Lewis, 2003).

The role of emotions in adolescent risk-based decision-making and associated processes has been described as bi-directional, despite the only recent empirical attention to such issues, in part due to an overemphasis on cognitive decision theories of probabilistic reasoning (Boyer, 2006). Affective decision-making theories pose that increases and decreases in positive and negative emotions (i.e., emotional costs and benefits) may fuel risk-based decision-making processes, whereas emotion regulation/ dysregulation and impulsivity may influence enactment of risk-taking behaviors (Boyer, 2006). Further research is needed to address the bi-directional interaction of cognitive and emotional development in adolescent risk-taking; however, some developmental evidence suggests that cognitive processes associated with decision-making systems may become better-developed earlier than aspects of affective decision-making and regulation (Boyer, 2006).

Related to emotional and cognitive development, autonomy and identity development also represent important developmental considerations for adolescents. Autonomy has been suggested to include constructs such as parental detachment, agency, self-reliance, individuation, self-assertion, and self-determination, spanning domains such as emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and psychological functioning (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003). Maturational, motivational, social/relational, cultural, and gender-based perspectives have each been implicated in the processes of autonomy development, as "self-reliance and personal decision-making increase, the self and identity are gradually consolidated, and affect, behavior, and cognition are increasingly self-regulated" (Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2003, p. 175). Identity formation may involve strivings for balance between individual uniqueness and connectedness of experience, within a variety of identity domains (e.g., ideological, ethnic/cultural, interpersonal, sexual, and gender), and related research has traditionally focused on identity transitions via identity exploration and commitment (Kroger, 2003). Within a developmental period in which individuals are actively striving for autonomy and identity development, the processes and functions of risk-based decision-making and related risky behavioral enactment may be particularly relevant for exploration.

In addition to cognitive, emotional, and identity development in adolescence, neuropsychological research suggests that adolescent brains vary both structurally and functionally from those of adults, impacting adolescent decision-making, planning, judgment, and impulse control (e.g., Beckman, 2004; Steinberg & Scott, 2003). For example, gray matter pruning (at approximately a rate of one percent per year during

adolescence), increases in and reorganization of white matter, and frontal lobe maturation all proceed across the developmental periods of adolescence and emerging adulthood, perhaps not reaching peak maturational status until the mid-twenties. Additionally, the brain's integration of information from various regions becomes increasingly sophisticated across adolescence, relying less on local regions (such as during childhood) and increasingly relying on collaborative interaction among diverse regions (such as in adulthood) (Beckman, 2004). In addition to brain development, social and cognitive developmental factors may interact with biological factors in mitigating adolescent decision-making capacities in potentially risky situations. For example, susceptibility to peer influence in perceptions and decisions related to risky social situations is believed to peak in early- to mid-adolescence, and decision-making driven by anticipated rewards may be more emphasized by adolescents than decision-making driven by anticipated risks, compared with adults (Steinberg & Scott, 2003).

However, in general, researchers have only begun to evaluate the neurocognitive, neuroaffective, and physiological developmental correlates associated with adolescent decision-making processes in high risk situations. For example, the frontal lobe has recently been implicated in impulse inhibition as a mediator of risk-taking and maladaptive behavior (Boyer, 2006). Other work has demonstrated the use of multiple neural structures in decision-making in potentially risky situations, spreading from basic sensory-motor pathways (i.e., detection of information) to emotional centers of the brain (e.g., amygdala and hippocampus), and then to higher cortical regions (e.g., frontal cortex) for weighing of alternatives and selection of a response (Boyer, 2006). Perhaps

most interesting is recent evidence that some risks are processed more centrally by cognitive systems (e.g., loss-framed risks), whereas others are more emotionally processed (e.g., gain-framed risks) (Boyer, 2006).

Although further research on developmental pathways is needed, current evidence suggests an association between adolescent decision-making processes that result in engaging in high risk behaviors and various psychobiological developments, including synaptic pruning, increasing frontal lobe function, and shifts in various neurotransmitters and hormone levels (Boyer, 2006). Additionally, developmental and pubertal timing may offer important insight into decision-making to engage in risky behaviors in adolescence, for example, highlighting the role of such behaviors among adolescents who are early to develop socially and biologically in advance of corresponding cognitive and emotion regulation development (Boyer, 2006; Susman & Rogol, 2004). Some evidence suggests that pubertal status and timing variables may be related to various risky behaviors (e.g., physical and relational aggression, delinquency, substance use, early onset of sexual activity, and risky sexual behaviors) (Susman & Rogol, 2004).

Finally, in addition to examination of individual-level factors associated with adolescent development (e.g., cognition, emotion, neurobiology), a social developmental perspective highlights the social and cultural context of development, as well as the reciprocal interaction between the adolescent and his or her environment. Despite transformations in the patterns of parent-child interactions across development from childhood to adolescence (e.g., decreased hierarchical structure; shifts in amount, content, and perceived meaning of interactions; expression of positive and negative affect),

parent-adolescent relationships remain vitally important in both the short- and long-term, and typically maintain considerable continuity across development (Collins & Laursen, 2004). Parent-adolescent attachment remains important in the ongoing development of social competence, social-representational systems, autonomy-strivings, and risky behaviors (Boyer, 2006), although behaviorally and cognitively, attachment may appear distinct in adolescence, as compared to childhood (e.g., security for exploration in new peer relationships and life pursuits outside of the family, as opposed to childhood exploration of the immediate environment) (Collins & Laursen, 2004). Authoritative parenting styles have been associated with decreased adolescent risk-taking, in comparison with authoritarian, indulgent, or neglectful parenting styles, perhaps due to improved parental monitoring and adolescent self-disclosure (Boyer, 2006). Other parenting styles (e.g., traditional parenting styles characteristic of non-majority and non-Western cultures) may also be associated with decreased adolescent risk-taking (Arnett, 2007), although relatively less research attention has addressed this typology. Further, particularly in adolescence, consideration of the bi-directionality of influence in parent-child relationships is important, as well as the interactive influence of peer and parent factors on decision making processes that may lead to risk-taking behaviors (Boyer, 2006; Collins & Laursen, 2004).

During adolescence, teens often seek increasing independence from parents as they increasingly focus on peer acceptance and social status (Brown, 2004). Peer relationships increase notably in complexity and intensity from childhood to adolescence and take on particular importance during the adolescent period (Brown, 2004). Social

networks shift from predominantly same-sex to mixed-gender groups, and peer

relationships are more highly valued and involve greater emotional intimacy than in

earlier stages of development (Yoon, Barton, & Taiariol, 2004). Self-identity is explored

across adolescent development, in part through exploration of the self in relation to

others. This self-exploration via social comparison may take many forms, including

shifting social roles and peer relationships, self-disclosure, social problem solving, and

cognitive and emotional analysis of social relationships (Bierman, 2004; Gottman &

Mettetal, 1986). In fact, research suggests that adolescent peer groups may be particularly

unstable, dissolving and realigning frequently with changes in group status as well as

group membership. And, with the added complexity of adolescent peer relationships,

interactions are often embedded within and across groups as well as within larger social

contexts (e.g., school, community) (Brown, 2004). Within the peer context, association

with peers who engage in risky behaviors is related to adolescents' own engagement in

these behaviors, bi-directionally through peer influence and selection effects (Boyer,

2006).

In addition to increased emphasis on emotional connection, trust, and intimacy

within friendships, dating and romantic relationships typically emerge around age 12 or

13, after which self-disclosure and intimacy in romantic partnering begins to increase and

ultimately surpasses the closeness and self-disclosure present in adolescent relationships

with best friends and parents (Brown, 2004). Even among early- to mid-adolescents,

some extent of romantic involvement (e.g., group dates, individual dates, "going steady")

is reported by a majority of youth (in some studies as high as 70% or more), with

romantic partner-based interactions surpassing the frequency of interactions with peers or family by mid-adolescence and also representing important sources of support (Bouchey & Furman, 2003; Foshee et al., 1998; Montgomery & Sorell, 1998). By mid- to late-adolescence, over 90% of youth report a history of some dating involvement (Roscoe & Callahan, 1985), and by age 19, over 75% of youth are sexually active (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). Further, during this developmental period, youth are actively engaged in considering the essence of romantic experiences, including the idea of love, as they develop their own self-identity and capacity for intimacy with others (Montgomery & Sorell, 1998).

However, this newly emerging interest in dating and romantic relationships does not imply a negation of the role of peers, and particularly so among early romantic experiences (Brown, 2006). Adolescent developmental stage theories of dating (e.g., Brown, 1999; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999) have consistently suggested that early adolescent dating is "played out in the arena of the peer group" often relating more to social status than true emotional connection between partners (Brown, 2006, p. 115). For example, in one prominent four-stage theory of adolescent dating (Brown, 1999), youth are theorized to proceed through stages of initiation, status-based dating, and affection-based dating, all with heavy influence of peer evaluation and support, before ultimately reaching the final bonding phase of relationships, usually during emerging adulthood, in which peer influence becomes less pronounced. In fact, social influences on dating are of such importance that they may be even more relevant in determining the onset of dating than either biological or sexual maturation (Dornbusch et al., 1981). Unfortunately,

though, the role of peers in adolescent dating may not always be developmentally adaptive, such as when peers influence dating conflict and related violence. Some research suggests that this role of peers in adolescent dating violence may be both quantitatively and qualitatively different than the role of peers at any other stage of development (Adelman & Kil, 2007; Sousa, 1999).

The complexity of adolescent dating requires that researchers devote attention to multiple features of relationships via a developmental-contextual focus. Such a focus moves beyond simplistic accounts of current involvement, number of partners, or frequency of dates, in order to focus on cultural and contextual issues within peer and dating relationships. Further, researchers have also suggested the importance of considering the influence of childhood and adolescent relationships with parents and peers as influences on dating and romantic relationships (Collins & van Dulmen, 2006). This focus may begin to elucidate pathways to adaptive adolescent dating and influences of adolescent dating on adult romantic relationships (Joyner & Campa, 2006).

In conclusion, the importance of the adolescent developmental context is clear, and particularly when considering the impact of cognitive, emotional, psychobiological, and social factors associated with decision-making resulting in risk-taking behaviors. This developmental period is marked by increases in risk behaviors and in independence in decision-making (Reyna & Farley, 2006), set amidst the developmental stage of significant psychosocial changes. Further, it is a developmental period that has received significant attention from prevention and intervention researchers (Farrell & Camou, 2006). Given these considerations and the impetus for building such interventions with

developmental appropriateness and socioecological relevance, the current study will strive to embed itself within a developmental framework of examination.

Adolescent Peer-Based Violence

The adolescent developmental period is marked by increases in risk behaviors across a variety of risk domains (e.g., delinquency, substance use, and risky sexual behavior) (Reyna & Farley, 2006). Among these domains, peer- and dating-based aggression and victimization represent two important areas for consideration insofar as they pose serious threats to adaptive developmental outcomes for youth. The following review will focus on each of these risk domains for violence in turn, emphasizing the unique adolescent developmental context of each form of violence from both an individual and a socioecological perspective. Because of the complexity and breadth of these literatures, peer and dating violence research will be examined from three perspectives. First, definitions and subtypes of each form of violence will be examined. Second, the prevalence of these forms of violence will be reviewed, with discussion of variability in prevalence based on age and gender differences. Finally, the correlates of each form of violence will be examined, along with predictors and outcomes associated with each.

Definitions. The broadest definitions of aggression include the delivery of a harmful stimulus and intention that the behavior will be harmful to the victim (Harré & Lamb, 1986). Within this framework, the current literature encompasses several subtypes of aggression that may be categorized based on the elements of harm and intent. For example, reactive aggression, sometimes referred to as hostile, impulsive, or affective

aggression, includes acts of aggression in which the aggressor's primary goal is to harm or damage the victim (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Ramírez & Andreu, 2006). By contrast, proactive aggression, also referred to as instrumental, premeditated, or predatory aggression, includes acts of aggression in which the aggressor's primary motivation is to deliver a harmful stimulus in order to gain other desired goals, rather than to inflict suffering on the victim per se (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Ramírez & Andreu, 2006).

Key subtypes of adolescent peer-based aggression include physical, verbal, relational, and social. Physical aggression is typically defined as acts of physical force intended to cause bodily harm, as well as threats of the use of such force (e.g., Crick et al., 1999; Farrell, Kung, White, & Valois, 2000; Mercy, Butchart, Farrington, & Cerdá, 2002), with examples including pushing, shoving, hitting, and threats to perform such acts (e.g., Farrell et al., 2000). Verbal aggression also represents overt actions intended to cause psychological harm in the form of hostile teasing and name-calling (Underwood, 2003). By contrast, relational and social aggression encompass both overt (e.g., telling someone you won't like them unless they do what you want) and covert (e.g., spreading a rumor behind someone's back) actions intended to cause harm by damaging or manipulating peer relationships (e.g., Crick, 1996, 1997; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001; Underwood, 2003). Examples of relational aggression include not letting students be a part of your group, threatening to terminate friendships unless victims comply with certain demands, spreading malicious rumors or gossip, and attempting to damage victims' friendships by saying mean things about them (e.g., Crick, 1996; Farrell et al., 2000; Goldstein & Tisak, 2004).

In addition to definitions of subtypes of aggression, the peer victimization literature has typically focused on the reciprocal viewpoint of these forms of aggression (i.e., studying the victim rather than the aggressor), and numerous studies include either physical or relational forms of victimization, as described above. However, in comparison to the aggression literature, relatively less research has been conducted on peer victimization in adolescence (Craig, Pepler, Connolly, & Henderson, 2001). Peer victimization has typically been described as "an unprovoked attack that causes hurt of a psychological, social, or physical nature," depending upon the form of behavior enacted (Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowen, 2001, p. 138). Despite the relative imbalance in the body of research on aggression versus victimization experiences, it is clear that both are common among adolescents, and have negative impacts on the aggressors, victims, peer groups, school climates, and society more broadly (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001). The current review of literature examined prevalence rates, correlates, predictors, and outcomes for physical and relational subtypes of aggression and victimization because these behaviors have been demonstrated to be prevalent and problematic across samples of African American, European American, and Latino youth (e.g., Farrell et al., 2008, 2009; Sullivan et al., 2006).

Prevalence, age and gender differences. Peer-based aggression and victimization are quite common among adolescents, with prevalence estimates ranging from 22% to over 50% for physical and relational aggression (e.g., Herrenkohl et al., 2007; Sullivan et al., 2006; Sullivan, Helms, Kliewer, & Goodman, in press). Estimates of adolescent peer victimization vary from around 33% in some studies (e.g., Swahn, et al., 2008), to

estimates among late childhood and early adolescent samples as high as 81% for males and 72% for females (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001). Rates of peer-based aggression and victimization vary across studies depending on the timeframe assessed (e.g., lifetime versus past month) and based on biological/pubertal and social/peer group transitions spanning late childhood to early adolescent developmental periods (Craig et al., 2001).

Despite research on differential prevalence rates of aggression based on age, gender, and specific subtype of aggression (e.g., physical versus relational), overall, the characteristic of aggression appears to be remarkably stable across childhood and adolescence for both males and females, even rivaling the stability of intelligence (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Huesmann, Eron, & Lefkowitz, 1984). However, even with this demonstrated stability of the general construct of aggression, some research has examined shifts in aggression with age. For example, cognitive, social, and emotional developmental changes across adolescence may contribute to a shift toward increased use of relational aggression and decreased use of physical aggression, perhaps representing the avoidance of direct aggression that is characteristic of adult social life, and/or representing a safer alternative to physical aggression because of the increased risk of serious injury or legal involvement with increased age and physical strength (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Ferguson, & Gariépy, 1989; Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, & Peltonen, 1988; Prinstein et al., 2001).

Further, this shift may reflect the increased emphasis in adolescents' relationships on intimacy, achieved through gossip, social comparison, and self-disclosure, and it may also reflect developmental increases in cognitive capacities for planning, abstract thought,

and facility with sarcasm, irony, and innuendo (Bierman, 2004; Byrnes, 2003; Creusere, 1999; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Yoon et al., 2004). Insofar as peer social norms dictate increasing control over aggressive impulses, social success may be influenced by the ability to channel aggressive impulses into less direct methods (e.g., relational rather than physical means) (Bierman, 2004). However, socioecological factors and social-contextual perceptions of aggression and aggressors may influence such social pressures and norms such that this posited developmental trend may be less relevant, perhaps particularly among minority youth living in urban areas with high levels of community violence (Gorman-Smith, Henry, & Tolan, 2004; Miller-Johnson, Moore, Underwood, & Coie, 2005).

Greater research attention has been devoted to questions about differential rates of aggression by gender. Reviews of aggression typically note higher levels of physical aggression among males as compared to females (Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Coie & Dodge, 1998; Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Tremblay, Hartup, & Archer, 2005), which theorists have suggested may be due to genetic, evolutionary, social, and cultural factors (Baron & Richardson, 1994). Prior to about the age of four, children show no gender differences in physical aggression; however, by middle childhood and adolescence, boys tend to engage in more physical aggression than females (Crick & Zahn-Waxler, 2003; Zimmer-Gembeck, Geiger, & Crick, 2005). In fact, across the extant literature, females have only tended to be more physically aggressive than males within the context of adolescent dating relationships (Feiring, Deblinger, & Hoch-Espada, 2002; Foshee, 1996). One important exception to this general pattern is the finding that African

American girls may exhibit higher rates of physical aggression as compared to girls in other racial/ethnic groups within the context of urban, low-income environments (Miller-Johnson et al., 2005).

Research on relational aggression has more mixed findings on prevalence and gender differences, in many cases finding girls to be more relationally aggressive than boys (Crick, 1997; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). In general, research suggests the possibility of a developmental trend, whereby girls' use of relational aggression exceeds that of boys at younger ages, leveling off by adolescence and possibly even reversing in adulthood. For example, by middle childhood, relational aggression is considered the most typical angry behavior and most frequently occurring harmful behavior for girls as opposed to physical aggression for boys (Crick, Bigbee & Howes, 1996). However, within adolescent samples, and particularly by late adolescence, boys and girls report approximately equivalent levels of relational aggression, despite greater use of overt aggression among boys (Crick et al., 1999; Prinstein et al., 2001).

Some of the gender differences that have been found in rates of youth aggression may relate to the typical social networks and relationships of boys and girls. For example, whereas boys' friendships tend to be comprised of larger, more permeable, less distinct groups, girls' friendships are often maintained in tighter groups of close dyads or triads in which intimacy and interdependence are valued. Insofar as these group structures are more emotionally valued and also more visible for perpetrators' manipulation, relational aggression may be facilitated (Bierman, 2004; Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Lagerspetz et al., 1988). By contrast, boys' friendships tend to place more emphasis

on shared or common interests and overt competition, thus offering less "fuel" for relational aggressors, and perhaps providing more opportunity for direct, overt, and physical confrontation (Galambos, 2004).

In sum, the research on prevalence of peer violence among adolescents suggests that these behaviors are quite frequent (e.g., Casey-Cannon et al., 2001; Herrenkohl et al., 2007; Sullivan et al., in press, 2006; Swahn, et al., 2008). However, the prevalence of these acts may vary based on age, socioecological context, gender, and interactions of these factors (Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Ferguson et al., 1989; Gorman-Smith et al., 2004; Lagerspetz et al., 1988; Miller-Johnson et al., 2005; Prinstein et al., 2001). Because of the unique shifts in peer social networks and the importance placed on peer acceptance during the adolescent developmental period (Brown, 2004; Yoon et al., 2004), as well as the potential for adolescent peer violence to impact trajectories of long-term negative sequelae (Goldbaum et al., 2003; Hanish & Guerra, 2002; Reyna & Farley, 2006), it is important to understand the individual social-cognitive variables and socioecological factors associated with peer violence concurrently and over time.

Correlates, predictors, and outcomes of peer violence. A variety of factors have been associated concurrently and prospectively with peer-based aggression and victimization. The current review emphasizes both the socioecological contextual framework of the various correlates, predictors, and outcomes associated with peer violence (e.g., individual factors, proximal contextual factors, distal factors), as well as emphasizing the social cognitive framework of these factors, particularly at the individual level. Such a joint focus on individual and ecological factors has been encouraged among

27

violence prevention researchers (Capaldi & Gorman-Smith, 2003). At the individual

level, SIP theories are among the most widely empirically-supported theoretical models

of aggression, including both adolescent peer-based and dating violence. Such theories

focus on the role of beliefs, perceptions, and cognitive processes that may influence

violent behavior (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1994; Huesmann, 1998). Other social

developmental models emphasize violence within the framework of attachments and

prosocial values embedded within social contexts (e.g., Hawkins, Catalano, Morrison,

O'Donnell, & Day, 1992), and broader socioecological contexts (e.g., Bronfenbrenner,

1997; Lerner & Castellino, 2002).

At the individual level, several deficits in social-cognitive information processing

have been identified among aggressive youth. First, aggressive youth may have biased or

selective attention to cues and are also more likely to interpret ambiguous cues in hostile

or threatening ways (i.e., hostile attribution bias). In problem-solving, aggressive youth

tend to generate fewer possible response alternatives, and those solutions identified tend

to be less effective and more aggressive in nature than solutions generated by their non-

aggressive peers. Finally, aggressive youth have more positive outcome expectancies for

aggressive responses and higher self-efficacy for enacting such responses than non-

aggressive youth (de Castro et al., 2005; Lochman & Dodge, 1994; Pettit, 1997).

Social-cognitive processes may also be influenced by relational and physical

victimization experiences by biasing individuals' perceptions of peers and conflict

situations and compromising the victims' emotion and behavior regulation (Hoglund &

Leadbeater, 2007). Such social-cognitive disruption may impact youths' responses to both

aggressive and non-aggressive peers and friends. In fact, in a study of non-bullying adolescents, female victims reported fewer self-controlled responses, less cooperative responses, more conflict with friends, and more aggressive intentions than their non-victimized peers (Champion, Vernberg, & Shipman, 2003). Violent victimization may predict the onset of later physical violence perpetration, specifically for youth who were previously non-aggressive (Aceves & Cookston, 2007), and biases in social-cognitive processing and emotion regulation may represent important factors associated with this pattern of reactive aggression.

Also at the individual level, physical and relational victimization have been associated with various types of internalizing problems, including anxiety, depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem (e.g., Craig et al., 2001; Crick, Casas, & Nelson, 2002). Both overt and relational victimization have been associated with posttraumatic stress symptoms among African-American and Latino youth (Storch & Esposito, 2003), and relational victimization, but not overt victimization, predicted later social phobia symptoms (Storch, Masia-Warner, Crisp, & Klein, 2005). Further, intervention work suggests that reductions in anxiety and depression symptoms may be produced by reductions in relational victimization for girls and physical victimization for boys (Vuijk, vanLier, Crijnen, & Huizink, 2007). African American and Latino youth who are victimized by peers and are early to reach pubertal development may experience particular difficulty with depressed mood, physical/psychosomatic symptoms (e.g., headache, sleep or appetite problems, upset stomach) and decreased sense of self-worth (Nadeem & Graham, 2005). However, in addition to the relations for victimization, a

29

number of mental health problems have also been observed among overt and relational aggressors. After controlling for overt forms of aggression, relational aggression has been uniquely associated with affective instability, self-harming behaviors, and bulimic behaviors among females (Crick et al., 1999), and with anxiety and depression symptoms among both males and females (Crick, Ostrov, & Werner, 2006).

Both overt and relational victimization experiences may engender strong emotional reactions for youth, and these emotional reactions appear to remain salient and meaningful over time (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001). Further, youth's emotional reactions to victimization and associated coping responses may predict subsequent changes in peer victimization (Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004). Victimization experiences are described as hurtful and damaging, inducing feelings of sadness, hurt, and anger, in addition to behavioral responses such as retaliation, ignoring, minimizing, and seeking support or assistance. Adolescent girls' self-image may be particularly threatened by peer victimization when they are insulted about characteristics such as ethnicity or when they are insulted about aspects of themselves that they dislike. This negative impact may occur for victims even when unrealistic verbal attacks are made (e.g., calling a girl fat, even when she recognized that she was not fat) (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001).

In addition to individual or internal factors, a number of proximal peer factors are related to peer-based aggression and victimization for adolescents. Peer dynamics such as the degree of acceptance, belongingness, and presence of close friendships may all relate to aggressive behavior among youth. Youth who are rejected by their peers are at particular risk for aggressive outcomes, with some evidence that this relation is bi-

directional in nature. Further, aggressive youth tend to have poorer quality interactions with their close friends, and those friends are more likely to also have high levels of aggression. Association with aggressive peers also increases the likelihood of increasing trajectories of aggression and delinquency for youth (Pettit, 1997).

Spanning the individual and proximal levels of peer influence, research suggests that physically and relationally aggressive adolescents are at increased risk for concurrent and future social adjustment difficulties, including peer rejection, loneliness, depression, social isolation, and high levels of exclusivity/jealousy within friendships (Barnow, Lucht, & Freyberger, 2005; Craig et al., 2001; Crick, 1996; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Grotpeter & Crick, 1996). However, some evidence suggests that the relation with future social maladjustment may be stronger for girls than boys (Crick, 1996). Other evidence suggests that social-psychological maladjustment may be more severe for youth who engage in gender non-normative aggression (i.e., physically aggressive girls or relationally aggressive boys) than for their gender-normative aggressive peers (Crick, 1997). Additional research has shown that when types of aggressors are delineated (i.e., relational only, overt only, both relational and overt, and neither relational nor overt aggressors), high school boys identified as either relational aggressors or as both relational and overt aggressors demonstrated significantly greater loneliness than high school girls identified into these groups (Prinstein et al., 2001). Relational aggression has also been uniquely associated with future social withdrawal among males and females (Crick et al., 2006), and with peer rejection and relationship problems among females (Crick et al., 1999; Rys & Bear, 1997). Concurrently, relational victimization is

31

associated with loneliness, peer relationship problems, and peer rejection (Crick & Bigbee, 1998). Further, similar to the social risks for relational aggressors, relational victims may experience friendship/peer group disturbances, including feeling socially isolated (Casey-Cannon et al., 2001).

Peer-based violence predicts a range of health-risk behaviors and externalizing problem behaviors. Physical aggression in childhood and adolescence has repeatedly been demonstrated to robustly predict future maladjustment, including drug use, delinquency, school dropout, teen parenthood, criminal behavior, spousal abuse, traffic violations, and further physical aggression (e.g., Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989; Farrell et al., 2005; Farrington, 1986; Huesmann et al., 1984; Xie, Cairns, & Cairns, 2001). A small percentage of youth may experience a life-course pattern of maladjustment that shows continuity into adulthood, particularly among physically aggressive boys with neuropsychological deficits appearing early in life and problems spanning many different life-domains (Broidy et al., 2003; Moffitt et al., 2002). Aggression is also of primary importance in predicting the emergence of problem behaviors in other domains, such as in the longitudinal prediction of increases in substance use and delinquency across the middle school years (Farrell et al., 2005). Childhood aggression impacts substance use and deviancy in adulthood, as mediated by adolescent substance use and delinquency (Brook, Whiteman, Finch, & Cohen, 1996). And, temperament and low executive functioning in late childhood may be associated with drug use in later adolescence, with these relations mediated by aggression and association with delinquent peers in early adolescence (Giancola & Parker, 2001).

Particularly for boys, early adolescent aggression may predict later increases in substance use and aggression (White, Brick, & Hansell, 1993), and chronic childhood physical aggression may contribute to elevated risk for adolescent violence and delinquency (Broidy et al., 2003).

Relational aggression has been associated with adolescent delinquency, stimulus-seeking and egocentricity personality factors, and for females only, with engagement in antisocial behaviors including destruction of property, lying, and school misbehavior (Crick et al., 1999). Concurrently, relational victimization is associated with externalizing difficulties such as aggression and delinquency (e.g., Crick et al., 2002). Longitudinally, controlling for overt forms of aggression, relational aggression has been uniquely associated with future delinquency among males (Crick et al., 2006), and with general externalizing behaviors (Prinstein et al., 2001), sensation-seeking, and alcohol use among females (Grimes et al., 2005). Although externalizing problems are characteristic of both relationally and physically aggressive youth, some research suggests that the differences in aggressive adolescents' behavior profiles relate to the internalizing problems characteristic of relational aggressors and the self-restraint difficulties characteristic of physical aggressors (Crick, 1997). In addition to these associations between aggression and various problem behaviors, physical and relational victimization have also been associated with substance use, delinquency, and physical and relational aggression, although the strength of some of these relations may vary by gender (Graham, Bellmore, & Juvonen, 2007; Sullivan et al., 2006).

Interactions between youth and parents are another important proximal socioecological factor associated with adolescent peer-based violence, and a variety of parenting variables have been associated with youth aggression. Some evidence links aggression with attachment problems in infancy and young childhood. Low levels of positive parenting behaviors such as parental responsiveness, warmth, social instruction, and proactive guidance, as well as high levels of negative parenting behaviors such as inconsistent responding, harsh parenting, and coercive or power-assertive parenting have been associated with youth externalizing behaviors and aggression. Finally, low levels of parental monitoring have been linked with youth aggression and other problem behaviors (Pettit, 1997). However, in contrast to these negative outcomes associated with poor parenting practices, high quality parent-child relationships may buffer the effect of peer victimization on the later onset of physical violence perpetration, particularly for males (Aceves & Cookston, 2007).

Exposure to aggression in various proximal and distal contexts may increase the risk for aggression perpetration in youth, including aggression in the family, peer group, school, and through media exposure, and it is important to note that elements of social information processing mediate the relations between these contextual risk factors and aggressive behavioral outcomes (e.g., Lösel, Bliesener, & Bender, 2007; Pettit, 1997). At a more distal level of influence, exposure to community violence may impact adolescent aggression (Salzinger, Feldman, & Stockhammer, 2002; Scarpa & Ollendick, 2003; Shahinfar, Kupersmidt, & Matza, 2001). For example, among aggressive, incarcerated adolescent boys, exposure to community violence was associated with several SIP factors

known to relate to aggressive behaviors, including approval of aggression, difficulty with social cue interpretation, use of proactive aggression to achieve social goals, and positive aggression outcome expectancies, with some evidence for unique profiles of risk based on witnessed versus experienced community violence (Shahinfar et al., 2001). Additionally, school functioning, engagement, and academic achievement may be impacted by relational and physical victimization experiences, and these relations may be associated with the related internalizing and externalizing problems associated with each form of victimization (Craig et al., 2001; Hoglund, 2007). More specifically, internalizing problems are more strongly associated with relational than physical victimization, and partially mediate the influence of victimization on school engagement, whereas externalizing problems partially mediate the influence of victimization on school functioning. However, these relations may vary by gender (Hoglund, 2007).

In sum, despite the many positive and developmentally adaptive functions of peer relationships for adolescents, a number of significant risks are associated with the types of aggression and victimization that can occur within adolescent peer contexts. However, the peer-violence literature has tended to focus primarily on social contexts of peer and friendship domains, with relatively less attention to the types of violence that exist in adolescent dating and romantic relationships. Given the intricate interrelations between peer and dating domains in adolescence (Brown, 2006), such attention may be particularly important for gaining a more comprehensive assessment of violence and related risk behaviors during this developmental period.

Adolescent Dating Violence

Despite the many positive functions of adolescent romantic relationships in terms of social and emotional development, adolescent dating relationships may also be associated with significant sexual, physical, and relational risks (Bouchey & Furman, 2003). For example, although exploration of dating and romantic relations represents a normative developmental task of adolescence, in some cases dating relationships become violent and may lead to a number of difficulties for both perpetrators and victims. Because of the high prevalence of dating violence perpetration and victimization among adolescents, and because of the associated negative sequelae, this relatively understudied domain of adolescent aggression warrants further review. Although an extensive literature base exists on adult intimate partner violence and marital abuse (for a review, see Johnson, 1995), the current review will focus on the literature for adolescents and young adults, insofar as the context of adolescent dating violence (e.g., importance of peers, developmental context, levels of autonomy, types and contexts of interpersonal connection) may have unique features as compared to its manifestation at other life periods. Consistent with the previous sections on adolescent peer-based violence, the following sections will review definitions of dating violence, prevalence, age and gender differences, and correlates, predictors, and outcomes with which it has been associated.

Definitions. Dating violence has been defined in a variety of ways, often including attempts to control or dominate physically, sexually, or psychologically that cause some degree of harm (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). Although some researchers have restricted the definition to include only threats or use of physical force (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001), the

continuum of acts considered within this domain more commonly include behaviors of interpersonal coercion, power assertion, persistent arguing, threats, emotional manipulation, verbal abuse, physical violence, and sexual violence (e.g., Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). Although dating violence perpetration and victimization may be reciprocal, some researchers have explicated perpetration and victimization as excluding acts performed in self-defense (i.e., acts of perpetration are only counted if they are performed first, and not in response to a partner's aggression; acts of victimization are only counted if they are received first, and not if the partner enacted the behavior out of self-defense) (e.g., Foshee, 1996).

Commonly studied subtypes of dating violence include physical, psychological, and sexual perpetration (e.g., Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). Physical violence perpetration and victimization have been divided by some researchers into mild, moderate, and severe forms, based on the likelihood of resulting injuries. Examples of physical dating violence include scratching, slapping, pushing, slamming or holding someone against a wall, biting, choking, burning, beating someone up, and assault with a weapon (Foshee, 1996). Whereas threats of physical harm may be encompassed within definitions of physical aggression within the peer violence literature (Farrell et al., 2000; Mercy et al., 2002), within the dating violence literature, many researchers have included threatening behaviors within the domain of psychological abuse (e.g., Foshee, 1996; James, West, Deters, & Armijo, 2000). Examples of such threatening behaviors could include damaging a partner's property, throwing something at a partner but missing, starting to hit a partner but stopping, or threatening to hurt a partner (Foshee, 1996). Psychological

abuse also includes other dimensions such as excessively monitoring a partner's behaviors, personal insults, and emotional manipulation. For example, monitoring could include not allowing a partner to interact with other people (friends or members of the other sex) or making a partner account for his or her whereabouts at all times (Foshee, 1996). More recently, psychological abuse may also include monitoring or bullying through the use of technology (e.g., cell phones, internet), although this form of violence is only recently gaining attention primarily within peer domains (Slonje & Smith, 2008).

Emotional abuse is a construct that is similar to psychological abuse insofar as examples may include humiliating, insulting, criticizing, or berating a partner; however, emotional abuse is distinguished by the explicit use of intimidation to obtain control over a partner. The functions of this form of violence are to damage the victim's self-esteem, and as a result, foster the dominant role of the aggressor. Purposeful manipulations of jealousy and suspiciousness are common forms of emotional abuse, which may in turn lead to arguments, acts of intimidation, or escalation of violence. Isolation from friends, family, or other forms of social support, and attempting to make a victim feel "crazy" or questioning of his or her own judgment are also common forms of emotional abuse that may contribute to a loss of self-esteem and independence (Smith & Donnelly, 2001). Another similar construct that has recently emerged in the literature, relational dating aggression (e.g., Schad, Szwedo, Antonishak, Hare, & Allen, 2008), is defined as "efforts to manipulate romantic relationships by using jealousy, ignoring, and threats to end the relationship" (Leadbeater et al., 2008, p. 368).

Sexual violence is another subtype of dating violence that has typically been separated for study from other forms of physical abuse. Sexual violence may include rape, attempted rape, verbal sexual coercion, and other forms of forced sexual contact (Rickert, Wiemann, Vaughan, & White, 2004; Foshee, 1996). Pressure to have sex before one is ready to do so, or pressure to have sex more than one wishes, may also be classified as sexual abuse (Smith & Donnelly, 2001). Further, although sexual abuse may include intercourse, many other acts are also included within the definition, insofar as "every act leading up to sexual intercourse can be classified as sexual abuse if it is without consent, painful, unprotected or performed in a demeaning way" (Smith & Donnelly, 2001, p. 57). A new term proposed in the qualitative literature, sexual bullying, refers to actions with a fusion of elements of sexual harassment, bullying, and aggression, with an underlying gender-based power structure manipulation (Shute, Owens, & Slee, 2008). The current study examined physical and psychological subtypes of aggression and victimization because these behaviors have been demonstrated to be prevalent and problematic for adolescents (e.g., Foshee, Linder, MacDougall, & Bangdiwala, 2001; Foshee, Benefield, Ennett, Bauman, & Suchindran, 2004).

Prevalence, age and gender differences. Despite the only recent empirical attention to the various forms of adolescent dating violence, rates of perpetration and victimization among this age group are quite high. Across the literature, prevalence rates of dating violence perpetration range from 10 to 76%, rates of threatening behavior range from 13 to 28%, and victimization rates range from 25 to 76% (Avery-Leaf, Cascardi, O'Leary, & Cano, 1997; Close, 2005; Foshee, 1996; Foshee et al., 1996; Holt &

Espelage, 2007; James et al., 2000; Jouriles, McDonald, Garrido, Rosenfield, & Brown, 2005), with some variability by type of violence and other demographic variables.

For example, prevalence of sexual violence tends to be relatively lower (3 to 11%) than physical violence (20 to 53%), which in turn tends to be lower than emotional and psychological forms of abuse (as high as 76% prevalence) (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Avery-Leaf et al., 1997; Foshee et al., 1996; Holt & Espelage, 2007; James et al., 2000). The types of violence and prevalence of these acts may also vary for couples with unilateral violence, compared to the majority of violent adolescent relationships that involve mutual or reciprocal violence (prevalence ranging from 66 to 86%) (Gaertner & Foshee, 1999; Gray & Foshee, 1997; O'Leary, Slep, Avery-Leaf, & Cascardi, 2008). Further, some evidence suggests that racial/ethnic minority youth (African American males and females, Latina females) may be at higher risk for dating violence perpetration and victimization, as compared with Caucasian youth (Howard & Wang, 2003a,b). Prevalence and forms of dating violence may also differ for sexual minority youth; however, limited research has examined dating violence among gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender teens (Freedner, Freed, Yang, & Austin, 2002; Halpern, Young, Waller, Martin, & Kupper, 2004).

Important gender differences exist in both prevalence rates of perpetration and victimization, as well as in subtypes of aggression used. In general, females tend to exhibit higher prevalence of dating violence perpetration than males during adolescence, which is a gender perpetration pattern unique to this form of violence and this developmental period (Feiring et al., 2002; Foshee, 1996). However, although girls tend

to perpetrate more frequently than boys, some research suggests that boys and girls are roughly equally likely to be victims of physical dating violence (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Avery-Leaf et al., 1997; Foshee, 1996), despite differences in the severity of these physical forms of attack. For example, some research suggests that boys tend to perpetrate more severe physical and sexual violence than females, whereas girls may perpetrate more verbal aggression and be more psychologically and sexually victimized than males (Foshee, 1996; Muñoz-Rivas, Graña, O'Leary, & González, 2007). Other research on psychological abuse shows that males most commonly use psychological abuse alone, whereas girls more commonly use psychological abuse in combination with physical abuse (Sears et al., 2007). Across the literature, though, boys consistently appear to be less severely victimized than girls, based on the severity of reported violent acts and frequency and severity of sustained injuries (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Avery-Leaf et al., 1997; Foshee, 1996; Muñoz-Rivas et al., 2007).

Even within the adolescent developmental period, age differences in prevalence and severity of dating violence are also important to consider. Both perpetration and victimization increase from early to mid-adolescence in frequency and severity. For example, in a six-month longitudinal study of eighth and ninth grade students, adolescent-reported perpetration increased from 20 to 32% prevalence, and victimization increased from 36 to 48% (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004). Additionally, more physical and emotional abuse has been reported among high school students than among middle school students (Holt & Espelage, 2005). Also, although the frequency of physical perpetration may begin to decrease by late adolescence/emerging adulthood,

consequences of dating violence (e.g., physical and mental health) may become more severe with age (Muñoz-Rivas et al., 2007).

In conclusion, the research on prevalence of adolescent dating violence suggests that these behaviors are quite frequent (e.g., Avery-Leaf et al., 1997; Close, 2005; Foshee, 1996; Foshee et al., 1996; Holt & Espelage, 2007; James et al., 2000; Jouriles et al., 2005). However, more research is needed on how these prevalence rates may vary for ethnic and sexual minority youth. Particularly because of the unique manifestation of this form of violence during the adolescent period (e.g., role of peers, developmental novelty of romantic relationships, different patterns of perpetration by gender compared to peer violence and compared to dating violence at other stages of development), special attention should be paid to the unique patterns of correlates, predictors, and outcomes that characterize this type of aggression at this time in development.

Correlates, predictors, and outcomes of adolescent dating violence. A wide variety of factors have been associated with adolescent dating violence, representing both the heterogeneity of developmental trajectories toward dating violence and associated sequelae, as well as the range of theoretical bases by which these factors have been considered. For example, some common themes associated with the onset of abusive relationships include exposure to violence, substance use/abuse, relationship contextual variables, personality variables, relational stress, conflict resolution and self-regulation skills, and prior victimization and aggression experiences (e.g., Close, 2005). Specific risk factors associated with participation in an abusive relationship include childhood maltreatment or sexual abuse, mental health disorders, early sexual behavior, and

42

substance use, and the sequelae of such relationships may involve risks to physical and psychological health, quality of life and relationships, and various health-related behaviors (e.g., unhealthy weight control, risk for sexually-transmitted infections, and suicidal ideation) (e.g., Close, 2005; Cyr, McDuff, & Wright, 2006; Gaertner & Foshee, 1999; Rickert et al., 2004).

A number of individual social-cognitive predictors and correlates of adolescent dating violence have been framed within SIP theories and related literature. Two important social-cognitive variables, attitudes toward violence and sensitivity to interpersonal rejection, may predict dating violence perpetration. For example, positive attitudes toward violence mediated relations between exposure to parental aggression (i.e., directed at youth via parent-to-child aggression) and exposure to peer aggression (i.e., aggressive peer association) and subsequent dating violence perpetration (Brendgen et al., 2002). Further, interpersonal rejection sensitivity mediated the relations between parent-to-child aggression and peer rejection and dating violence perpetration outcomes (Brendgen et al., 2002). Such rejection sensitivity may encompass both emotional factors (e.g., emotion regulation in response to rejection or anticipation of rejection) and cognitive factors (e.g., biased interpretation of interpersonal cues). In one study of late adolescent and emerging adult men, dating violence perpetrators articulated more irrational and cognitively biased thoughts and fewer anger-controlling thoughts than non-violent men under conditions of anger arousal (Eckhardt & Jamison, 2002). In addition, researchers found that response generation and evaluation stages of the SIP model were

significant mediators of the relation between childhood interparental conflict and adult romantic relationship conflict (Fite et al., 2008).

Another important social-cognitive variable, beliefs about aggression, may represent an important area for understanding the pathways to adolescent dating violence perpetration and victimization. Beliefs that are tolerant and accepting of aggression represent a significant risk for dating violence perpetration (Goldstein et al., 2008; Josephson & Proulx, 2008; Sears et al., 2007). This risk may be further delineated by gender-specific attitudes, such that attitudes toward female versus male dating violence perpetration may affect physical versus psychological aggression perpetration, respectively (Josephson & Proulx, 2008). Also, traditional beliefs about male and female gender roles in relationships (i.e., traditional views about how husbands and wives "should" behave or what "should" happen in marriages) and associated justification of violence are associated with increased dating violence perpetration (Lichter & McCloskey, 2004). Chronic sexual victimization for females is also predicted by gender stereotyped norms and beliefs (Foshee et al., 2004). Aggression expectancies may also impact adolescent dating violence. One study with adolescent vignettes suggests that despite perceiving interpersonal actions and responses as being "appropriate" behaviorally, adolescents may still expect or predict that such actions would produce aggression toward a partner (i.e., higher aggression expectations than aggressive perceptions or attributions) (Próspero, 2006).

Moreover, individuals' sense of identity (both individually and in the context of their relationships) may be important for understanding the development of adolescent

dating violence. For example, beliefs in the importance of romantic relationships and contingency of one's self worth on relationships, and having a weaker sense of self may place individuals at increased risk for dating violence victimization (Goldstein et al., 2008; Howard et al., 2005). Both perpetration and victimization are predicted by higher exclusivity and anxious attachment styles in dating relationships, as well as by greater symptoms of anxiety and depression (Goldstein et al., 2008). Beliefs that aggression represents a way of showing love within a relationship may also place adolescents at increased risk for dating violence victimization (Swart, Stevens, & Ricardo, 2002).

Both victimization and perpetration within dating contexts have been associated with internalizing symptoms and disorders. For example, depressed mood and general internalizing symptoms are associated with dating violence perpetration for females (Banyard, Cross, & Modecki, 2006; Chase, Treboux, & O'Leary, 2002), and sad and hopeless feelings have been associated with increased risk for physical victimization for both males and females (Howard & Wang, 2003a,b). Physical and emotional dating victimization have also been associated with increased symptoms of anxiety and depression for both males and females, although perceived social support may moderate this relation, particularly for African American males (Holt & Espelage, 2005). Also for males, dating victimization is predicted by a history of low self-esteem and is associated with suicidal ideation and/or attempts (Foshee et al., 2004; Howard et al., 2005; Howard & Wang, 2003a). Posttraumatic stress symptoms have been associated with increased severity and frequency of dating violence victimization for both males and females, and these symptoms may mediate the relation between child maltreatement and adolescent

45

dating violence for females (Callahan, Tolman, & Saunders, 2003; Wekerle et al., 2001). Also for females, sexual victimization may be predicted by depression symptoms (Foshee et al., 2004), and victimization more generally may also be associated with dissociative psychological symptoms (Callahan et al., 2003).

Spanning the effects of individual-level and proximal peer factors, is centered the debate regarding the bi-directional nature of influence between individuals' dating relationships and peers. As with many adolescent risk behaviors, researchers have attempted to disentangle the effects of peer selection (i.e., selection of peers with norms/beliefs or engagement in risk behaviors similar to oneself) versus peer influence (i.e., shifting one's own norms, beliefs, and/or behaviors to fit those of one's peer group) (e.g., Sieving, Perry, & Williams, 2000), with mixed results within the domain of dating violence. For example, among eighth and ninth graders, males with dating victimization experiences were found to have increased levels of dating violence among their friends over time (i.e., selection), whereas girls with higher levels of initial dating violence in their group of friends later experienced more dating victimization themselves (i.e., influence) (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004). In a separate study, for both males and females, having a friend who had been a previous victim of dating violence increased one's own likelihood of being victimized as well (Foshee et al., 2004).

However, regardless of the ultimate direction of these influences, a plethora of health risk behaviors are associated with dating violence. Adolescents who are exposed to alcohol use in their peer group are at increased risk for dating violence victimization (Howard, Qiu, & Boekeloo, 2003). Girls who perpetrate dating violence are nearly five

times more likely to use alcohol than their non-aggressive peers, and both boys and girls who perpetrate dating violence are four times more likely to use drugs (Pepler, Craig, Connolly, & Henderson, 2002). Other health risk behaviors associated with dating victimization include multiple sex partners and sex with non-monogamous partners, nonuse of condoms, pregnancy, binge drinking, cocaine/inhalant use, and unhealthy weight control behaviors (Howard & Wang, 2003a,b; Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001; Thompson, Wonderlich, Crosby, & Mitchell, 2001; Wingood, DiClemente, McCree, Harrington, & Davies, 2001). In one study, up to 52% of adolescent girls diagnosed with a sexually-transmitted infection reported concurrent dating violence victimization (Decker, Silverman, & Raj, 2005).

Further, concurrent health risk behavior profiles may vary by gender. For example, in one study, dating victimization among females was associated with alcohol and marijuana use, early initiation of alcohol use, and sexual history (i.e., ever having sex, number of lifetime partners), whereas victimization among males was only associated with sexual history (Eaton, Davis, Barrios, Brener, & Noonan, 2007). One clear negative health outcome associated with physical and sexual forms of violence is physical injury, which may be more common and also more severe among females, as compared to males (Avery-Leaf et al., 1997). One study found prevalence rates for sustained injuries from physical dating violence of around 12% for males and 17% for females (Avery-Leaf et al., 1997), with other studies reporting injury rates as high as 25% for males and females (O'Leary et al., 2008).

Other proximal peer influences may also be related to adolescent dating violence. Not surprisingly, histories of involvement in peer-based and dating violence are associated with current dating violence perpetration and victimization for adolescent males (Banyard et al., 2006; Chase et al., 2002; Foshee et al., 2004) and perpetration for young adult males and females (O'Donnell et al., 2006). There is also significant overlap (59%) between adolescent boys who perpetrate delinquency-related aggression and those who perpetrate acts of dating violence (Brendgen et al., 2002). Early association with deviant peers, and increasing involvement with such peers over time, has been associated with higher rates of dating violence perpetration (Schnurr & Lohman, 2008). And some evidence suggests that such extrafamilial violence may be more predictive of dating victimization than intrafamilial violence exposure for females. Specifically, exposure to male peer sexual harassment, previous dating victimization, membership in a peer group characterized by violence or victimization, and a history of involvement in physical fights may increase the likelihood of adolescent girls' own dating victimization (Gagné, Lavoie, & Hébert, 2005; Howard et al., 2005). Other types of externalizing behaviors (e.g., antisocial behavior, substance abuse, delinquency, property damage) have also been associated with dating violence perpetration, perhaps more strongly for boys (e.g., Lavoie et al., 2002), as well as relational victimization for boys and girls (Leadbeater et al., 2008).

Other important proximal socioecological factors associated with adolescent dating violence involve youths' interactions with parents. For males and females, a history of child maltreatment or physical abuse by an adult (i.e., being hit with the

intention of harm) is associated with verbal, physical, and sexual dating violence victimization and perpetration (Foshee et al., 2004; Foshee, Ennett, Bauman, Benefield, & Suchindran, 2005; Wolfe, Scott, Wekerle, & Pittman, 2001; Wolfe, Wekerle, Reitzel-Jaffe, & Lefebvre, 1998). Females with a history of childhood sexual abuse may have significantly higher rates of dating violence perpetration and victimization in their adolescent dating relationships than their non-abused peers, with physical victimization prevalence rates as high as 45% and prevalence of reciprocal psychological abuse at over 90% (Cyr et al., 2006; Holt & Espelage, 2005). For boys, exposure to interparental conflict may increase the risk for verbal and physical dating violence perpetration, and this relation appears to be mediated by increased beliefs in the justifiability and commonness of aggression and difficulty with anger management (Kinsfogel & Grych, 2004). However, exposure to family violence was more predictive of dating violence perpetration for African American adolescents than Caucasian adolescents (Foshee et al., 2005). Chronic victimization for females is also predicted by single parent residence (Foshee et al., 2004).

Parental monitoring has been associated with lower levels of dating violence victimization for boys and girls (Howard et al., 2003; Leadbeater et al., 2008), and lower levels of perpetration for boys (Lavoie et al., 2002). Parental monitoring is also protective against relational forms of dating violence perpetration (Leadbeater et al., 2008), whereas harsh parenting practices have also been associated with higher levels of dating violence perpetration for boys (Lavoie et al., 2002). Despite the important relations between these parental variables and adolescent dating violence, some evidence suggests that the impact

of these factors may relate more directly to their influence on internal youth

characteristics, such as beliefs, attitudes, and values. For example, exposure to parents'

marital violence during childhood may increase adolescents' beliefs in the justifiability of

the use of violence in dating relationships, and these beliefs about dating relationships

tend to be more important predictors of dating violence than exposure to marital violence

per se (Lichter & McCloskey, 2004). Parental closeness and support are related to dating

violence attitudes and behaviors, and these relations are varyingly mediated by youth

self-esteem. For example, among youth from lower SES, low self-esteem mediates the

relation between parenting and dating violence behaviors, whereas among higher SES

youth, low self-esteem only mediates the relation with dating violence attitudes (Pflieger

& Vazsonyi, 2006).

Finally, at a more distal level of socioecological influence, exposure to

community violence, including exposure to weapons and violent injury (Malik, Sorenson,

& Aneshensel, 1997) and school-based violence (O'Keefe, 1998), has been associated

with beliefs in the justifiability of romantic aggression as well as increases in actual

dating violence perpetration and victimization prevalence. In one study, this type of

community violence exposure and associated increases in dating violence was highest

among African Americans, boys, and older adolescents (Malik et al., 1997). Other

research suggests that dating violence may also be related to socioecological factors and

low SES (O'Keefe, 1998). Further, lack of perceived safety at school and academic

difficulties may exacerbate the impact of witnessed parental violence on dating violence

for some youth, with some indications that this is more pronounced for minority males (Schnurr & Lohman, 2008).

As demonstrated within the previous sections' review, peer and dating violence occur frequently within the adolescent developmental period and exact an incalculable toll on perpetrators, victims, and society more broadly. However, despite the negative outcomes associated with peer and dating violence, teens still engage in such behaviors, and do so at alarming rates. Because these forms of aggression and victimization are among the most serious risk-behaviors exhibited in adolescence, it is imperative that researchers understand the processes behind students' decision-making that may lead them to engage in such behaviors. Attention to *how* students think about the risks inherent in their social contexts may help to inform prevention and intervention efforts directed at changing the outcomes of those decision-making and cognitive processes.

Decision-Making and Risk-Taking Behaviors in Adolescence

A number of influential theories on decision-making processes associated with risk behaviors exist in the current literature base. A key premise of the current research is that adolescents' evaluation of potential positive and negative outcomes in risky dating and peer situations may influence decision-making processes, and the following review highlights decision-making theories that attend to social, emotional, and cognitive processes that may be significant for the adolescent developmental period. Further, social information processing theory and its subcomponent response evaluation and decision model are reviewed as a model of decision-making with particular relevance for the study of adolescent peer and dating violence. Finally, rational decision-making theories are

reviewed, highlighting how elements of these theories can be integrated with response

evaluation and decision-making elements of the SIP theory to better understand how

adolescents think about and evaluate risk in their decision-making processes related to

peer and dating violence. Within this review, specific attention is directed to the unique

impact of accounting for not just how adolescents make decisions about enacting specific

behaviors once they are already engaged with peers in a risky context, but also how

adolescents think about and conceptualize potential positive and negative elements of the

risky situations themselves (i.e., pros and cons, costs and benefits, or potential good and

bad outcomes inherent to various potentially risky or problematic situations) that may

provide a framework for decision-making processes.

Some of the well-known theories of risk-based decision-making associated with

adolescent problem behaviors include problem behavior theory, biopsychosocial models,

and models of socialization influence. Problem behavior theory suggests that risk-

behaviors increase during adolescence as an indicator of independence. This theory

encompasses social structural variables such as family factors, peer influence, school

context, neighborhood resources, poverty, and racial discrimination, but offers limited

insight into cognitive and affective risk-based decision-making (Boyer, 2006; Jessor,

1993). The biopsychosocial model of chronic conduct problems highlights the

transactional influences of biological predispositions and sociocultural risks that may

propel some youth to chronic behavioral dysregulation, including consideration of the

mediating influence of intrapersonal processes (e.g., cognitive, emotional). However, this

model fails to capture processes underlying more developmentally normative risk-taking

(Boyer, 2006; Dodge & Pettit, 2003). The theory of broad and narrow socialization links social developmental factors with risk-based decision-making, noting that broad sociocultural/contextual factors (e.g., autonomy, rules and punishment) and narrow factors (e.g., group allegiance) determine the contextual basis for engaging in risk behaviors. Further, this theory links contextual influence with intrapersonal factors (e.g., egocentrism, sensation-seeking) in explaining risk-based decision processes. However, other evidence suggests that some of this model's cognitive assumptions (e.g., adolescent egocentrism) may be less relevant than previously assumed (Arnett, 1992; Boyer, 2006).

Several decision-making theories specifically emphasize the role of affect and emotion regulation. The somatic marker hypothesis suggests that "rational" decision-making is inextricably linked to emotional processing, particularly in risk-based decision-making. The key tenet of this affective decision-making theory is that "decision-making is a process that is influenced by marker signals that arise in bioregulatory processes, including those that express themselves in emotions and feelings," wherein emotions serve as an important link between the environment and an individual's decision-making (Bechara & Damasio, 2005, p. 336; Boyer, 2006). The self-regulation model of decision-making suggests that failure to adequately self-regulate may negate crucial attending to and analyzing of information relevant to the process of decision-making, and that these self-regulation systems are still developing during adolescence (Boyer, 2006; Byrnes, Miller, & Reynolds, 1999). Similarly, the psychosocial maturity theory of criminal and antisocial behaviors integrates cognitive and affective components, suggesting that the ability to inhibit impulsiveness and critically evaluate situations is essential to adaptive

53

decision-making. This theory emphasizes the role of responsibility, perspective, and temperance in decision-making. However, it has been criticized for its circularity insofar as "adolescents are assumed to take risks because they are psychosocially immature, and, conversely, they are considered less psychosocially mature because they take risks" (Boyer, 2006, p. 310; Cauffman & Steinberg, 2000; Steinberg & Cauffman, 1996).

Despite the importance of these various models of risk-behaviors and adolescent decision-making, the SIP model has served as the foundation for the most commonly-used and best-supported risk-behavior interventions for adolescents (Boxer & Dubow, 2002; Sullivan et al., 2008; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). Within the SIP model of youth aggression, decision-making involves a series of six steps of information processing (Crick & Dodge, 1994), including: 1) encoding cues, 2) interpreting and mentally representing those cues, 3) selecting a goal, 4) generating possible responses, 5) evaluating and selecting a response, and 6) enacting the response. Following this series of steps, youth encode information about the response and circularly repeat the process. Also, because youth come into social situations with their own histories of experience and biological predispositions, their processing at each of these steps may vary depending on a number of factors. For example, some youth may selectively attend to certain cues, thus impacting their encoding and subsequent response generation and selection. The individual's latent mental structures (e.g., schemas, beliefs, scripts) may also influence this process at various steps (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Huesmann, 1988).

Although SIP researchers have examined a number of factors associated with decisions to engage in aggressive versus non-aggressive actions (e.g., hostile attribution

bias, self-efficacy for enacting various responses, beliefs about the effectiveness of aggressive versus non-aggressive responses) (e.g., de Castro et al., 2005; Lochman & Dodge, 1994; Pettit, 1997), research has paid little attention to specific problem situations faced by youth that may place them at risk for violence (Farrell et al., 2007; Sullivan et al., 2009). Further, the problem-situation research that does exist has yet to fully examine students' own perceptions about the potential costs and benefits associated with such high-risk situations. Like the influence of schemas, beliefs, scripts, and other cognitive structures and processes on each step of the SIP decision-making process, such perceptions of potential positive or negative situational factors or outcomes could also influence adolescents' decision-making processes across various stages of the SIP model.

The fifth step of the SIP model has been further elaborated upon within the response evaluation and decision (RED) model of decision-making in aggressive youth, offering a more nuanced theoretical perspective on the intervening processes that occur at this evaluative step of risk-based decision making (Fontaine & Dodge, 2006). However, emerging research has only begun to consider factors associated with response selection in real-time decision-making models, and these models have thus far remained largely theoretical (Fontaine & Dodge, 2006). Within the RED model, a series of decision processes occur that lead an individual from their pool of response options to the point of behavioral enactment of their selected response. Similar to the SIP model, the RED model also considers individual-level factors, such as the influence of an individual's database of cognitive resources on both the processes of response evaluation as well as on the content of the pool of response options available. Within this model, adolescents are

posited to first apply some threshold of acceptability to response options generated from their pool. If those response options do not meet some minimal threshold, then the individual returns to the pool for additional options. Once the threshold is met, non-impulsive responders then proceed to: 1) consider their efficacy, 2) evaluate outcome expectancies and the value placed on outcomes, 3) compare responses, 4) select a response, and ultimately 5) enact the selected response (Fontaine & Dodge, 2006).

The RED model also posits that although most individuals proceed through these steps, some impulsive responders may largely bypass the evaluative processes of the fifth step of the SIP model. Thus, whereas most non-impulsive responders proceed through at least some stages of evaluation of outcome expectancies and efficacy, impulsive responders may proceed immediately to behavioral enactment with the first response option generated that meets their minimal threshold of acceptability (Fontaine, Burks, & Dodge, 2002; Fontaine & Dodge, 2006). Models of instrumental antisocial decision-making similarly emphasize goal assessment, sociomoral and outcome appraisals, and ultimately behavioral decision (Fontaine, 2006, 2007). However, across these models, relatively little empirical attention has focused on adolescents' overall perceptions of positive and negative aspects of specific risk situations (e.g., what are the facets of possible outcomes youth take under consideration) or the processes by which these evaluations are used (e.g., how do these considerations differ for different youth or in different situations) in the greater processing of social information. For example, a risky situation that is viewed as potentially high in benefit may result in the generation of

differential goals, response options, and evaluations than one that is viewed as potentially high in costs.

The recent expansion of the SIP model to include the more elaborated RED model draws attention to a critical debate in the decision-making literature regarding the extent to which decision-making is a deliberative or rational process. In general, across the various models of risk-based decision-making, theories have been broadly classified into two primary categories: rational decision-making models that emphasize deliberative, quantitative weighing of factors and non-deliberative/reactive models based on gists or prototypes. Dual-process models incorporate both paths to risk behaviors (i.e., reasoned and reactive pathways) (Reyna & Farley, 2006). Early decision-making research emphasized probabilistic theories, in which the utility of a risk or gamble was viewed as a mathematically-calculable axiom of behavior. However, later research suggested that people do not always behave according to such rational rules of decision-making (Boyer, 2006). Factors such as the style of presentation of the risk, individual perceptual and attentional capacities, and other automatic, intuitive, and heuristic strategies may greatly influence risk-perception and decision-making (Boyer, 2006). Further, for adolescents, the developmental or situational context in which these processes occur represents an integral focus of research, insofar as psychosocial factors may exert unique influence over adolescent decision-making to engage in violence, as compared with adults, including "susceptibility to peer influence, attitudes toward and perception of risk, future orientation, and the capacity for self management" (Steinberg & Scott, 2003, p. 1012). However, despite theoretical and some empirical support for attending to these

developmental, situational, and contextual influences on decision-making, limited research has examined how these factors may influence adolescents' decision-making in risky situations, nor has research examined the specific influence of appraisal of potential positive and negative outcomes associated with situations that may place adolescents at risk for dating and peer-based violence.

In addition to the SIP model, several notable rational decision-making theories on adolescent risk behaviors include health-belief models, theories of reasoned action and planned behavior, and problem-solving theories, each of which include consideration of risk/benefit perception, social norms, self-efficacy, perceived control, and behavioral intention. By contrast, several newer non-deliberative theories include prototype/ willingness models and fuzzy-trace theory, both of which emphasize mental representations, willingness, and contextually-based risk-avoidant value retrieval. More specifically, these models suggest that risk-based decision-making may proceed via individuals' intuitive grasp of the "gist" of situations and risk, rather than conscious deliberative choice. Additionally, discussions of various decision-making models often note the factors of coherence and correspondence. Whereas coherent decision-making reflects internal consistency for the individual (i.e., consistent adherence to rules of logic), correspondence in decision-making reflects acquisition of one's goal (i.e., basis in real-world outcomes) (Reyna & Farley, 2006).

Based on a review of these theories, three primary groups of adolescent decision-makers have been proposed. The first are risky deliberators, whose decision-making is based on perceived risks and benefits per traditional rational behavioral decision-making

approaches. The second group consists of risky reactors, who react spontaneously and disjointedly from rational weighing of costs and benefits (i.e., behavioral willingness outweighs intentions or beliefs). Finally, gist-based decision-makers avoid deliberation of risks and benefits, instead relying on their intuitive grasp of risk and retrieval of risk-related values (Reyna & Farley, 2006).

One theory of adolescent development and decision-making holds that adolescents may underestimate risk outcomes in their deliberation (i.e., risky deliberators) due to misconceptions of personal invulnerability associated with their cognitive egocentrism (e.g., underestimating their probability of being in an automobile accident). Both youth and adults may exhibit an optimistic bias, or relative viewing of their own risk as being lower than that of their peers (e.g., perceiving one's own risk of contracting lung cancer from smoking as lower than the risk for other long-term smokers), and this bias may exist separately from individuals' prototypical style of decision-making (i.e., risky deliberators, risky reactors, and gist-based decision-makers may all have optimistic bias) (Reyna & Farley, 2006). Although some research suggests that adolescents may have stronger optimistic biases than adults (e.g., Arnett, 1992, 2000; Weinstein, 1989), other research suggests that adolescents and adults may have similar functioning in their consequence perception, outcome probability assessment, and perception of invulnerability (e.g., Beyth-Marom, Austin, Fischhoff, Palmgren, & Jacobs-Quadrel, 1993; Boyer, 2006). Indeed, some research suggests that adolescents may even perceive themselves as more vulnerable than adults, and that perceived vulnerability may decrease with age. For example, youth may overestimate important health risks, while

underestimating longer-term negative outcomes (e.g., overestimating the likelihood of contracting a disease but minimizing the perceived long-term impact of that disease in comparison to the short-term benefits in their social context). However, regardless of risk or vulnerability perception, adolescents' willingness or susceptibility to engage in risks may exceed their original intentions or expectations to do so, based on a number of factors (Reyna & Farley, 2006).

Despite cognitive risk-awareness, adolescents may engage in risk behaviors because the perceived risks or potential negative outcomes are considered acceptable or reasonable (Boyer, 2006). For risky deliberators, this consideration may be quite purposive, whereas for risky reactors these risks may be less well-considered, and for gist-based decision-makers the anticipated outcome may be more intuitively presumed (Reyna & Farley, 2006). In any case, however, research suggests that adolescent risk-behaviors are positively associated with the perceived benefits or potential positive outcomes and negatively associated with the perceived costs or potential negative outcomes, yet adolescents rate risk behaviors as less harmful than adults. In other words, adolescents may not ignore or fail to acknowledge potential negative outcomes in their risk-assessment. Rather, they may be more willing to accept the inherent risks of certain behaviors because the potential positive outcomes are deemed so highly desirable. In this sense, potential positive outcome values may be more relevant to adolescent decision-making than probability estimation per se (Boyer, 2006). Alternatively stated, perceived benefits may "loom larger than risks" or "carry more weight than perceived risks do," thus

driving adolescent risk-taking despite reasonably accurate risk-perception (Reyna & Farley, 2006, p. 6).

Despite these important differences in positive versus negative outcome values to youth, research has more extensively evaluated outcome probability estimation (i.e., how *likely* is it that X outcome will occur), while offering relatively little attention to estimations of overall positive and negative outcomes youth may associate with risky situations in peer and dating contexts that may then affect decision-making processes such as response evaluation (Boyer, 2006). This deficit in the literature represents a valuable opportunity for the integration of the rational decision-making literature that has historically focused on probability estimations with theories of social information processing and response evaluation. In the RED model, Fontaine and Dodge (2006) highlight the importance of outcome expectancies and valuations of potential responses to problem situations in social arenas, yet limited empirical attention has been directed at such factors. The current literature also offers little insight into overall risk and benefit evaluations considered by adolescents as they initially consider risky situations, nor does the research address ways that these risk/benefit perceptions may influence adolescents' decision-making processes. Further, these types of value estimations have not been studied within contextually-relevant peer and dating situations that may place youth at risk for violence perpetration, victimization, and other related risk behaviors. Given the emphasis within violence prevention and intervention programming on decision-making skills and the SIP framework, gaining an understanding of these overall evaluative processes of potential positive and negative outcomes in risky situations represents an

important step in creating interventions that best meet the needs of youth. Indeed, attempting to change students' behaviors in risky situations seems to be a daunting task without a solid understanding of *how* students themselves view those situations and *why* they might decide to engage in them, despite inherent risks.

Prevention Programs for Peer and Dating Violence

Given the extensive negative toll of youth violence, both at the individual level for perpetrators and victims, as well as at broader societal levels, prevention of youth violence represents an important public health initiative. Because school settings offer an efficient means of targeting youth, they have typically been the most common setting for violence prevention efforts (Farrell & Camou, 2006). Within these school-based violence prevention programs, intervention approaches may be classified into one of three categories: universal, selective, and indicated. Universal prevention focuses on entire school populations, regardless of individual students' risk for engaging in problem behaviors, and may focus both on individuals and interpersonal relationships, as well as social norms and environment (Farrell & Camou, 2006; Hahn et al., 2007; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). Selective interventions are designed for youth who are known to be at elevated risk for developing violence or problem behaviors, and indicated interventions are designed for youth who are not only at risk for such problems, but have already begun to demonstrate the types of problems the intervention is designed to impact (Farrell & Camou, 2006). Multilevel intervention programs combine elements of these primary and secondary prevention strategies (e.g., universal plus selective interventions) (Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). Although programs may vary widely across these types of interventions,

the most commonly used and best supported intervention strategies include affective, cognitive, and behavioral intervention strategies, many of which are grounded in components of SIP theory (Boxer & Dubow, 2002; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007).

Social problem-solving or decision-making skills are often included in both primary and secondary prevention programs as an important component of the SIP model, impacting both the knowledge of the decision-making skills themselves, as well as other related constructs such as self-efficacy in implementation of these strategies (e.g., Boxer & Dubow, 2002; Howard, Flora, & Griffin, 1999). Problem-solving and decision-making interventions have been identified as key competencies in youth violence prevention, and may span both emotional (e.g., sufficient emotion regulation to foster evaluative decision-making rather than impulsive or reactive responding) and social-cognitive (e.g., problem identification, social norm analysis, goal-setting, response generation) learning competencies (Sullivan et al., 2008; Payton et al., 2000). Specifically for adolescents, youth violence prevention programs have emphasized cognitive-developmental abilities and values of interpersonal relationships and social goals characteristic of this developmental period (Haynie, Alexander, & Walters, 1997).

Behavioral and emotional self-control represents a critical component of violence prevention efforts insofar as behavioral and emotional dysregulation may impact youths' ability to encode social information, interpret this information, and enact goal-directed responses (Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000). As a result, emotional awareness and regulation and behavioral impulse control have been targeted in violence prevention curricula (Boxer & Dubow, 2002). These constructs are often taught through anger management

skills (e.g., Frey, Hirchstein, & Guzzo, 2000; Lochman & Wells, 2002), skills in identifying, understanding, and communicating emotions, and skills in behavioral and impulse self-control (CPPRG, 1999; Frey, Nolen, Edstrom, & Hirschstein, 2005).

The SIP model of violence prevention offers a promising framework for risk-based decision-making interventions, encompassing response generation, response evaluation, and response selection (Boxer & Dubow, 2002; Crick & Dodge, 1994). Such interventions promote problem solving through challenging beliefs about violence, promoting consequential thinking strategies, and developing self-efficacy for non-violent behavior (Boxer & Dubow, 2002). Examples of such programs include Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways [RIPP], Second Step, The Metropolitan Area Child Study [MACS], Making Choices: Social Problem Solving Skills for Children Program, Fast Track, and Safe Dates (CPPRG, 1999; Farrell, Valois, Meyer, & Tidwell, 2003; Foshee, et al., 1996; Fraser et al., 2005; Frey et al., 2000; MACS Research Group, 2007). For example, the MACS, Second Step, and RIPP programs (Boxer & Dubow, 2002; Farrell et al., 2003; MACS, 2007; Van Schoiack-Edstrom, Frey, & Beland, 2002) address social-cognitive and emotion regulation processes. Social-cognitive components emphasize changing beliefs about aggressive behavior, such as through the MACS use of attitude-change strategies to modify youths' beliefs supporting aggression (MACS, 2007). The Safe Dates project targets beliefs about aggression, relationships, and prosocial resources, as well as gender norms and attributions (Foshee et al., 1996). These types of beliefs and norms represent the latent knowledge structures that may influence assimilation of social information and online processing of social cues (Cason, Resick, & Weaver, 2002; Crick

& Dodge, 1994). Other programs place greater emphasis on decision-making and problem-solving processes, such as RIPP and Second Step (i.e., including emphasis on generating possible responses, evaluating those responses, and selecting an appropriate response) (e.g., Farrell, Meyer, Kung, & Sullivan, 2001; Frey et al., 2000).

Despite the demonstrated effectiveness of some peer and dating violence prevention programs in targeting beliefs, values, and emotional/cognitive skill-building (Boxer & Dubow, 2002; Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007; Farrell & Camou, 2006; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007), these programs have proceeded under the assumption that providing students with such assets (on an individual-level and/or via influence on school/social norms) represented a sufficient goal for enabling behavior change. However, prevention and intervention programs have devoted less attention to reasons why adolescents may find themselves in risky situations to begin with, or reasons why adolescents may choose to enact risky behavioral choices despite knowledge and skills to the contrary. In essence, many prevention programs have been implemented with the assumption that student participants are interested in and ready for behavioral change, if only they had the skills, beliefs, and values consistent with those provided by the program. Violence prevention programs have typically not addressed the type of ambivalence to change that is common among a host of other risky behaviors (e.g., substance use, risky sexual behaviors, medical treatment non-adherence), nor has the field fully explored the decisional balances of costs and benefits youth may associate with risk situations and risk behaviors they face in daily life (e.g., Miller & Rollnick, 2002). In short, to some degree, violence prevention programs have done a good job of addressing beliefs, values, and skill-development, but

have typically not as thoroughly addressed motivational factors, functions served by aggressive behaviors, or costs and benefits associated with risky situations that may weigh into adolescents' decision-making processes.

In order to promote effective decision-making among adolescents in situations that may place them at risk for violence perpetration or victimization, researchers need to better understand adolescents' value estimations (i.e., perceived costs and benefits) associated with such situations, and to date such attention has been lacking within the literature (Boyer, 2006). In other words, whereas research supports the SIP and RED frameworks, including the importance of considering outcome expectancies and valuations in evaluating potential responses in decision-making (Fontaine & Dodge, 2006), interventions currently lack information about students' risk-based assessment as manifested in their overall perceptions of potential positive or negative outcomes associated with risky situations. Across a variety of other health-risk domains (e.g., substance use, sexual risk-taking, medical treatment non-adherence), attention to individuals' decisional balances of costs and benefits has proven particularly beneficial in increasing intrinsic motivation for behavioral change, reducing ambivalence about change, and enhancing effects of problem-solving/skill-building phases of intervention (e.g., LaBrie, Pedersen, Thompson, & Earleywine, 2008; Miller & Rollnick, 2002; Suarez & Mullins, 2008; Walters, Vader, Harris, Field, & Jouriles, 2009). Further, simply acknowledging individuals' perspectives on costs and benefits of risky behaviors may improve alliance with interventionists by promoting empathy and portraying a sense of programmatic credibility (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). The current study will attempt to

address this deficit in the adolescent violence literature by qualitatively exploring youths'

evaluations of potential positive and negative outcomes associated with risky situations in

both peer and dating contexts.

Statement of the Problem

Adolescent violence perpetration, victimization, and related risk-behaviors across dating and peer contexts represent serious public health concerns with far-reaching implications. Given the significant overlap in various forms of youth risk behaviors and the frequent co-occurrence of aggression across dating and peer domains, researchers have called for an increased focus in prevention on "bridging the gap" among various risk behaviors with intervention that is derived with cultural and contextual relevance and appropriateness (Leadbeater et al., 2008; Ozer et al., 2004). However, researchers have only recently begun to devote attention toward core competencies and processes that may "bridge the gap" by promoting youth resiliency across various risk domains, and most intervention programs continue to focus on the prevention of specific problem behaviors (e.g., peer-based aggression, dating violence, sexual risk-taking) (DuRant et al., 1994; Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Pittman & Wolfe, 2002). The present study aimed to address these issues by exploring a key factor associated with adolescent risk-based decision-making, specifically, how adolescents conceptualize and evaluate risky social situations occurring in peer and dating contexts in terms of potential positive and negative outcomes.

A primary goal of the current study was to develop an enhanced understanding of adolescents' perceptions of positive and negative outcomes associated with commonly encountered risky peer-based and dating situations among urban, lower-income, predominantly minority youth. Such an understanding may help to promote the development and refinement of health promotion programs to provide ecologically-valid,

culturally-sensitive, and contextually-relevant intervention. To accomplish this aim, the current study built upon previous research designed to identify ecologically relevant problem situations commonly encountered by youth in these contexts (Farrell et al., 2007; Sullivan et al., 2009). The current study utilized qualitative methodology to capture the richness of youths' social-cognitive processing about potential costs and benefits associated with these ecologically valid risky situations.

The present study offered several valuable areas of contribution to the current literature. First, although an extensive body of research has been built upon cognitive decision-making theories, and specifically on outcome probability estimation, little attention has been directed to adolescents' actual perceptions of positive and negative outcomes associated with risky peer and dating situations. These perceptions may play a significant role in students' decisions to place themselves in such situations, and also could influence a number of SIP decision-making steps. For example, if adolescents view a particular situation as potentially threatening, harmful, or negative, their goals related to that situation and responses they may access could be very different than if a situation is perceived as exciting or beneficial in some ways. The present study capitalized on qualitative methodology to enhance understanding of the potential positive and negative outcomes considered by youth in situations that may place them at risk for violence perpetration, victimization, and related risk behaviors. The current study's focus on both positive and negative elements of risky situations represented a novel contribution to the literature, consistent with recent evidence suggestive of the relative importance of considering perceived benefits in adolescent risk-based decision-making (Boyer, 2006).

Further, the current study contributed to the literature through its joint focus on both peer-based violence as well as violence within dating relationships. Given the great overlap between peer and romantic partner influences during adolescence (Brown, 1999), it is important to improve our understanding of how factors related to risk-based decision-making processes may be similar or different across these two domains. Such knowledge may help to improve interventions designed to promote positive youth development across multiple domains of functioning (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008).

Another contribution of the current research was based on the population of study. Whereas early research in the field of intimate partner violence focused on adult populations, and more recent research has begun to explore dating violence within high school and college contexts, very limited work has examined dating processes, and more specifically dating violence, within younger adolescents and middle school samples (Close, 2005). Also, limited research exists on dating violence within samples of urban, minority youth, despite evidence suggesting that intervention and prevention work needs to be contextually relevant and empirically derived, addressing socioeconomic, cultural, and contextual risk and protective factors (Dutton & Corvo, 2006). This deficit within the literature has been noted as representing an important area for exploration and future work (Close, 2005), and represented an important strength of the current study's contribution.

Finally, the current study offered promise for improving prevention programs in several important ways. The qualitative design is well-suited for development of theory that is grounded in the experiences of youth. Hearing youths' voices on issues of risk-

based decision-making may help interventionists to design programs that better meet the needs of youth and promote youth resiliency from a "bottom-up" framework rather than a "top-down" framework. Such a process can foster credibility of prevention programming and enhance cultural and contextual relevance (Leadbeater et al., 2008; Ozer et al., 2004). The current study may also enhance prevention programs by promoting a better understanding of the unique features of risk-based decision-making in ecologically valid peer and dating situations, as well as promoting understanding of shared elements of risk across these domains. The focus of the current research on understanding students' perceptions of positive and negative outcomes associated with risk situations also represented an important step toward moving beyond traditional focuses within violence prevention efforts on simply changing beliefs and building skills. Such a focus may help to begin to elucidate motivational factors underlying decision-making processes, including attention to the types of decisional balances of costs and benefits that has proven effective in other health-promotion/risk-reduction fields (Miller & Rollnick, 2002).

To accomplish these aims, a two study design was implemented to examine unique elements of risk and benefit perception within dating situations (Study One) and within peer-based situations (Study Two). This design allowed for the study of unique factors associated with contextually-specific risk situations, and simultaneously created two distinct data sets that could later be examined in a future comparative study of similarities and differences in risk perception based on dating versus peer contextual factors. Further, this two study design allowed for some elements of general study

replication, particularly given the significant overlap in dating and peer contexts during

the adolescent period.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Several key research questions were explored in the current study. First, this research examined descriptive statistics to better understand the prevalence of dating and peer violence experienced by urban, predominantly African American adolescents. Second, the study qualitatively explored the themes of potential outcomes discussed by youth in risky dating and peer situations. Third, these themes of outcomes were examined for differences in valence (i.e., what portion of the content within this theme represents potential benefits or positive outcomes versus what portion represents potential risks or negative outcomes). And finally, these themes were examined for relevance across various types of situations (i.e., which themes relate specifically to certain risk situations, which themes are relevant across many different types of risk situations).

Due to the emergent and descriptive nature of the qualitative studies, no confirmatory hypotheses were offered per se. However, based on the review of the literature and prior coding of preliminary work (Sullivan et al., 2009), a number of a priori themes were proposed. As discussed further with the Coding and Data Analysis sections, these a priori themes were utilized as a starting point for exploration of the data and were supplemented with emergent themes as dictated by the data itself. Similar to the structure of the literature review, these a priori themes were proposed based on the adolescent developmental literature and the peer and dating violence literatures.

Given the adolescent developmental context and the salience of peer and dating experiences on emotional experiences, the theme of Emotion was proposed as an a priori construct across both dating and peer risk domains (see Brown, 2004; Casey-Cannon et

al., 2001; Rosenblum & Lewis, 2003). For similar reasons, and given the focus on dating and peer contexts within the risk situations of the current study, the theme of Interpersonal Connection and Relationships was also proposed for dating relationships and peer friendships (see Brown, 2004). Because of the emerging importance of autonomy and identity development in adolescence (Kroger, 2003), and the increasing value placed on peers as teens begin to individuate from parents, the theme of Parent Monitoring and Peer Influences was proposed for both dating and peer domains (see Boyer, 2006; Brown, 2004; Collins & Laursen, 2004). The theme of Sexuality was proposed specifically for dating because of the importance of students' emerging sexual development during the adolescent period and its potential impact on goals in risky dating situations (see Bouchey & Furman, 2003; Montgomery & Sorell, 1998; Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). Finally, because of the emphasis on peer status, popularity, and image during the adolescent period, the theme of Image, Status, and Social Functioning was proposed for peer and dating risk situations (see Brown, 2004; Eder & Kinney, 1995; Yoon et al., 2004). Further, issues related to image, status, and reputation have been noted as particularly relevant in relation to adolescent peer and dating violence (Farrell et al., 2007; Sullivan et al., 2009).

Risks for adolescent dating and peer violence were highlighted as a primary focus within the current study, and as such, themes of Aggression and Victimization were proposed for both dating and peer situations (see Crick et al., 1999; Goldbaum et al., 2003; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Holt & Espelage, 2005; Howard et al., 2007a; Lavoie et al., 2002; Sullivan et al., 2006). Further, given the frequent co-occurrence of aggression

and other problem behaviors and rule-breaking, the theme of Problem Behaviors was also

proposed for both dating and peer situations (see Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989;

Farrell et al., 2005; Farrington, 1986; Huesmann et al., 1984; Xie, Cairns, & Cairns,

2001). Given the unique gender-based dynamic involved with dating violence, the theme

of Gender Roles and Inequities was proposed specifically for dating risk situations (see

Goldstein et al., 2008; Howard et al., 2005; Josephson & Proulx, 2008; Lichter &

McCloskey, 2004; Sears et al., 2007).

Preliminary Study

Overview of Method

Data from a preliminary study that formed the foundation for development of the current investigation were collected in the Spring and Summer of 2006 on problem situations related to dating experiences and relationships (including those situations associated with dating violence) among adolescents from one middle school and one high school in an urban, inner-city setting in the Southeastern United States (Sullivan et al., 2009). On average, over 50% of students at these two schools were enrolled in the federal free or reduced lunch program during the 2005-2006 school year, and a high percentage of the students who participated in this study lived in neighborhoods with high levels of poverty and high rates of crime and violence (Kids Count, 2004; Nolan, 2004).

The sample was purposively selected to include mid-adolescents in seventh and ninth grades for the preliminary study, with the intent to follow these students longitudinally as part of the current investigation. Sixty-seven students were randomly selected from their health and physical education classes for recruitment into the preliminary study. Of the 67 students recruited, 51 students were consented and 50 participated (75% participation), with approximately equivalent representation across grade and gender (46% seventh graders, $N = 23$ seventh graders, 27 ninth graders; 56% females, $N = 28$ females, 22 males). The majority of students identified themselves as African American or Black ($N = 44$, 88%), with fewer identifying as Latino/a or Hispanic ($N = 5$, 10%) and European American, White, or Caucasian ($N = 1$, 2%).

As part of the preliminary study, students were asked to identify recent (i.e., within the past few months) problem situations in dating contexts. Problem situations were defined as those that felt bad or uncomfortable, or generated emotions including anger, sadness, or being scared, disappointed, or worried. Dating contexts represented a broad array of situations (e.g., ranging from the approaching a potential dating partner to going together). Once the students began to describe their problem situations, interviewers used open-ended prompts to clarify student responses and request additional information. Interviewers were trained to discuss all situations described by students (typically one to four) and to summarize each interview including asking students to clarify any inaccuracies to improve credibility by allowing participants to review, modify, and elaborate upon the construction of their own data (Patton, 2002).

Coding and Data Analysis

Four researchers each with at least two years experience (range 2-12 years) completed qualitative coding and analysis for the preliminary study data. Open coding conducted during first level analyses resulted in the identification of 68 themes of problem situations across numerous dating contexts. These themes were further refined during second level analyses resulting in a final list of 20 themes of problem situations within six domains (Sullivan et al., 2009; see Appendix A for an overview of this coding structure). The problem situations discussed by students were then used to develop the measure utilized in the current research.

Following coding and analysis of the preliminary data, a list was generated of the most common problem situations identified by youth. From this coding and listing of

problem situations, the 12 situations independently rated as most relevant, salient, and high-risk by four researchers were selected to form the measure used for the current study. In some cases, details were aggregated across several similar problem situations described by youth in order to best represent the breadth and depth of the preliminary study data, and also to reduce the ability to identify individual student responses. These 12 situations were used to develop two six-item protocols (see Appendix B).

Study One: Dating Risk Situations

Method

Setting and Participants

Data for this study were collected in the Fall/Winter of 2006-2007 as part of a follow-up study to the preliminary study previously described (Sullivan et al., 2009). Participants for this study included 43 of the original 50 students interviewed for the preliminary study (86% retention rate). Of the 7 students who were not retained between the preliminary study and the current investigation, 6 were no longer enrolled in the school system (2 African American males, 3 African American females, 1 Latino male) and one declined to continue participation (African American female). Five of these youth were in the ninth grade at the preliminary data collection point and two were in the seventh grade. The majority of students interviewed for the current study had advanced to the eighth and tenth grades by the fall data collection point (1 Latina female was retained in ninth grade and 1 Caucasian male was retained in seventh grade at the time of the second interview), maintaining approximately equivalent representation across grades (42% eighth grade, 47% tenth grade) and gender (56% female; N=24 females, 19 males). These students ranged in ages from 13 to 17 years old (M=14.65, SD=1.17). The majority of the students identified themselves as African American or Black (N=38, 88%), with fewer students identifying as Latino/a or Hispanic (N=4, 9%) and European American, White, or Caucasian (N=1, 2%). As described for the preliminary study, these students were identified as potentially having elevated levels of risk due to their socioecological context

(e.g., high levels of poverty, neighborhood crime, and violence) (Kids Count, 2004; Nolan, 2004).

Procedures

Interviewer training. Five interviewers were trained in interviewing procedures for the current study, two of whom had also conducted interviews for the preliminary study (N = 2 African American males, 2 African American females, and 1 Latina female). Because not all students could be assigned the same interviewer for the current study that had conducted their preliminary study interview (i.e., due to interviewer attrition between studies), interviewer assignment for the current study was based on scheduling and logistical constraints. This quasi-random method of assignment of student-interviewer pairings resulted in 13 students (30%) conducting this interview with the same interviewer from their preliminary interview and 30 students (70%) conducting this interview with a different interviewer.

Interviewers completed over ten hours of formal training, including lecture, discussion, readings, and role-plays of the interview protocol. All interviewers were required to complete an online university training course in human rights protection and research ethics for the social sciences. Training included a segment in which human subjects protection procedures were thoroughly reviewed along with procedures for reporting suspected child abuse and neglect.

General qualitative interviewing skills, developmental issues pertinent to adolescence, and cultural and contextual issues were also addressed in training, in addition to detailed review of the semi-structured interview protocol. All interviewers

participated in role-plays of interviews during training sessions, supervised by trained research institute staff, and also provided audio-recorded mock interviews to be reviewed by investigators who provided verbal and written feedback. Interviewers were required to provide at least one mock interview, in addition to supervised trainings, and interviewers continued performing mock interviews and training until adequate adherence to the protocol was established. Throughout the study, supervision and feedback on randomly selected audio recordings was provided to interviewers by the research team to enhance interview quality and adherence to the research protocol.

Interviewing procedures. Interviews for the current study were conducted approximately 6 to 8 months after the interviews for the preliminary study. Research protocols were reviewed and approved by the Virginia Commonwealth University Institutional Review Board (IRB). When interviewers returned to the schools to complete the interviews for the current study, they reminded students: a) of the consent and assent forms previously signed, b) of the general purpose of the study, c) that responses would be kept confidential, d) that participation was voluntary and could be discontinued at any time without penalty, e) that they could opt not to answer any questions, and f) of the general process for audio recording the interviews. Interviewers also reminded students of the limits of confidentiality, such as in the case of the disclosure of abuse or neglect, and answered any new questions before proceeding. Interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted in private locations of the school (e.g., small study rooms of the library, etc.). Youth received a $10 gift certificate in acknowledgement of their time and effort for participating in this interview.

Because a small portion of the sample was bilingual, students were offered the option of completing the consenting process and the interviews in English, Spanish, or a combination of the two. To account for the potential heterogeneity in Latino subgroups interviewed, bilingual members of the research team considered Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican cultural factors and dialects to assure close attention to accurate translation across these cultural groups (Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006). These three Latino subgroups have been identified as being among the most common within the city in which the research was conducted (U.S. Census, 2009). Of the three students who chose to complete the preliminary study in Spanish, one boy was lost to attrition, one boy chose to complete the current interview in English, and one girl chose to complete the current interview in Spanish. No students previously interviewed in English requested to complete the current interview in Spanish.

Students were randomly assigned to one of the six-item protocols with dating risk situations derived from the preliminary study (see Appendix B), and were asked to describe their perceptions of potential positive and negative outcomes (i.e., pros/cons, costs/benefits, good/bad things) associated with each situation. Particular care was taken in wording the situations to ensure neutrality of the characters and situation (i.e., gender neutrality, neutrality of sexual orientation, neutrality of "perpetrator" and "victim" roles, ambiguity of risk, etc.).

Embedded within the current study, students also responded orally to 19 questionnaire items read aloud to them, designed to assess dating violence victimization, followed by the same 19 items designed to assess dating violence perpetration (e.g.,

Foshee et al., 2001; see Appendix C for full measure). In this measure, students were asked to report on their lifetime prevalence of dating violence victimization and perpetration, including any times that the behaviors occurred with anyone they had ever been on a date with, using a four-point scale (0 - *never*, 1 - *1-3 times*, 2 - *4-9 times*, 3 - *10 or more times*). Examples of items include, "Slapped you," "Pushed or shoved you," "Insulted you in front of others," and "Did something just to make you jealous." This scale was developed from the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979), and was adapted for use with an adolescent population, based on examples of dating violence behaviors reported more commonly within adolescent samples (e.g., being slammed against a wall; Foshee et al., 2001). These scales have been validated in previous research with adolescent samples (e.g., Foshee, 1996; Foshee et al., 1998; Foshee et al., 2001). The alpha coefficient for the current sample was .84 for dating violence victimization and .75 for dating violence perpetration.

Transcription and data management. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim by trained transcription staff into Microsoft Word documents, and then checked by another transcriber to assure accuracy. The interview conducted in Spanish was simultaneously translated and transcribed in English by a bilingual transcriber and then verified for accuracy by a separate bilingual researcher to assure close attention to accurate translation across dialects (Perreira et al., 2006). Transcripts were imported into NVivo 7 software (QSR International, 2006), which offers unique capabilities for qualitative data analysis, including computer-based coding and re-coding of data, management and tracking of theme merging and separating, organization of

theoretical models, and hierarchical structuring capabilities through the use of tree nodes.

Quantitative data collected from the self-report measure of dating violence were entered

separately into SPSS software (SPSS, 2007) for statistical analysis.

Coding and Data Analysis

Descriptive data for the quantitative self-report measure of dating violence

perpetration and victimization were examined for the total sample and separately by

gender and grade[1], including lifetime prevalence, means, standard deviations, ranges,

effect sizes, and bivariate correlations. Categorical variables for gender and grade were

imported into the NVivo 7 software for all students, and these case attributes were used to

examine the distribution of qualitative coding content across these variables for the final

coding structure.

Qualitative data transcribed and entered into NVivo 7 were coded by two graduate

students, both of whom had received training on qualitative principles and methods,

including approximately three to four years of qualitative research experience per student

coder and qualitative methodological coursework. Coding occurred over a 10-month

period and was supervised by regular research team meetings with graduate students and

faculty researchers, including consultations with a qualitative research expert with over

seven years of experience.

A key process across all coding was the use of memoing to provide an ongoing

record of research team conversations about the overall analytic strategy and emerging

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[1] Note that for the purposes of categorical grade analyses, the two youth retained in seventh and ninth grades between the preliminary study and current study were merged with their eighth and tenth grade peers.

theme structure (Erwin et al., 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and a number of bias-reduction activities were utilized, including intensive discussion and team meetings among researchers, triangulation across researchers and relevant theory and literature, and examination and discussion of negative cases (e.g., Farrell et al., 2007; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Methods of constant comparison, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and audiotaped and verbatim transcription were used to enhance credibility of findings. Further, triangulation between investigators and with extant theory and research findings was used to promote trustworthiness in analysis and results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Trustworthiness was also enhanced through the negative case analyses designed to eliminate "outliers" and "exceptions by continually revising the hypothesis at issue" until an excellent "fit" is achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 312). "Thick description" (i.e., rich contextual description, including elaboration on participants, settings, and methods) of the research context and methods was also used to promote evaluation of the transferability of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Finally, dependability and confirmability of the data and analyses was promoted through a comprehensive audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The first phase of coding represented open coding, designed to discover emergent conceptualizations, categories, properties, and dimensions of the data, combined with examination of the a priori themes proposed based on relevant literature. These themes were explored within an open coding framework, allowing for properties of the a priori themes to be modified based on emergent conceptualizations of the data. Memoing and ongoing research team meetings were held to discuss and document the emergent

constructs and triangulate across researchers and with relevant literature. From the first level of coding, a total of 24 themes of potential outcomes in risky dating situations emerged, including the eight a priori themes proposed.

Second level coding represented an iterative process during which themes and subthemes of coded text were refined to create a progressively more complete and accurate representation of adolescents' perceptions of the 12 risky dating situations. During second level coding, all text segments were read and each theme was named and defined. Subsequently, themes were compared and contrasted to highlight similarities and differences among related constructs and explore the need for new themes or identify redundant themes that could be collapsed. Themes were refined through constant comparison of each with their emerging definitions and representative data. Consensus was achieved on name, definition, and content of each theme and also on possible negative cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Second level coding resulted in a final list of 17 themes of potential outcomes in risky dating situations. This final theme structure incorporated four of the a priori themes originally hypothesized, and integrated content from the remaining four a priori themes with emergent content. Concurrently, the content of the student interviews was coded based on the valence (positive or negative) of the possible outcomes identified (i.e., all data was coded as either a potential positive outcome or a potential negative outcome). This valence-based coding was conducted independently of the thematic coding, such that all data was coded within at least two locations: 1) at least one of the 17 content-based themes, and 2) *either* within the positive valence or the negative valence themes.

Content-based themes were not mutually exclusive categories, and as such thematic content could be coded within multiple content-based themes.

Once the final theme structure was established, 20% of transcripts were randomly selected for examining inter-coder reliability, with a result of 100% agreement for valence-based coding and 91.9% agreement for content-based coding. These levels of inter-coder percent agreement exceeded levels of percent-agreement designated within the literature as goals for qualitative research (Zimmerman et al., 2004). Following this analysis, researchers met to discuss and come to resolution on instances of non-agreement, and a third level of analysis was conducted to ensure that all text coded across all interviews adhered to these final consensus decisions.

Once the coding structure was finalized, the distribution of content across themes was examined by gender and grade using coding by case attribute matrices within NVivo 7. These matrices generated quantitative data on the coding distribution that could then be examined using descriptive and comparative statistics. Further, coding matrices were utilized to examine the distribution of outcome valences across themes (i.e., which themes contain potential positive outcomes, which themes contain potential negative outcomes, what are the percentages or ratios of positive and negative outcomes across themes), as well as to examine the theme and valence distributions across the different dating risk situations.

Results

Overview

The following sections review analyses of situations that may place adolescents at risk for dating violence victimization, perpetration, and other maladaptive outcomes. First, descriptive statistics for dating violence victimization and perpetration are reviewed for the purposes of thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and to illustrate the types of dating violence experienced by the sample for contextualization of their qualitative data. Subsequently, an overview of the qualitative data is presented, followed by an in-depth review of each theme generated by the coding process, including definitions, summaries of content, and exemplar quotations. Tables with coding matrices are used to summarize coding density and saturation and highlight trends described narratively for each theme.

Descriptive Statistics for Dating Violence Victimization and Perpetration

Lifetime prevalence rates for dating violence victimization and perpetration are reported in Table 1 for the total sample and separately by gender and grade. For dating violence victimization, rates ranged from 15 to 71% for the total sample. Over half of the victimization items (*N*=10 items) were endorsed by one-third or more of the adolescents, including acts and threats of physical harm, verbal abuse, psychological control, and property damage. For perpetration, prevalence rates ranged from 7 to 54% for the total sample. Eleven of the 19 perpetration items were endorsed by at least one-fifth of the sample, and five items were endorsed by over one-third. Similar to victimization, students reported a variety of perpetration experiences, albeit at slightly lower rates.

Boys and girls generally reported comparable lifetime prevalence rates for dating violence victimization and perpetration. Significant gender differences were found for only 3 of 19 victimization items. Boys reported significantly higher prevalence rates than did girls for having a dating partner who had pushed or shoved them, χ^2 (1, 41) = 8.06, $p<.05$, and who had thrown something at them that could hurt, χ^2 (1, 41) = 6.39, $p<.05$. By contrast, more girls than boys reported a history of having a partner who made them describe where they were every minute of the day, χ^2 (1, 41) = 10.55, $p<.05$. Only two significant gender differences were found for dating violence perpetration, with girls reporting higher rates of threatening to hit or throw something at their dating partner, χ^2 (1, 41) = 11.71, $p<.05$, and slapping their dating partner, χ^2 (1, 41) = 6.61, $p<.05$. Similarly, both younger and older students across middle and high school contexts tended to report comparable rates of dating violence, with only one significant difference by grade. More tenth than eighth grade students reported ever having a partner tell them that they could not talk to someone of the opposite sex, χ^2 (1, 41) = 10.01, $p<.05$, and tenth graders also reported higher prevalence of perpetrating this act, χ^2 (1, 41) = 7.56, $p<.05$.

Ranges, means, standard deviations, and effect sizes by gender and grade for dating violence victimization and perpetration are presented in Table 2. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) identified only one significant difference in means by gender for acts of perpetration. Specifically, girls reported higher frequencies of dating violence perpetration as compared to boys, $F(1,39)=8.15$, $p < .05$. A bivariate correlation was also calculated for the dating violence victimization and perpetration variables which revealed a moderate correlation ($r = .37$) that did not differ significantly by gender or grade.

Table 1. *Lifetime prevalence of dating violence victimization and perpetration.*

	Total (%)	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	χ^2	8th (%)	10th (%)	χ^2
Victimization							
Threatened to hit or throw something at you	39.0	44.4	34.8	2.77	42.9	35.0	2.02
Scratched you	31.7	50.0	17.4	5.38	33.3	30.0	0.98
Slapped you	19.5	33.3	8.7	4.19	14.3	25.0	2.54
Slammed or held you against a wall	26.8	38.9	17.4	2.97	33.3	20.0	2.71
Kicked you	31.7	50.0	17.4	5.38	38.1	25.0	2.45
Pushed or shoved you	46.3	66.7	30.4	8.06*	42.9	50.0	4.16
Threw something at you that could hurt	26.8	44.4	13.0	6.39*	28.6	25.0	0.12
Punched or hit you with something that could hurt	14.6	16.6	13.0	0.11	9.5	20.0	0.90
Damaged something that belonged to you	43.9	61.1	30.4	4.58	52.4	35.0	1.97
Would not let you do things with other people	34.1	27.8	39.1	2.58	38.1	30.0	0.46
Told you not talk to someone of the opposite sex	39.0	33.3	43.5	0.59	19.0	60.0	10.01*
Made you describe where you were every minute of the day	26.8	16.7	34.8	10.55*	19.0	35.0	3.51
Insulted you in front of others	24.4	33.3	17.4	1.49	28.6	20.0	0.51
Put down your looks	17.1	16.7	17.4	0.87	28.6	5.0	4.12
Blamed you for bad things that they did	41.5	50.0	34.8	3.61	47.6	35.0	2.81
Said things to hurt your feelings on purpose	56.1	66.7	47.8	1.47	57.1	55.0	0.03
Threatened to start dating someone else	41.5	55.6	30.4	3.18	52.4	30.0	2.57
Did something just to make you jealous	70.7	72.2	69.6	0.74	71.4	70.0	0.31
Brought up something from the past to hurt you	48.8	55.6	43.5	4.75	38.1	60.0	2.77
Perpetration							
Threatened to hit or throw something at them	34.1	5.6	56.5	11.71**	33.3	35.0	2.01
Scratched them	17.1	5.6	26.1	3.24	19.0	15.0	0.18
Slapped them	17.1	0.0	30.4	6.61*	9.5	25.0	2.25
Slammed or held them against a wall	22.0	11.1	30.4	2.72	28.6	15.0	1.39
Kicked them	22.0	11.1	30.4	2.72	28.6	15.0	3.39
Pushed or shoved them	51.2	27.8	69.6	7.57	57.1	45.0	4.25
Threw something that could hurt them	9.8	0.0	17.4	3.47	9.5	10.0	1.34
Punched or hit them with something that could hurt	14.6	0.0	26.1	5.50	19.0	10.0	3.34
Damaged something that belonged to them	31.7	44.4	21.7	2.40	19.0	45.0	3.19

	Total (%)	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	χ^2	8th (%)	10th (%)	χ^2
Perpetration (cont.)							
Would not let them do things with other people	24.4	22.2	26.1	0.80	14.3	35.0	2.78
Told them not talk to someone of the opposite sex	26.8	16.7	34.8	2.43	9.5	45.0	7.56*
Made them describe where they were every minute of the day	7.3	11.1	4.3	3.39	9.5	5.0	2.98
Insulted them in front of others	17.1	16.7	17.4	0.00	23.8	10.0	1.38
Put down their looks	7.3	11.1	4.3	0.68	14.3	0.0	3.08
Blamed them for bad things that you did	17.1	22.2	13.0	2.15	19.0	15.0	0.98
Said things to hurt their feelings on purpose	34.1	38.9	30.4	0.32	38.1	30.0	0.30
Threatened to start dating someone else	36.6	33.3	39.1	0.98	33.3	40.0	1.56
Did something just to make them jealous	53.7	44.4	60.9	1.13	52.4	55.0	0.95
Brought up something from the past to hurt them	24.4	22.2	26.1	1.71	23.8	25.0	0.01

Note: N=18 boys and 23 girls; N=21 8th graders and 20 10th graders. * p<.05. **p<.01.

Table 2. *Means, standard deviations, effect sizes, and observed ranges for dating violence victimization and perpetration by gender and grade.*

	Total		Boys		Girls				8th Grade		10th Grade				
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	D	M	SD	M	SD	F	d	Range
Victimization	9.00	6.91	10.83	6.35	7.57	7.13	2.33	.48	9.52	8.16	8.45	5.47	0.24	.15	0-26
Perpetration	5.93	4.87	3.67	3.03	7.70	5.35	8.15*	.93	5.90	4.24	5.95	5.57	0.00	.01	0-22

Note: N=18 boys and 23 girls; N=21 8th graders and 20 10th graders. *p<.05.

Qualitative Coding and Themes

        Overview. Qualitative coding generated 17 themes across the 12 risky dating situations. Some of these themes represented direct positive and negative outcomes or consequences associated with the risky situations (e.g., General Risk for Harm; Aggression, Victimization, and Harassment), whereas others represented more descriptive themes of positive and negative processes and contextual factors associated with the risky situations (e.g., Interpersonal Connection and Relationships; Monitoring, Information, and Assistance). Further, some themes contained a mixture of outcomes and processes/contextual factors (e.g., Communication could represent the outcome of a situation or could represent a process associated with a situation that led to a different distinct outcome).

        All themes were mentioned by at least 25% of the youth interviewed (range 12 to 40 youth sources per theme). Nine themes were mentioned by over half of the youth, and three themes were mentioned by at least 75% of youth. Two additional themes were created to account for students who explicitly stated that there were no potential positive outcomes (*N*=36) or no potential negative outcomes (*N*=0) in a given situation. Table 3 presents the theme names, numbers of youth who mentioned each theme (e.g., 27 students discussed content at any point during their interview that was coded into the General Risk for Harm theme), numbers of separate instances, or references, when youth discussed content within each theme (e.g., among the 27 students with interviews, or sources, coded into the General Risk for Harm theme, there were 39 separate comments coded into that theme), and descriptive statistics for each theme (ranges, means, and

Table 3. *Sources, references, ranges, means, and standard deviations for dating themes.*

Theme Name	Number of Sources	Number of References	Range of References per Student	*M* References per Student	*SD* References per Student
General Risk for Harm	27	39	0-3	0.91	0.92
Victim-Blaming, Minimization, and Double-Standards	17	28	0-4	0.65	0.97
Aggression, Victimization, and Harassment	40	115	0-7	2.67	1.70
Arguments, Conflicts, and Break Ups	30	45	0-4	1.05	0.95
Jealousy or Cheating	17	24	0-3	0.56	0.83
Interpersonal Connection and Relationships	36	75	0-6	1.74	1.38
Communication	14	21	0-6	0.49	1.03
Emotion	29	63	0-7	1.47	1.52
Power, Control, and Pressure	24	36	0-3	0.84	0.90
Image, Respect, Status, and Reputation	20	34	0-4	0.79	1.06
Sex and Sexuality	38	71	0-5	1.65	1.15
Monitoring, Information, and Assistance	22	37	0-4	0.86	1.10
Rule-Breaking and Consequences	27	46	0-4	1.07	1.10
Trust	17	22	0-3	0.51	0.74
Maturity, Age, and Experience	15	17	0-2	0.40	0.58
Financial or Material Possessions	12	14	0-3	0.33	0.61
Fun, Enjoyment, or "Something to Do"	21	31	0-3	0.72	0.85
No Positives in a Situation	36	96	0-6	2.23	1.53
No Negatives in a Situation	0	0	---	---	---

Note: N=43 students.

standard deviations). Although the reference numbers represent text segments of varying length per reference, ranging from a few words or clauses to full paragraphs, these numbers provide a useful supplement to the number of interviews coded per theme in evaluating not only the saturation of content across students, but also the density or frequency of discussion of content within themes.

The total number of references generated by participants was calculated for the total sample (N=718) and separately by gender (N=339 for boys, 379 for girls; M=17.84 and 15.79 references per boy and girl, respectively) and grade (N=351 for eighth graders, 367 for tenth graders; M=16.71 and 16.68 references per eighth and tenth grader, respectively). Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) revealed no differences in mean levels of coding by gender or grade. These findings suggest that the coding structure is developed with comparable total amounts of coded text represented across these demographic groups.

Given the variety of risk situations presented to youth, the fit of coding was evaluated not only across youth characteristics, but also across the protocol situations. Table 4 presents the distribution of coding across themes for each of the risk situations. Each risk situation presented to students generated responses that were coded within 10 to 14 different themes (M=12 themes per risk situation). Conversely, each theme represented potential positive and/or negative outcomes, processes, and contextual factors associated with 2 to 12 different risk situations (M=8.5 risk situations represented within each theme). Although there were no situations in which any students reported that there

Table 4. *Analysis of themes by type of dating risk situation.*

Themes	Risk Situations (Protocol A)						Risk Situations (Protocol B)						Total Situations Per Theme
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
General Risk for Harm	4		11		2	1	1		4		2	11	8
Victim-Blaming, Minimization, and Double-Standards	3		1	3	3	1		2	3	3	3	2	10
Aggression, Victimization, and Harassment	11	7	3	11	2	12	7	10	5	9	18	10	12
Arguments, Conflicts, and Break Ups	1	7	1	2	1	13	3	10		2	3		10
Jealousy or Cheating		6		1		4		7	1	1			6
Interpersonal Connection and Relationships	7	4		5	8	5	9	10	5	1	2	11	11
Communication	5	1	2	3	2	2	1	1	1	2		1	11
Emotion	5	3	2	7	8	5	6	6	2	3	2	2	12
Power, Control, and Pressure	3	12			3	1	7		5	3	1		8
Image, Respect, Status, and Reputation	1	2		3	4	2	2	4	3	7	2		10
Sex and Sexuality	14		3	2	9		9		10	3	2	12	9
Monitoring, Information, and Assistance		9	9		3	2	1	6	1		2		8
Rule-Breaking and Consequences	2		8	2	1		3	1	14	3	4	2	10
Trust		5	5		1	5		4			1		6
Maturity, Age, and Experience					1				13			1	3
Financial or Material Possessions							12		1				2
Fun, Enjoyment, or "Something to Do"		2	8	2			1	2		7	7	2	8
Total Themes Per Situation	11	11	11	11	14	12	13	12	14	12	13	10	
No Positives in Situation	6	4	11	10	12	12	5	4	6	9	10	7	
No Negatives in Situation													

Notes: N=43. For Protocol A, N=21. For Protocol B, N=22. Blank cells represent cells in which no data was coded (i.e., no positives or negatives were mentioned for a given theme/situation combination). Numbers within cells represent the number of sources (or students) who discussed content within a given theme for each risk situation presented. Risk situations 1-12 are summarized in Appendix B.

would not be any potential risks or threats of negatives, between 4 and 12 students

suggested that there were no potential positives across every situation presented (*M*=8

students per situation). These findings suggest that students did interpret the dating

situations presented as risky situations for teens. Further, these findings highlight both the

variety of potential positive and negative aspects anticipated by youth within each given

situation (i.e., one situation may lead to many different possible positive or negative

outcomes), as well as the similarity of potential outcomes and process/contextual factors

that could occur in different situations (i.e., one type of positive or negative outcome may

occur in a variety of different risky situations).

Finally, because themes contained references to both potential positive and

negative content associated with the risky dating situations, the coding structure was

evaluated based on the valence (i.e., positive versus negative) of coding contained within

each theme (see Table 5) as well as within each risk situation (see Table 6). Table 5

highlights the number of students who identified positive and negative content within

each theme, as well as the number of text segments or references coded as positive or

negative content within each theme. Between 0 and 31 students identified positive factors

coded within any single theme, whereas for negative or risk-related factors those numbers

ranged from 0 to 40 students per theme. In total, 40 out of 43 students did identify at least

one potential positive outcome or process/contextual factor associated with the risk

situations presented to them, whereas all 43 identified at least one potential negative.

Themes ranged from having no positive content identified within them (General Risk for

Harm) to having as many as 53 separate positive references (Interpersonal Connection

Table 5. *Analysis of prevalence of coding per theme identified as potential positive and negative content in dating situations.*

Themes	Sources		References		References	
	Potential Positives or Good Things	Potential Negatives or Bad Things	Potential Positives or Good Things	Potential Negatives or Bad Things	Positive Content (%)	Negative Content (%)
General Risk for Harm	0	27	0	39	0.0	100.0
Victim-Blaming, Minimization, and Double-Standards	8	15	10	20	33.3	66.7
Aggression, Victimization, and Harassment	4	40	4	111	3.5	96.5
Arguments, Conflicts, and Break Ups	5	28	5	40	11.1	88.9
Jealousy or Cheating	2	17	2	22	8.3	91.7
Interpersonal Connection and Relationships	31	18	53	22	70.7	29.3
Communication	11	5	16	8	66.7	33.3
Emotion	10	29	16	50	24.2	75.8
Power, Control, and Pressure	4	22	4	32	11.1	88.9
Image, Respect, Status, and Reputation	8	15	13	21	38.2	61.8
Sex and Sexuality	6	37	7	64	9.9	90.1
Monitoring, Information, and Assistance	16	12	23	14	62.2	37.8
Rule-Breaking and Consequences	4	27	4	42	8.7	91.3
Trust	8	12	8	14	36.4	63.6
Maturity, Age, and Experience	11	5	11	6	64.7	35.3
Financial or Material Possessions	8	4	10	4	71.4	28.6
Fun, Enjoyment, or "Something to Do"	21	0	31	0	100.0	0.0
Positive and Negative Source and Reference Totals	40	43	168	329	33.8	66.2

Note: N=43. Note that source and reference column totals are not additive, as students typically discussed content within multiple themes over the course of their interviews and often produced text segments that were coded in multiple locations.

Table 6. *Distribution of potential positive and negative content by theme and peer risk situation.*

Themes	Risk Situations (Protocol A)						Risk Situations (Protocol B)						Total Positive/ Negative Ratio per Theme
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
General Risk for Harm	0/4		0/11		0/2	0/1	0/1		0/4		0/2	0/14	0/39
Victim-Blaming, Minimization, and Double-Standards	1/2		0/1	3/0	1/3	1/0		0/3	2/4	1/2	1/3	0/2	10/20
Aggression, Victimization, and Harassment	0/12	0/7	0/3	1/11	0/2	2/14	0/7	1/9	0/5	0/11	0/19	0/11	4/111
Arguments, Conflicts, and Break Ups	0/1	0/7	0/1	1/1	0/1	1/13	0/3	3/7		0/2	0/4		5/40
Jealousy or Cheating		1/6		0/1		0/5		1/8	0/1	0/1			2/22
Interpersonal Connection and Relationships	7/0	4/0		4/1	2/6	3/2	6/5	7/5	5/2	1/1	2/0	12/0	53/22
Communication	5/0	1/0	0/2	2/1	1/1	1/1	0/1	1/0	1/0	3/2		1/0	16/8
Emotion	2/4	2/1	0/2	0/9	1/8	2/6	3/6	1/6	2/3	1/2	1/2	1/1	16/50
Power, Control, and Pressure	0/3	3/10			1/2	0/1	0/7		0/5	0/3	0/1		4/32
Image, Respect, Status, and Reputation	0/1	1/1		1/2	2/2	2/1	1/1	1/3	2/2	3/6	0/2		13/21
Sex and Sexuality	3/15		0/3	0/2	3/8		0/9		0/11	0/3	1/1	0/12	7/64
Monitoring, Information, and Assistance		9/4	0/9		2/1	2/0	1/0	6/0	1/0		2/0		23/14
Rule-Breaking and Consequences	1/1		1/8	0/2	0/1		0/3	0/1	1/18	0/3	1/3	0/2	4/42
Trust		2/3	0/5		0/1	3/2		2/3			1/0		8/14
Maturity, Age, and Experience					0/1				11/4			0/1	11/6
Financial or Material Possessions							8/4		2/0				10/4
Fun, Enjoyment, or "Something to Do"		2/0	8/0	2/0			1/0	2/0		7/0	7/0	2/0	31/0
Total Positive References per Situation	19	25	9	14	13	17	20	25	27	16	16	16	217/50
Total Negative References per Situation	43	39	45	30	39	46	47	45	59	36	37	43	9
Positive References (%)	30.6	39.1	16.7	31.8	25.0	27.0	29.9	35.7	31.4	30.8	30.2	27.1	29.9
Negative References (%)	69.4	60.9	83.3	68.2	75.0	73.0	70.1	64.3	68.6	69.2	69.8	72.9	70.1

Notes: N=43. For Protocol A, N=21. For Protocol B, N=22. Blank cells represent cells in which no data was coded (i.e., no positives or negatives were mentioned for a given theme/situation combination). Numerators within cells represent number of positive references or responses; denominators within cells represent number of negative responses (i.e., 1/2 reflects one statement of a positive outcome coded in a given theme and two statements of negative outcomes mentioned by youth within a given theme). Risk situations 1-12 are summarized in Appendix B.

and Relationships), and similarly themes had between 0 and 111 negative references (Fun, Enjoyment, or "Something to Do" and Aggression, Victimization, and Harassment, respectively). These numbers of references translate to percentages ranging from 0 to 100% of the coding contained within the themes; however, overall the coding contained 33.8% positive references and 66.2% negative references.

Table 6 further explores the data summarized in Table 5 by breaking down the potential positive and negative content identified by youth across every theme and risk situation combination. For example, students produced 39 coding references within the theme of General Risk for Harm, occurring across eight risk situations, and within any given situation in which General Risk for Harm was coded, students identified no potential positive content (identified by numerators within the table cells) and between 1 and 14 instances of potential negative content (identified by denominators within cells). Across all of the coding, students ranged from producing between 0 instances potential positive or negative content in a variety of theme by situation combinations to as many as 12 instances of positive content (Interpersonal Connection and Relationships within the risky dating situation regarding meeting an internet partner in-person) and as many as 19 instances of negative content (Aggression, Victimization, and Harassment within the risky dating situation involving "playful" physical aggression). In total, across all of the coding by situation combinations, this analysis reveals a range of 9 to 27 potential positive outcomes, processes, or contextual factors identified per situation (risky dating situations involving lying to a parent and dating an older partner, respectively), and a range of 30 to 59 potential negative outcomes, processes, or contextual factors (risky

99

dating situations involving a harassing style of approach and dating an older partner, respectively). Across situations, these reference totals translate to a range of 17 to 39% positive content, or 61 to 83% negative content, per situation.

The following sections summarize the content of coding within each theme, including presentation of definitions and exemplar quotations, as well as reference to data within Tables 3-6 on the distribution of content across combinations of themes, situations, and positive/negative valences. Themes are presented based on a review of their theoretical relevance to one another, progressing from themes regarding harm and victimization, to themes related to interpersonal and intrapersonal processes within dating relationships, and concluding with themes of a more concrete or tangibly-defined nature. Further, this order of presentation loosely clusters around the themes' valences, proceeding from more heavily negative or risk-based themes, to moderately balanced or mixed themes, and ultimately to more heavily positive or benefit-based themes.

General risk for harm. This theme included references to specific, serious threats of harm as well as non-specific risks for general danger. All coding reflected potential negative outcomes in dating situations, and about two-thirds of students discussed content relevant to this theme. Although coding for this theme spanned a variety of dating situations, it was most commonly associated with meeting a dating partner from the internet, lying to parents about one's activities or whereabouts, dating a much older partner, and being alone in a bedroom with a partner or potential partner.

The most common specific risk for harm was the risk for "abduction" or being "kidnapped" by an internet predator. For example, students noted that someone could "end

up taking you somewhere or killing you or you end up…stranded." Students also discussed the risk that internet partners might turn out to be a "rapist," "robber," "criminal," or "crazy person." However, even with this recognition of risk, some students seemed comfortable with meeting someone they'd previously only met online and discussed perceptions of ways to safeguard themselves, as one tenth grade girl explained.

I would ask the person for a picture…I would tell them to meet me at this certain place…Instead of going directly to them, I would…be at somewhere that's close. I would tell them to wave their hand in the air or something—give me a signal to let me know that that's them. And if the person looks [safe]…I might go up and talk to them…I would be very, *very* cautious.

Additionally, some students identified more ambiguous risks and seemed unable to elaborate further, such as a risk for "danger" or getting "hurt," fears that "something might happen," or anticipation that someone might "do something harmful to you." Particularly with the situation on lying to a parent, students identified the risk of having "something happen," but the actual risks for what might happen were often undisclosed. In a separate situation, even when acknowledging that dating partners met online might be significantly older, not all students connected such "relationships" with the level of risks potentially inherent. For example, a tenth grade boy thought this was a "bad idea" because these individuals might be "older guys trying to date girls." However, he was unable to connect this age difference with any specific risk for harm. Finally, students explained that risky situations could "get too serious" or "feel intense," which could be particularly salient when you "don't know what [the other person] is capable of."

Victim-blaming, minimization, and double-standards. This theme addressed instances of youth blaming victims or minimizing their victimization experiences, as well as students' discussions of sexual or gender-based stereotypes or double-standards. In some cases, victim-blaming could represent an outcome associated with a risky situation; however, more often this theme represented descriptions of processes and contextual factors associated with the risky situations presented. About 40% of youth interviewed discussed issues relevant to this theme, and they perceived these issues to be approximately two-thirds negative and one-third positive. The only two situations in which this theme did not emerge involved a) dating a controlling partner and b) receiving gifts from a partner with ulterior motives or expectations.

One example of victim-blaming was the belief that victims want attention, and they "actually like" unwanted sexual advances, harassment, or relational aggression because "they love, *love* attention" and interpret aggressors' comments as "compliments" or signs that they must be "popular." Students explained that victims of relational aggression "feel fine about it" because "they like getting a lot of attention… they don't care if somebody talks about them 'cause they think…they are famous." One tenth grade girl explained that "if somebody talks about you, it's like, 'Okay, you must really, *really* like me if you talk about me.'" Related to these beliefs were the ideas that girls who had a reputation for being promiscuous either enjoyed or deserved dating experiences that involved aggression. For example, one eighth grade boy said that certain girls in his school would enjoy or choose to continue a dating relationship even knowing a partner was using them just for sex. An eighth grade girl similarly said that girls who were

promiscuous "like being [alone] in a room with a boy" and suggested they held an element of blame for any harm encountered, saying, "So for *that girl*—the one in the room with the boy—I just say good luck, 'cause that's *you*." Similar comments also suggested an "us versus them" mentality that could further marginalize victimized youth.

A second belief involved the notion that victims of violence were responsible in some way for their experiences as a result of their actions or lack of self-protective behaviors. For example, in discussing fears of abduction by an internet predator, one tenth grade girl suggested that children could be partly responsible for their own abduction and that the aggressor was somehow less culpable as a result, based on her experiences of watching the television series *America's Most Wanted*.

> I've never been kidnapped before, but oh I think that is so scary…so many kids done been kidnapped that it's just crazy. But see, you can't blame the person always, that abducted the child, because the child—you don't know what *they* did.

Other students discussed the belief that girls needed to take responsibility for their own safety by setting limits or boundaries early on in a dating encounter. One tenth grade girl said that after some critical point had passed, "It's too late…unless she said it in the beginning, then after, if he did put his hands [on her] then she should've handled it then." Similarly, a tenth grade boy said that if a girl knew she was "not ready" for sex, she should avoid being alone with a boy because she was "setting herself up." An eighth grade girl also talked about victims' responsibility in staying in abusive relationships, noting that if "they don't leave" then they hold some responsibility for their abuse since

they "still stayed." Even with dancing that crossed boundaries, a tenth grade girl said that if they had originally asked the other person to dance, "then that's their fault."

Another belief highlighted within this theme was the idea that girls may lie about being raped. For example, one eighth grade girl said that boys or older men could be at-risk for being unjustly accused by girls who have sex and "a few days later...go file a rape charge." An eighth grade boy also addressed this belief, as well as highlighting beliefs about the social acceptability of males admitting that they had been sexual victims.

> [A negative outcome could be] rape charges. If you break up with a younger girl…trust me, she will get mad and try to carry you to court. But if she is older…and you break up with her, she ain't gonna say nothing. You gotta think— you gonna carry [her] to court…*or* you just gonna keep your mouth closed?

Finally, students discussed double standards and stereotypic views about differences in what boys and girls want in relationships. For example, one tenth grade boy talked about the risks for girls in dating older men who might "take advantage of them." However, when asked by the interviewer about risks if the gender roles were reversed, he simply noted, "well, that guy is lucky." An eighth grade boy further elaborated on the gender-based double standards in relationships with age differences, noting the benefit to the male partner's reputation: "If it's a dude [with an older woman], oh that is *good*." In addition to double standards regarding age differences, students discussed gender stereotyped sex roles, as one eighth grade boy addressed in response to a situation with one person dancing provocatively or in a way that crosses a partner's boundaries.

Most people be *happy*! If they got a girl dancing all up on them, close—oh, they

get closer! That's a good thing. [The roles wouldn't be reversed because] girls

come to *them*, dance all up on them. Dudes just be chillin'. [Girls] go up to dance

on them. That's how it's been ever since…I turned 11 that's how I been looking

at it.

Gender double standards were also discussed in regard to teen pregnancy, as students

discussed the idea that "sometimes the girls get pregnant" and then "the boy might not

wanna stick around for the baby." These students discussed females as being responsible

for caring for their babies and males as having the freedom to escape such responsibility.

Aggression, victimization, and harassment. This theme included references to

aggression and victimization as outcomes or consequences associated with the risky

situations presented, including physical, sexual, relational, and verbal forms of violence.

It was the most commonly discussed (93% of students) and also most frequently

discussed theme (115 references), with primarily negative outcomes (97%) in risky

situations and only four potential positive outcomes. Aggression and victimization were

identified as risks within every situation presented, and physical aggression was the most

common subtype of aggression discussed. Specifically, the risk for physical aggression

was particularly relevant in situations where a) partners engaged in "playful" aggression,

b) one partner was controlling or exerted pressure over the other, or c) one partner was

jealous of the other's flirtation with peers. Outcomes varied from involving less serious

(e.g., "playing around" that became too rough) to more serious forms of aggression,

including some students' fears of the escalation of aggression to include weapons use, serious injury, or death.

Though most of this theme's content represented potential negative outcomes, several students identified positive outcomes for aggression. For example, an eighth grade boy discussed dating violence as an opportunity for partners to end the relationship and "choose somebody else," and an eighth grade girl said that inappropriate approaches from boys could be fun because of the chance to fight the boys and "end up beating them up." Aggression was also viewed as acceptable or appropriate when girls felt that boys were threatening them or feared that boys would not respect their wishes. Two girls said that if a boy tried to pressure them to dance, it would be okay to "kick" or "smack" him, noting that if the partner didn't listen to their wishes, then "that's when you get ugly [and hurt them]." Additionally, a tenth grade boy explained that if dating partners' boundaries were violated or disrespected, a fight could be justified. He explained that "it'd probably lead to an argument or a fight" because "if you're all up on somebody and they tell you to back off, they *go off*" if you don't listen or respect that.

One of the most commonly discussed forms of aggression and victimization was physical aggression, and play fighting was identified as a risk for physical aggression in a number of ways. For example, one partner could unintentionally cross the line and harm their partner or incite a mutual fight. Personal boundaries could be crossed particularly easily if one partner was "not feeling in a playful mood" and the other "keeps going at it," and ultimately "leads to a fight," as one tenth grade girl explained.

If it starts at playing and someone says...or does the wrong thing, it could turn into a disaster. They're joking around and stuff, playing, fighting…A girl might hit a guy too hard, and they take it the wrong way and might hurt her or something.

Secondly, students explained that some people could use "playful" fighting as a guise for their true intentions of becoming aggressive. For example, one ninth grade girl explained that a male partner might "want to hit her, but he tells her it is playing so that she's [placated], but he does really want to hit her due to something that has happened, or he wants her to keep letting him hit her," and "playfulness" becomes his excuse for doing so. In such cases, the victim may feel confused or uncertain of how to respond, as the lines between "play" and serious aggression become blurred with disguised intentions.

Third, a number of students discussed ways that playful fighting could desensitize partners to aggression and lead to intentional violence because of the sense that it was acceptable to hit each other. One tenth grade girl noted that a boy could "take it too far…since they be playing like that all the time, and then when something really do come up, then he thinks he can just hit her." Another tenth grade girl also noted that playful aggression should be stopped immediately to avoid escalation later in the relationship.

[If a girl] allows him to play…then she hasn't really shown him "If you touch me that's disrespectful" or "Don't put your hands on me." If they play like that, he might get serious one day. And he hit her before, so why not do it again?

Physical aggression toward dating partners or peers could also result from jealousy over flirtation or cheating. For example, if a girl was flirting with male friends, a tenth grade girl explained that everyone involved was at risk for physical violence. She

said that the girl's boyfriend would "want to beat the boys' tail," and he might "take his anger out on either the boys or even the girl." She shared a personal experience when she had "seen that happen…seen a boy get upset at his girlfriend 'cause she was all over another dude, and she end up getting hit instead of the boy." Similarly, jealousy-based aggression could occur among girls who would often "fight with the other girl" who they perceived as flirting with their boyfriends.

In some cases, peer-based physical aggression was seen as an expectation or norm related to relationships, insofar as one partner might expect the other to "do him a favor, like…beat up this person." Such requests were described as common, even in relationships that otherwise seemed to be positive experiences for youth. As one girl explained, "you'll probably never think that he'll want these things or…do these things to you [until it happens]." Seeking peer-based physical retaliation for dating transgressions was also discussed as being a frequent risk. For example, if a girl was approached by a potential partner in a way that made her uncomfortable, she might either "hit him…or go tell one of her other friends… and then they'd probably want to fight him."

Sexual violence was also widely discussed as a potential risk in dating situations, including the risk of unwanted sexual advances, sexual harassment, or rape. The risk for rape was viewed as particularly relevant when attempting to meet a partner from the internet, dating an older partner, spending time alone with a partner in a bedroom, and receiving gifts with pressure or expectations for some form of reciprocation. Attempting to meet a potential partner in-person who had previously only been met online was viewed by many students as a serious risk for "rape or murder and stuff like that" because

"he could be an online pedophile" or a "sex offender." Though students identified the risk for rape with internet partners who lied about their identity, one student noted that even if he ended up being "her same age, that still don't guarantee that he won't hurt you."

Finally, relational and verbal forms of aggression were also identified among the students interviewed. Such forms of aggression included rumors or talking about peers behind their backs, boosting up fights between peers as a form of manipulative instigation, name-calling, verbal attacks on one's image or reputation, and verbal abuse. For example, one tenth grade girl said that if a girl did not want to have a sexual relationship with a boy, he might "start getting mad and talking about you and make up things about you [to damage your reputation]."

However, in addition to the use of such aggression for the sake of inflicting social or relational harm, some relational aggressors used these acts as an instigation and escalation tactic. Such forms of "instigating" or "boosting up" physical fights were viewed by many students as a common event. One tenth grade girl explained that if peers talk about couples behind their backs, "it'll lead to a physical altercation…because the girl says, 'I heard you told my man that I was…' [First] they argue…Then [the two girls] will be fighting." Another eighth grade girl added that it was prudent to consider carefully who you shared personal information with because of the risk for relational aggression that could escalate into physical aggression.

> If it's a friend who's going to talk about you, you shouldn't really tell that person about [important or private issues]…because they could spread something about you that could really hurt you…to the point that when you confront that person,

it's going to be a problem because everybody wants to see a fight. And they are

going to try to boost that person's head up to do something.

Despite these and other instances of relational aggression among romantic dyads and the

larger peer group, for some boys, the indirect nature of relational aggression was

discouraged, in favor of more direct forms of aggression. One eighth grade boy said that

rather than using relational aggression or spreading rumors, "They should just say it to

your face and stop being scared, you know? Be a man and…come out with it."

Arguments, conflicts, and break-ups. This theme included discussion about

arguments and conflicts that occur within dyadic romantic relationships, the extension of

dyadic dating conflicts into the peer group and reciprocal influence of peer groups on

dating conflicts, and the frequent connection between conflict and break-ups in teens'

dating relationships. Over two-thirds of the students interviewed discussed content within

this theme, and nearly 90% of that content reflected potential negative outcomes. All but

two of the risk situations had content coded within this theme. However, this theme most

frequently related to risky dating situations involving peers, such as peer jealousy or

flirtation and relational aggression in the peer group. Although this theme primarily

contained outcome-based discussion by students (i.e., arguments or break ups were

negative outcomes associated with risky situations), in some cases these arguments or

break ups could reflect interpersonal processes that contributed to other distinct outcomes

(e.g., arguments as a process associated with a risky situation that could then lead to

aggression or other problematic outcomes).

Although conflict and arguments were often described as leading to break-ups, students did discuss the negative implications of arguments independently from their implications for the sustainability of dating relationships. For example, having a partner who was "upset" with you, "jealous" of your interactions with peers, or in a "fight" with you was described as particularly difficult to handle. Further, students discussed the ways in which relational aggression and rumors among peers could "destroy your relationship" and contribute to couples who "get mad at each other for no reason" due to the outside peer manipulation. One eighth grade girl explained how peers intentionally manipulate relationships via rumors and gossip to instigate conflict and incite a potential break up.

> [Peers] try to break you up because they're really jealous of how your relationship is. And they're gonna try to break it up just to say, "Ohhh! They broke up!" So it's probably gonna be a girl trying to get with [the boyfriend]. They like him and they got mad because they couldn't go with him, and he didn't want them—he wanted her, so… [the peers instigate conflict and break-ups to achieve their goal].

Breaking up was described as a logical and frequent result of conflict in dating relationships because "if the argument [was] bad enough, then that'd probably be the end of the relationship." As one tenth grade boy said, this tendency to quickly move from a minor argument to a larger conflict and break-up may relate to the fact that the adolescent dating partners were not "really committed to the person [they] were with." Again, the peer influence on break-ups was apparent, such as when rumors and relational manipulation led couples to "break up 'cause [of what] other people [are] saying about them." However, break-ups did not necessarily represent the end of relational conflict and

111

related peer conflict. For example, one tenth grade girl talked about how couples "could break up, and then when they break up, somebody else start talking to them," which the ex-partners "ain't gonna like." Another eighth grade girl noted that when couples "end up breaking up" because of "gossip and stuff like that" in the peer group, those conflicts could lead to an ongoing "rivalry between the [couples'] friends." In such situations, students explained that ex-partners, new partners, and/or other peers could all become involved in the relational "drama," including arguments, "fights," and even aggression.

Despite the majority of negative outcomes or risks coded within this theme, five students noted positive elements related to getting out of a bad relationship before it gets worse and finding a new, better relationship with someone else. As one eighth grade girl summarized, "if the relationship wasn't good in the first place, then they might be better off breaking up anyway." For example, if one person is jealous of their partner's flirtation or possible cheating behaviors, then one tenth grade boy discussed the potential good that can come if you can "go ahead and let the girl go…just forget her…if she is flirting with a boy, you can let her go ahead, and just try to find another girl." An eighth grade girl similarly explained the benefits of not wasting one's time with a partner who cheats "because now you can move on with your life instead of sitting up under him."

Jealousy or cheating. This theme included references to jealousy among dating partners, peer-based jealousy of individuals who were in dating relationships, and exploration of the nature of flirtation and cheating behaviors in adolescence. About 40% of youth discussed content within this theme, and over 90% of that content represented negative outcomes. Jealousy and cheating were discussed as negative outcomes in half of

112

the risk situations, but were most common in situations with partners who openly flirted with peers, partners who exerted relational or psychological control, and peers who instigated conflict via relational aggression. Similar to the previous theme, jealousy and cheating could represent the specific negative outcomes associated with the risky situations presented to students or content within this theme could reflect relational processes that contributed to other distinct outcomes.

As discussed in other themes, jealousy was frequently noted as a contributor to arguments, conflict, aggression, and break-ups within both dating and peer relationships. Students who were jealous of their partners' flirtation with peers could engage in conflict or aggression with their partner or with peers who were involved, and peer instigation and escalation were common. As one tenth grade boy explained, the likelihood of calmly considering a partner's potential flirtation with a peer versus the likelihood of engaging in conflict or aggression varied based on how teens learned of the situation.

> A lot of people take stuff differently if a friend says it than someone you don't talk to. So if one of your boys was to come up, "Man, I seen your girl yesterday hugged on another dude." That's your boy…But if someone you didn't know was, "Man, I seen your girl with that other dude," you would probably handle that situation right then and there [rather than] sitting down and actually thinking about what's really going on…[If it's a stranger] you're gonna take it to a whole new situation. Then you really created a bigger situation than if a friend was just like, "Hey, I seen your girl. You might want to ask her what's going on."

However, not all students responded directly to jealousy, flirtation, or fear of future cheating. For example, one tenth grade boy said that some partners acted in a controlling manner in order to hide their true, jealousy-based intentions. He said that "a lot of men tell their girl what to wear" because "they don't want to say" that they don't "want no other guy talking to my girl…so [instead they say], 'You know that's a little too tight.'" In this way, he said, males could reduce the risk of unwanted attention directed at their partners and subsequently reduce their own jealousy, without directly having to address such points with their partner.

Some students discussed their "confusion" about the meaning of certain behaviors or where their own and their partners' boundaries should lie with peer flirtation. A tenth grade boy talked about how commonplace it was for people to "cheat," but explained the fuzziness around what constituted "cheating" and what the implications should be. He said, "People cheat, you know what I'm saying? And, you know, we're young…We don't look at it as cheating, but…we still do really have…a   certain amount of love for another person." Similarly, a tenth grade girl shared her mixed feelings about seeing a partner acting flirtatiously with a peer, but also not wanting to overreact.

> [A negative outcome is] that you feel funny because that's probably how he plays with [you] or whatever. So, she feeling like, "He do me the same way… [does this] mean that they're more than…friends?" …you don't want to feel like you [are being overly] jealous or anything, but you just trying to let him know that he can't do that.

Although the majority of references highlighted jealousy and cheating as potential negative outcomes or risks in dating situations, two individuals did note perceptions of positive elements within this theme. One tenth grade girl explained that control tactics in relationships helped to improve the relationship and keep partners together. For example, she said that the restriction of freedom to talk to other peers helped to prevent partners from getting interested in someone new and "leaving him to go to somebody else," and she noted that restrictions on wardrobe choices (e.g., not allowing a girl to wear "short shorts") helped to reduce or prevent conflict that would ensue if "another dude walking down the street [was] looking at what you got on." Additionally, another tenth grade girl discussed the benefit of learning that a partner had been flirting or cheating.

> You probably just be like, "Okay, well he doing that with other people. That means that I can do that with other people." So, the good thing probably be that you be able to do what he's doing and play around [too].

Interpersonal connection and relationships. This theme explored processes and contextual factors related to students' ideas about the meaning of romantic relationships, including descriptions of elements of a good or bad relationship, as well as discussion about opportunities for building relationships and threats to teens' existing relationships. This was one of the largest themes, with close to 85% of students contributing content across all but one of the risk situations. This theme was one of six themes with a heavier concentration of positive (71%) than negative (29%) references coded. Whereas the potential positive outcomes coded within this theme involved a variety of dating situations (i.e., students discussed the hope for or possibility of building positive dating

115

relationships out of a variety of risky situations), the potential negative outcomes more heavily emphasized unbalanced or exploitative relationships wherein one partner was using or controlling the other partner in some way.

Students explored components of good versus bad relationships, especially noting the negative impact of partners who cheat or use their partner in some way. Students said that "flirting and touching on other girls if you know you already have a girlfriend" is an example of "not showing good relationship traits" because it shows that you are not really "committed" and could "hurt" a partner. A tenth grade boy talked about the negative outcomes when a partner is "just playing games and messing with [their] emotions," such as when a partner says that "they love them," but they "really don't mean it."

Students also highlighted the value placed on interpersonal connection and relationships as they discussed their fears about losing a dating partner. For example, relational aggression could contribute to break ups. However, some students discussed their hopes that within committed relationships, partners might be able to "not listen to what nobody else says" and rise above the gossip to build a stronger relationship and create "a closer bond between two people," rather than breaking up. A tenth grade girl also talked about her attempts to avoid breaking up, and discussed her perception of the usefulness of controlling behaviors in such situations as a method for communicating a level of commitment and connection between partners.

Complementary to students' fears of relationship loss, students discussed their hope for the opportunity to build a relationship or grow closer within an existing relationship. Spending time alone in a bedroom with a potential partner, dating an older

116

partner, and being with a partner who uses you for a physical relationship were examples of dating situations in which students discussed the potential benefit of developing a relationship or interpersonal connection. Students said of such situations that "you might end up getting along with each other," might "like each other and want something to happen," and might even "love each other." Similarly, one tenth grade girl explained that even negative dating interactions could produce positive interpersonal connections and relationships, as she said that "a positive thing" associated with being approached inappropriately at school is "maybe they would start liking that person…start going together." Meeting an internet partner in-person was also frequently identified as a possible opportunity for meeting someone with whom "you have a lot in common," "falling in love," or meeting a partner who could be "the one," as one tenth grade girl explained.

> All these boys you see in school, and then you can actually meet somebody on the internet and they could be the one…You would never know. If you wanna meet in person, you would probably have to talk…for at least…a good year, just to get to know 'em. Then y'all could become best friends… date… meet each other.

In some cases youth spoke concretely about the benefit of "going together" as the positive outcome associated with the various risky dating situations, but in other cases, students spoke more abstractly. For example, students discussed their desire to "know that you're not alone" and "have somebody to love you," or stated that dating someone much older could be good because "there's not an age for love." The opportunities to have a partner, feel connected with or loved by that partner, and have "another person [who] just

listened and really believes [in you]" were discussed with high regard and value by youth. One eighth grade boy emphasized this importance placed on having a partner as he said that the good thing about being with a partner, even if they flirt or cheat is that "at least she *has* somebody—at least she…has got a boyfriend or a girlfriend."

Communication. This theme addressed ways that students communicate with their partners, peers, and families about issues related to dating and romantic relationships. Communication could be healthy and adaptive, such as when students were able to communicate their relational needs or boundaries with partners. However, students also discussed frustration with instances when their attempts at communication failed to achieve their goals, or when the communication itself (e.g., lying, relational aggression) became problematic. In this way, communication could represent specific positive or negative outcomes (i.e., the communication itself is the outcome of interest), or communication could represent processes or contextual factors associated with risky situations that could then lead to other outcomes. Only about one-third of students discussed communication; however, their coding references occurred across all but one of the risk situations. Those coding references were approximately 67% positive and 33% negative in valence.

Commonly cited positive outcomes associated with communication involved the ability to set limits, communicate needs, or stand up for yourself. These benefits were particularly salient in situations where a boundary was being violated, such as by a partner who approached in an inappropriate way, attempted to use a teen just for sex, or pressured a teen to dance in an uncomfortable way. Such messages could be verbally or

non-verbally communicated, as one tenth grade girl explained: "If somebody is dancing too close to me and I don't like it—best believe it, I'm gonna walk away…walking away is positive. Or…tell them to stop again." Another tenth grade girl similarly highlighted the importance of portraying a serious tone in assertively communicating boundaries.

> If the person is serious about telling the other person to stop, I don't think there really is a potential positive thing out of it except for telling them *to stop.* If you stand up for yourself…tell them to stop, and…walk off, then I think that is the only real positive thing about it. [You have to be serious, or else they won't stop.]

In addition to the importance of the style and method of communicating, students also highlighted the importance of the source and context from which the communication was received. For example, a tenth grade boy explained that a girl would react differently to a harassing or inappropriate approach from a boy she liked versus someone who she did not like. He said that if she actually liked the boy, "she'd probably laugh at the situation…and then when he leaves, she'd be like, 'Oh God! He was actually on me,'" whereas he thought the outcome would be different if she did not like him, "because you can say the same thing, but it won't come out the same exact way." Even in potentially risky contexts, the chance to talk, feel listened to, and connect with someone represented a salient potential benefit or positive outcome for youth. For example, as one tenth grade boy explained, being alone in a bedroom with someone, even if you are uncomfortable, could lead to a chance to talk and "learn something about that person."

Finally, students discussed malicious and deceitful communications and the benefits and risks associated with each. Relational aggression was a form of malicious

communication that could have serious negative implications for individuals (e.g., rumors about one's sexual reputation) as well as for couples and their peers (e.g., escalation of relational aggression into direct verbal and physical aggression). Further, lying was described as common but negative, such as by a tenth grade boy who explained that even though there could be "nothing good coming out of" lying, he still believed he would lie.

> [Asking your friend to lie is] putting your friend in a bad predicament…what happens if your mom comes to get you from my house and you're not here? What do I say? …I wouldn't say it's cool to lie…I wouldn't say it's alright…but you're trying to look out for one of your friends, so you're gonna [go along with it].

Emotion. This theme addressed discrete emotions that could result from various risky dating situations, as well as emotion regulation as a process that could contribute to other outcomes in dating situations. Emotions were discussed as both positive and negative outcomes across every risk situation by over two-thirds of students. About one-quarter of the references related to positive affect associated with dating, including feeling happy, comfortable, and experiencing love, care, and concern for a partner. By contrast, about three-quarters of the references regarded negative affect in situations where students might feel upset, uncomfortable, angry, scared, disrespected, violated, and hurt. Additionally, students discussed relational processes with emotional implications, such as "playing games" to "mess with" partners' emotions, experiencing the impact of a "broken heart" within later relationships, and "snapping" or having a "temper problem."

One of the most commonly discussed emotional experiences was feeling loved and loving another person, such as when partners told each other that "they love them" or

"listened and really believed [in them]." Feeling like someone "actually cares" was a powerful experience, and for some students could outweigh the negative impact of being with a controlling or manipulative partner. Such positive emotional experiences could be particularly salient if the teen were vulnerable or unaccustomed to attention, according to one seventh grade boy who said that a teen "might be happy that someone notices them and actually wants to meet them. They might not get noticed a lot by other people, but then they get that email and they're really happy that they are getting noticed."

The positive emotions associated with dating relationships were countered by the intensity of negative emotional reactions that were described by youth as salient risks. Students said their "heart could get broken" to the extent that they "wouldn't be trusting of another boy or girl…in the future." Feeling used, violated, or taken advantage of were common negative reactions, as well as having "their feelings hurt" by a partner who was disrespectful. The salience of emotional experiences as negative outcomes was highlighted by one girl who explained that an important risk associated with meeting an internet partner in person could be the negative emotions or emotional let-down experienced when you feel duped because they weren't who they said they were.

> They could be talking to you on email, but they probably don't got no picture…
> You expect them to be something that they're not… then a 12-year-old appears or
> it could be a 42-year-old. Then you feel like you've been played or tricked.

Students discussed the differences between feeling comfortable or uncomfortable as important positive and negative outcomes in the risky dating situations. Pushing a partner's limits or pressuring a partner to do something they didn't want to do were the

121

most commonly identified risks for making a partner feel uncomfortable. In some cases, students had difficulty articulating the specific uncomfortable experience, but identified the risk for feeling "bad," feeling "funny," or feeling "really intense." Also, some youth described observing the outward appearance of emotional experiences, such as a partner who was "sitting there looking all scared and nervous and uncomfortable," whereas other youth described internal emotional experiences, such as having their "heart start racing."

Feeling angry, upset, mad, and irritable were commonly described emotions in situations involving jealousy and relational aggression. Although such discrete emotions were more commonly discussed than emotion regulation processes, some students did identify the risk that "people can just snap" or "go off" because of their inability to self-regulate. This lack of emotion regulation could lead to escalation of conflict into aggression. One eighth grade girl discussed the need for emotion regulation when confronted with relational or verbal aggression "because it's just a word" and "shouldn't really matter" but can escalate if people have a "temper problem." A tenth grade boy explained that he would be so angry if another boy were pressuring his friend that he would have trouble managing his anger and would have to "handle it [him]self."

Power, control, and pressure. This theme included both positive (11%) and negative (89%) outcomes associated with dating relationships in which some element of a power-differential contributed to partners feeling controlled or pressured, including discussion of these issues from both the perspective of the controlled and the controlling partner. This theme generally contained discussion of power, control, and pressure as an interpersonal process or contextual factor, rather than as a specific outcome or

122

consequence per se. A little over half of the students interviewed discussed these issues in eight of the twelve risk situations. However, students emphasized these issues in situations involving older partners, partners who gave gifts in order to gain power in the relationship, and partners who attempted to exert power over lifestyle choices or sexual decisions.

The only positive outcomes associated with this theme were identified from the perspective of the individual who is controlling or exerting pressure over another person. One tenth grade boy simply put that a "potential good thing" is that "they get what they want" through controlling behavior, such as getting the partner to "dress like that" or "do what they want them to do." A tenth grade girl said that controlling a partner's style of dress or peers with whom they associate could be a positive way of keeping a relationship together and preventing that partner from leaving: "He probably wouldn't want nobody talking to her…'cause then she might leave him and go to somebody else." Others explained that control strategies such as demanding to know your partner's whereabouts could be useful or even necessary in handling a partner who has cheated in relationships. A tenth grade girl said "if you know the other person cheats a lot…[you have to] stay on their case, ask a lot of questions…be in control—that's the positive thing about it."

By contrast, the majority of content coded within this theme involved the negative implications for the partner who felt pressured or controlled. Students used strong negative language in their descriptions of individuals who acted in this way, calling these partners "bossy," "obsessed," and "control freaks," and noting that they "want to know everything" and "don't [allow you] to have your own space." One tenth grade girl even

said that controlling partners can cross into the territory of "almost like stalking" behavior. Some students described feeling "the pressure" or knowing that a partner was "controlling [you]—controlling [your] life" and found these feelings to be negative outcomes in their own right. Others discussed the potential negative outcome of doing something that violated their beliefs as a result of "feeling obligated" due to the pressure of a controlling partner. A tenth grade girl said that "the person that is getting [gifts] feels like they owe it to the other person. That could be a lapse of judgment—they do something that they don't want to do, thinking they owe it to that person."

The interpersonal or relational implications of power and control issues in dating relationships were also discussed. Jealousy was identified as a significant contributor to controlling behaviors, and the lack of trust communicated by controlling behaviors could contribute to conflict or break-ups, as one tenth grade girl explained: "If you tell [them] what to wear…asking them who they are talking to…where they are going out…that's being controlling. [They] might not like that, and…don't want a controlling person in their life…telling them what to do." An eighth grade girl shared her perception that such controlling behaviors precluded the establishment of strong relationships based on mutual respect, instead emphasizing superficial relationship factors like status and appearance.

> That means you are controlling…and you want them to be somebody that they're not. So that means you are not wanting them for how they are, like their mind and potential… It's like you want to show off…"That's my girlfriend. Don't she look fly with that outfit [that I made her wear]?"

Image, respect, status, and reputation. This theme involved the reciprocal influences of peer status and popularity on dating processes and of dating processes on peer status, including ways in which image and reputation could be improved or damaged by events that unfolded within dating relationships. In this way, peer status could represent a contextual influence on other outcomes associated with risky dating situations, or other factors could affect changes in one's peer status (i.e., loss or gain of status and respect as an outcome). Students also highlighted links between self-respect and the respect or disrespect teens received from partners and peers. Nearly half of the students interviewed discussed content within this theme, with 38% positive and 62% negative outcomes. This theme was coded across ten of the dating situations, with particular salience in situations involving sexuality and the peer group.

Students believed that their popularity could be improved by engaging in certain behaviors or dating certain partners. One tenth grade girl said that dancing provocatively might make one partner feel uncomfortable, but "the good things about it is…maybe they can look at her as one of the most best dancers" or one of the "most popular girls in the school." Particularly for boys, engaging in sexual activity and dating highly-desired girls were ways to "gain more respect" or "get some cool points." A tenth grade girl noted that seeing her boyfriend flirt with another girl could be a positive social indicator for herself.

> If a girl is letting your boyfriend…flirt with her…the good thing…is at least you
> know your boyfriend [is] good enough for a girl to want him…I would rather
> have a boy that all the girls want, instead of having a boy that nobody wants.

Youth also said that having peers perceive that a student had engaged in certain behaviors could be detrimental to reputation, particularly for girls. Sexual promiscuity was described as a threat to girls' reputations; however, girls did not even have to engage in sexual activity for their reputations to be damaged. For example, provocative dancing could lead peers to get the wrong idea "and then it makes her have a bad reputation…for dancing…like that." Rumors and gossip could also be used to attack girls' reputations, such as via a rumor about a girl "having sex with a lot of people," or having a boy get "mad and…make up things about" a girl who refused sexual activity with him. However, relational aggression could be a double-edged sword, damaging reputations but also ensuring that lots of people around school were talking about you, thus suggesting a certain level of social prominence or popularity. In this way, being noticed by peers represented an enviable goal with which a delicate balance could be associated: acting in a way that "makes everybody notice" was important, but also brought the risk that as people took notice it would "probably [be] in a good way, but maybe not."

Dealing with peer pressure represented a similarly delicate balance for teens because being perceived as a "follower" was viewed negatively, but students also valued peer perceptions and hesitated to fight back against peer pressure for fear of damaging their social status. Several girls explained that "people probably worry about making a scene" by standing up to pressure when peers were onlookers. A seventh grade girl similarly added that going against the crowd might lead to a loss of respect by peers.

[Teens might be] doing what everybody else is doing, and not trying to be *odd*

and just sitting down…they might feel like their friends might not treat them the

same if they don't dance like that…their friends might not respect them the same.

Although most content in this theme focused on peer and partner issues, some

students discussed intrapersonal issues of respect, such as feeling good "if you stand up

for yourself" rather than compromising your values. A tenth grade boy explained that

students could reduce conflict and aggression by showing respect for themselves and

expecting respect from others. He believed that this could be achieved by assertively

explaining personal boundaries with the stance of "if you don't disrespect me anymore, I

won't disrespect you" so that both parties could avoid being perceived by the peer group

as a "punk" or as having been "carried" by a dating partner (i.e., being disrespected, or

having one's status or reputation insulted). Such outcomes were described as important

because aggression could result if this type of respect was damaged or pushed too far.

Sex and sexuality. This theme included references to positive, consensual sexual

experiences for teens (10% of references) as well as negative, non-consensual, and

manipulative sexual experiences and negative repercussions of sexual activity (90% of

references). Sex often represented a specific outcome associated with the risky dating

situations, although students also discussed additional outcomes that could result from

sex or sexual experiences. Close to 90% of students discussed content related to sex

across nine out of the twelve situations, making this theme one of the largest and most

frequently discussed.

Several students identified risks associated with sexual activity that could "ruin your life," including pregnancy and STIs, and within this context others discussed the benefits of being protected or abstaining from sexual activity. A tenth grade girl said that dating an older partner could contribute to conflict or uncertainty in a sexual relationship.

If…the boy is in his twenties or something, he might want to have a baby. He might be ready for sex or whatever, but you're not. So you're kinda thinking, "What should I do?" [The boy might be] talking about kids…like, he wanted to start young so by the time they get old, he won't be real old trying to raise a child.

A few students talked about the potential positive elements of sexual activity within the situations presented, such as the chance to have a "physical relationship" or get "satisfaction." However, more commonly, students discussed the value of talking and connecting emotionally with a partner, and one tenth grade boy discussed the emptiness of a relationship based solely on sexual activity or using a partner just for sex. He said, "You…get nothing out of it…It's not going to be a real relationship…You not going to get love out of it…it's not going to be meaningful."

The risk for rape or other unwanted sexual contact (e.g., sex involving aggressive behavior) loomed as a major negative outcome across many different dating situations. However, such risks were identified as especially relevant when meeting dating partners online, when dating older partners, when partners were alone in a bedroom, and when one partner exerted interpersonal pressure or pushed the other's boundaries in some way. Additionally, students identified the "pressure" associated with such situations as a negative outcome "because she wouldn't want to do what he wants her to do," and the

results could include psychological manipulation or physical force. However, one student did note a potential positive outcome in interactions that began as "playfully" aggressive and then led to sexual activity, saying that "roughness" could lead to sex because "people…act rough together and the next thing you know [they end up having sex]."

Monitoring, information, and assistance. This theme included potential positive (62%) and negative (38%) outcomes associated with parents' and peers' information-management and monitoring strategies, and ways they could provide assistance in dating situations via information-sharing. About half of the students discussed these issues across eight of the dating situations. However, the positive outcomes were spread across seven of the risky dating situations, whereas the negative elements of this theme were focused within situations involving parental monitoring and controlling partners. Monitoring (by parents, peers, and partners) typically represented a process-related factor that could contribute to other specific outcomes (e.g., parental monitoring could lead to behavioral consequences), whereas receiving assistance was more commonly described as a specific outcome associated with risky situations.

The most commonly cited positive outcome was the revelation of a partner's "true colors," such as when they were found to be cheating, controlling, aggressive, or using a partner. Students noted that obtaining even hurtful information offered the opportunity to make decisions about their relationship status or future behavior with the partner (e.g., increasing one's own monitoring or controlling behaviors to better manage the partner). Students explained that monitoring partners or gathering information about them offered the chance to regain power in the relationship by using the information to "decide

129

whether to stay with them or break up with them." Further, in instances of controlling or aggressive behavior, such information could offer a "warning sign" about forthcoming danger if the relationship continued. One tenth grade girl said that if you surreptitiously monitor "your boyfriend…[flirting with] somebody, and they didn't know you could see, you could see how they really acted when you're not around…decide whether or not you want to date them…knowing what he does behind your back."

The use of control strategies, such as telling a partner who they can hang out with or how they should dress, was described by some students as a positive dating behavior because the information could be helpful to the partner who received it. For example, one tenth grade girl explained that telling a partner how to dress could be "a good thing" if the partner "didn't know how to dress [well]." An eighth grade girl explained how her friend had helped a boy to improve his social status by teaching him about styles of dress and middle school social groups: "She talked to him about sixth grade. He used to wear dirty clothes or whatever, and she helped to fix him up…she *made him*, actually."

Providing this type of information or assistance was viewed by some students as "looking out for the other person." However, students also described the circularity of such controlling behaviors, as information-management (e.g., demanding information about a partner's whereabouts) provided data to controlling partners who could then use such information as a mechanism for exerting even greater control in the relationship. For example, one tenth grade girl said that she would "ask a lot of questions" and "stay on [a partner's] case" in order to have the information she needed to stay "in control." Some students viewed this escalation of control in a positive light, whereas other students

viewed these types of information-management, monitoring, and control strategies as "overprotective," attempts to "own you," or signs that the partner is "obsessed with you."

Other negative outcomes within this theme focused on parental monitoring. Many students identified the risk of having "something bad happen" if they lied to their parents to evade their monitoring attempts. As a result of such fears, some students preferred to share honest information with parents. A tenth grade boy discussed the importance of being honest with parents, even though he said that many teens don't want to communicate with their parents.

> Parents communicate...Even though the kids don't communicate with their parents that much, parents will communicate…"Did you see my son?" And they'll be like, "No, I haven't seen him all day." [If you and your partner lied to your parents, to evade their monitoring] that makes both of you all a liar.

Rule-breaking and consequences. This theme included primarily negative references (91%) to specific consequences that occur as a result of youth breaking rules in risky situations. Students discussed parental rules and sanctions within the home as well as broader school-based or societal rules and consequences. However, several students noted potential positives within this theme, such as "getting away with it" or "not getting caught," and being able to have fun as a result. Close to two-thirds of students discussed content within this theme, and their coding spanned ten of the twelve risk situations. The types of rule-breaking that students most frequently discussed included dating partners who were over the age of 18, skipping school, sneaking out of the house, lying to parents, stealing things for a partner, fighting, and substance abuse. The

131

consequences most frequently discussed were getting in trouble with parents, legal trouble (e.g., juvenile detention, lawsuits), suspension from school, pregnancy, and damage to trust or to one's reputation with peers, parents, teachers, or the broader community.

Significant age differences in dating were identified by some students as a risk because the older partner "could get in trouble…[for] statutory rape." Some students did speak about the risks for the younger partners such as "getting in a lot of trouble for dating someone older." However, many addressed this issue from the perspective of harm to the older adult, including going to jail, "getting blamed" unfairly for something bad that happens to the younger partner, and damage to one's reputation as "people judge [you] because of [your] relationship" with someone younger. Negative consequences could occur through the family or the legal system, as one tenth grade girl explained.

> [An older guy] can get in trouble for real for messing with younger girls…I don't think it's a good idea. 'Cause your parents are gonna ask to meet him, and they… gonna be shocked…They can call the police. They can get a restraining order.

Older partners were also identified as a risk because of their ability to exert negative "influence" to break rules in situations where the younger partners could be "taken advantage of." For example, pressure could be used to get the younger partner to try "stealing stuff" for the older partner, go out "drinking and smoking, staying out late at night," go "somewhere my momma wouldn't want me to go," or "sneak out to meet him somewhere or sneak him in my house." Similarly, older partners who bought nice things

but expected something in return might pressure their partners to do "a favor, like something bad, like going and beat up this person or take something…a lot of things."

Trust. This theme highlighted the benefits (36% of references) of building trust within peer and parent relationships and the damage (64% of references) that can result from loss of trust in valued relationships. In either case, the loss or gain of trust typically represented the specific outcome associated with risky dating situations; however, the elaboration on *how* that trust was lost or gained could contain elements of process-based and contextual description. About 40% of students discussed trust-related issues in half of the situations presented; however, trust was particularly salient in situations involving relational aggression, jealousy, control, and lying to parents.

Students identified opportunities to build trust in relationships out of experiences that could otherwise be hurtful or damaging. For example, students explained that dating relationships could actually be strengthened following an experience with rumors or gossip because the experience would "make you all learn how to trust each other," and because you "don't have to listen to what [other kids] say" and you "can go on leading a happy life [together]" instead. The loss of trust, however, could be devastating to couples and individuals, such as having your "heart get broken" and then not being "trusting of another boy or girl" because of the "damage" to trust by an unfaithful partner. Witnessing a partner's flirtation with peers could be quite hurtful and make teens "feel bad…trust would be 'Poof'…gone." These experiences could also serve as positive opportunities, though, because they could be "a sign telling her that she need to leave him alone because he can't be faithful." However, as a tenth grade girl explained, trusting a partner who

flirted openly with peers could sometimes be easier than trusting a partner who attempted to do so behind her back because at least "they aren't trying to hide it."

Students also discussed the risk of their own and their peers' parents losing trust in them. A tenth grade boy shared his fear that if he lied to a parent to cover for a friend, "that makes both of you all a liar," and then "your friend's mother or father wouldn't… trust you anymore." Similarly, such lies to parents could mean that "if your…mom found out, she can stop having trust in you [too]." One tenth grade boy explained the risk that "when you lie, you got to make up another lie for that lie you about to tell again," and the cycle of deceit could damage trust in parent-child relationships.

In some risky dating situations, students reported that if partners were committed, they should be able to "trust someone's judgment," perhaps even at the expense of their own opinions or safety. Some students thought that "bad or good, you gotta be able to trust [your partner's] judgment" if the partner tries to control how you dress or who you are allowed to talk to, and in such controlling relationships, partners could benefit from the opportunity to work on trust issues together. A seventh grade boy even extended this type of logic from controlling relationships to "playful" physical aggression: "If the partner knows that they are just playing, then they might be happy…that the other person trusts them enough to hit around, but just be playing."

Other students discussed the damage to trust that could result from controlling behaviors in relationships. For example, students said that such behaviors were "nosey," and if someone tried to control who their partner was allowed to talk to, then "he or she doesn't trust them" and "they shouldn't be going out together." A tenth grade boy

134

elaborated on his perspective on trust and control in relationships: "That's a trust thing, so I think that would really mess up your relationship if you try to change that person" by trying to control him or her, and "that's going to be a big problem in your relationship."

Maturity, age, and experience. This theme included both the potential positive (65%) and negative (35%) outcomes anticipated by youth in considering dating a partner who had a different level of maturity (developmentally, emotionally, in age or experience with dating). Whereas some students defined a significant age or maturity difference as being two or three years, other students discussed youth dating young adults who were 18 years or older. Still other students discussed differences in maturity among peers of a similar age, such as classmates. This theme contained primarily descriptions of maturity and age differences as processes and contextual factors associated with risky dating situations. A little over one-third of students discussed content related to this theme, primarily focused within a situation about dating an older partner.

Particularly for girls, dating an older boy or man was seen as enticing "because he is more mature," as evidenced by "his personality" or the way that mature partners "think more." Further, as several girls explained, dating an older partner means that the younger partner can "learn from [them]" because they have "better experience in going out." Additionally, some students identified more concrete benefits of dating older partners, such as "you don't have to wait until they get out of school" to spend time with them, the older partner probably has "a job" and makes "a lot more money," and the "older person can help them out [with studying for a test] if they already learned the stuff."

Girls also described the negative implications of dating someone the same age or younger. A tenth grade girl explained that she did not want to "go with nobody this age… [or especially not someone] even younger, 'cause they act immature." Another tenth grade girl spoke about the contrast of older, mature boys versus younger, "childish" boys.

Older boys…talk to you more. They're more experienced in relationships…a girl would rather be with an older boy...because...boys her age are childish, and they do [things that] their parents won't approve of…But then they could be around older boys and think they're more mature and they handle themselves like older boys should handle themselves…that's what girls like about older boys.

By contrast, some students identified negative implications of age differences in relationships. A tenth grade girl said that it was "a waste of time" to go with someone older because "they are on two different levels…two different lives…just way different maturity levels." Further, "if they really loved each other, eventually he is going to leave…and maybe go to college." Others discussed similar developmental gaps when older partners are "ready to do a lot of things" that the younger partner is "not ready for." One tenth grade boy said that he didn't "know what it is that attracts the younger female to the older man" or "the older man to the younger female," but he thought such arrangements were "not a good thing…not a lot of good will come out of that situation."

Financial and material possessions. This theme was one of the smallest, with only about 28% of youth contributing content across two risk situations (dating an older partner and gift-giving with associated expectations or pressure). Students expressed potential positive (71%) and negative (29%) outcomes associated with these risky dating

situations, and discussed these outcomes from the perspectives of the gift-recipient as well as the gift-giver. Positive outcomes included getting "free stuff" and having a partner who would "basically buy [you] what [you] want," as well as experiencing the emotional significance of having a "special" partner who is "generous," showing that "they care," and "showing [they] love [you] and…would go out of [their] way to do something to keep [you]." Older partners were particularly likely to provide such gifts because they'd likely have "a job making a lot more money" than teenage partners. However, giving and receiving gifts could also lead to a lack of clarity about whether the partner "loves me for real or just loves me for my money," as well as whether they are giving gifts "because they care or [because they] want something out of it."

Students had different ideas about what a gift-giving partner might want in return. An eighth grade boy said that if a "dude bought a female a whole lot of shoes, dresses, and stuff" then he would likely try to "force her to…have sex." By contrast, he said that if a girl provided financial incentives to a male dating partner, it would be a positive outcome for him because the girl was "paying you money for free, just to be their friend." A tenth grade girl summarized why she thought it was a bad idea to accept gifts, because "they are buying you….if you accept the gifts…wouldn't you think that they were going to want something back in return? They probably don't want gifts, but they are going to want something else…to do him a favor…something bad."

Several students identified risks from the gift-givers' perspectives, such as being left in a bad position because they "wasted all [their] money on a girl" and can't "pay the bills no more." An eighth grade girl thought that gift-givers could unintentionally

sabotage their relationships by creating partners who were "too catered to" or "too pampered." A tenth grade boy similarly thought that giving too many gifts placed students at risk for building a relationship based on materialism.

> Whenever you probably be broke and can't buy them nothing, they'll be like, "Oh, you can't buy me more gifts, I'll have to get rid of you." …when they… can't buy them presents anymore…they find somebody else that can.

Fun, enjoyment, or "something to do." In this theme, students exclusively highlighted positive outcomes of having fun or enjoying themselves in risky dating situations. Nearly half of students contributed to this theme across eight of the twelve risk situations, including situations with controlling, harassing, or aggressive partners, as well as situations involving lying to parents or meeting an internet partner in person. In most cases, students discussed actively seeking out and engaging in fun activities, but some students also discussed positive outcomes of simply having "something to do" as boredom-relief, rather than fun-seeking, per se.

Although many students discussed the risks of lying to parents, a common positive outcome associated with this behavior was the chance to have fun and enjoy time with a partner. One tenth grade girl explained that "you all could just chill and not worry about your mom coming around." Others added that lying meant that "you get to see that person you want to see" and offered the opportunity for "kids to have fun." Further, if the teen was "a good liar" then "they might not get caught" and they might "end up going where they [wanted to go], doing what they [wanted] to do." One eighth grade girl

summarized that lying to parents gave you "a chance to do stuff you wouldn't be able to do if your parents knew what you were gonna do—that's it, it's just being bad, it's fun."

Similarly, whereas "playful" aggression was described as problematic in previous themes, some youth viewed these types of interactions as fun or enjoyable. Some students noted that if someone said that they were "just playing around," then it was important to believe them and try to have fun engaging in this type of play together. One tenth grade girl explained that after seeing her parents interact in a playfully aggressive way, she believed that some dating partners might also play in a similar fashion.

> I think that when people…say they are playing, they truly are…I see my parents play around like that all the time. My mom might tackle him on the floor…He might flip her on the couch or pick her up and throw her…when they are playing and rough-housing. But they are just playing…they are just having fun.

In addition to "playful" aggression, students also discussed other situations in which they thought teens should ignore their personal discomfort or unease in order to try and "have fun." Students identified the chance to "enjoy" or "have fun dancing" even if one partner was uncomfortable with the dancing style or intrusion into their personal space or boundaries. Students also said that if other teens were approached in a harassing way (e.g., touching, comments about one's physical appearance), they could try to enjoy "playing along" with the person by using friendly or flirtatious behaviors or by laughing and playfully telling the person to "shut up" or "go away."

Finally, several students discussed the opportunity to have fun or simply pass time on the internet. Meeting potential partners online was identified as positive because of the

139

opportunity to "play games with the person on the computer," "instant message," and have "somebody that just wants to talk." A tenth grade girl said that even though you "might not want to meet them [in person], it gives you something to do while you are on the computer."

Study Two: Peer Risk Situations

Method

Setting and Participants

Data for this study were collected in the Spring of 2008 as part of a larger study on violence prevention in middle school settings. Participants were 39 sixth grade youth (51% females, $N = 20$ females, 19 males), recruited from health and physical education classes in two middle schools in an urban, predominantly lower-income setting of the Southeastern United States. These students were identified as having elevated levels of risk due to their socioecological context (e.g., high levels of poverty, neighborhood crime, and violence) (Kids Count, 2004; Nolan, 2004). The students ranged in ages from 11 to 12 years old ($M=11.47$, $SD=0.51$), and the majority identified themselves as African American or Black ($N = 38$, 97%), with one student identifying as European American, White, or Caucasian ($N = 1$, 3%). Of the 42 students randomly selected as potential participants in this interview, parental consent and student assent were obtained for 39 students (93% participation rate).

Procedures

Interviewer training. Eight interviewers were trained in interviewing procedures for the current study ($N = 5$ Caucasian females, 1 Caucasian male, 1 African American female, and 1 bi-racial African American and Indian female). Interviewers completed over ten hours of formal training (e.g., lecture; discussion; readings; role-plays; university training course in human rights protection and research ethics; review of procedures for reporting suspected child abuse and neglect; review of general qualitative interviewing

skills; review of developmental, cultural, and contextual issues; detailed review of the semi-structured interview protocol). All interviewers participated in role-plays of interviews during training sessions, supervised by trained research institute staff, and also provided audio-recorded mock interviews to be reviewed by investigators who provided verbal and written feedback. Interviewers were required to provide at least one mock interview, in addition to supervised trainings, and interviewers continued performing mock interviews and training until adequate adherence to the protocol was established. Throughout the study, supervision and feedback on randomly selected audio recordings was provided to interviewers by the research team to enhance interview quality and adherence to the research protocol.

Interviewing procedures. Research protocols were reviewed and approved by the Virginia Commonwealth University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Prior to participation in the interviews, trained study staff met with students, thoroughly explained the study, and answered any questions. Youth who were interested in participating in the study were asked to take the student assent and parental consent forms home to review with their parent. Youth received a $5 gift certificate for reviewing and returning the assent and consent forms, even if they or their parents declined study participation. Youth also received a $10 gift certificate in recognition of interview participation even if they opted to stop at any point in the interview process.

Interviewers explained the following information to each student prior to starting the interviews: a) the general purpose of the study, b) that responses would be kept confidential, c) that participants could discontinue participation at any time without

penalty, d) that participants could opt not to answer any question, and e) the general process for audio recording the interviews. Interviewers also explained the limits of confidentiality, such as in the case of the disclosure of abuse or neglect. Interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted in private locations of the school (e.g., small study rooms of the library, etc.).

Twelve peer-based risk situations were generated via triangulation with domains of problematic dating situations identified in the preliminary study (Sullivan et al., 2009), triangulation with dating risk situations represented in the current Study One, and triangulation with other research on problem situations experienced by urban adolescents in similar socioecological contexts (Farrell et al., 2007; see Appendix D for a review of triangulation across these studies and the resulting two six-item protocols of peer risk situations). These problem situations were independently rated by three researchers as relevant, salient, and high risk situations within a peer or friendship context. Students were randomly assigned to one of the protocols and asked to describe their perceptions of potential positive and negative outcomes (i.e., pros/cons, costs/ benefits, good/bad things) associated with each situation. Similar to the situations from Study One, careful attention was given to the neutrality of wording and presentation of these risk situations.

Students' peer-based aggression and victimization experiences were also measured via self-report on the physical and relational aggression and victimization subscales of the Problem Behavior Frequency Scales (see Appendix E) (PBFS, Farrell, et al., 2000; Sullivan et al., 2006). The Physical and Relational Aggression subscales include 7 and 6 items, respectively, designed to measure frequency of adolescent-

reported aggression over the past 30 days using a six-point scale (0 - *never*, 1- *1-2 times*, 2 - *3-5 times*, 3 - *6-9 times*, 4 - *10-19 times*, 5 - *20 or more times*). Examples of aggression items include, "Hit or slapped someone" and "Shoved or pushed someone" (physical aggression), and "Spread a false rumor about someone" and "Left another kid out on purpose when it was time to do an activity" (relational aggression). The Physical and Relational Victimization subscales include 4 and 6 items, respectively, designed to measure frequency of adolescent-reported victimization over the past 30 days using the same six-point scale (0 - *never*, 1 - *1-2 times*, 2 - *3-5 times*, 3 - *6-9 times*, 4 - *10-19 times*, 5 - *20 or more times*). Examples of victimization items include, "Been hit by another kid" and "Been pushed or shoved by another kid" (physical victimization), and "Had a kid tell lies about you to make other kids not like you anymore" and "Had a kid who is mad at you try to get back at you by not letting you be in their group anymore" (relational victimization).

These measures have been validated and widely used with similar populations; however, with the current sample, some subscales' alpha coefficients were lower than in previous research (e.g., Miller-Johnson, Sullivan, Simon, & The Multisite Violence Prevention Project, 2004). For the current sample, the alpha coefficient for physical aggression was .84, for relational aggression was .55, for physical victimization was .68, and for relational victimization was .76. Due to the lower internal consistency for some of the subscales, and because the aggression and victimization subtypes were moderately to strongly correlated (r=.68 for physical and relational aggression, p<.01; r=.44 for physical and relational victimization, p<.01), physical and relational aggression were

combined into a composite aggression score, and physical and relational victimization were combined into a composite victimization score (r=.30 for aggression and victimization composite, p>.05). The alpha coefficient for the current sample was .84 for aggression and .79 for victimization.

   Transcription and data management. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim by trained transcription staff into Microsoft Word documents, and reviewed for accuracy by a separate transcriber. Transcripts were imported into NVivo 7 software (QSR International, 2006), which offers unique capabilities for qualitative data analysis, including computer-based coding and re-coding of data, management and tracking of theme merging and separating, organization of theoretical models, and hierarchical structuring capabilities through the use of tree nodes. Quantitative data collected from the self-report measure of peer aggression and victimization were entered separately into SPSS software (SPSS, 2007) for statistical analysis.

Coding and Data Analysis Plan

   Descriptive data for the quantitative self-report measure of peer aggression and victimization were examined for the total sample and separately by gender, including 30-day prevalence, means, standard deviations, ranges, effect sizes, and bivariate correlations. A categorical variable for gender was imported into the NVivo 7 software for all students and was used as a case attribute to examine the distribution of qualitative coding content across boys and girls for the final coding structure.

   Data in NVivo 7 were coded by two graduate students with three to four years of experience in qualitative coding over a 10-month period, and was supervised by regular

research team meetings with graduate students and faculty researchers, including consultations with a qualitative research expert with over seven years of experience. A key process across all coding was the use of memoing to provide an ongoing record of research team conversations about the overall analytic strategy and emerging theme structure (Erwin et al., 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and a number of bias-reduction activities were utilized, including intensive discussion and team meetings among researchers, triangulation across researchers and relevant theory and literature, and examination and discussion of negative cases (e.g., Farrell et al., 2007; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Methods of constant comparison, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and audiotaped and verbatim transcription were used to enhance credibility of findings. Further, triangulation between investigators and with extant theory and research findings was used to promote trustworthiness in analysis and results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Trustworthiness was also enhanced through the negative case analyses designed to eliminate "outliers" and "exceptions by continually revising the hypothesis at issue" until an excellent "fit" is achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 312). "Thick description" (i.e., rich contextual description, including elaboration on participants, settings, and methods) of the research context and methods was also used to promote evaluation of the transferability of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Finally, dependability and confirmability of the data and analyses was promoted through a comprehensive audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The first phase of coding represented open coding, designed to discover emergent conceptualizations, categories, properties, and dimensions of the data, combined with

examination of the a priori themes proposed based on relevant literature. These themes were explored within an open coding framework, allowing for properties of the a priori themes to be modified based on emergent conceptualizations of the data. Memoing and ongoing research team meetings were held to discuss and document the emergent constructs and triangulate across researchers and with relevant literature. From the first level of coding, a total of 23 themes of potential outcomes in risky dating situations emerged, including the six a priori themes proposed.

Second level coding represented an iterative process during which themes and subthemes of coded text were refined to create a progressively more complete and accurate representation of adolescents' perceptions of the 12 risky dating situations. During second level coding, all text segments were read and each theme was named and defined. Subsequently, themes were compared and contrasted to highlight similarities and differences among related constructs and explore the need for new themes or identify redundant themes that could be collapsed. Themes were refined through constant comparison of each with their emerging definitions and representative data. Consensus was achieved on name, definition, and content of each theme and also on possible negative cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Second level coding resulted in a final list of 13 themes of potential outcomes in risky peer situations. This final theme structure incorporated three of the a priori themes originally hypothesized, and integrated content from the remaining three a priori themes with emergent content. Concurrently, the content of the student interviews was coded based on the valence (positive or negative) of the possible outcomes identified (i.e., all data was coded as

147

either a potential positive outcome or a potential negative outcome). This valence-based coding was conducted independently of the thematic coding, such that all data was coded within at least two locations: 1) at least one of the 13 content-based themes, and 2) *either* within the positive valence or the negative valence themes. Content-based themes were not mutually exclusive categories, and as such thematic content could be coded within multiple content-based themes.

Once the final theme structure was established, 20% of transcripts were randomly selected for examining inter-coder reliability, with a result of 100% agreement for valence-based coding and 94.8% agreement for content-based coding. These levels of inter-coder percent agreement exceeded levels of percent-agreement designated within the literature as goals for qualitative research (Zimmerman et al., 2004). Following this analysis, researchers met to discuss and come to resolution on instances of non-agreement, and a third level of analysis was conducted to ensure that all text coded across all interviews adhered to these final consensus decisions.

Once the coding structure was finalized, the distribution of content across themes was examined by gender using coding by case attribute matrices within the NVivo 7 program. These matrices generated quantitative data on the coding distribution that could then be examined using descriptive and comparative statistics. Further, coding matrices were utilized to examine the distribution of outcome valences across themes (i.e., which themes contain potential positive outcomes, which themes contain potential negative outcomes, what are the percentages or ratios of positive and negative outcomes across

themes), as well as to examine the theme and valence distributions across the different

peer risk situations.

Results

Overview

The following sections review analyses of situations that may place adolescents at

risk for peer aggression, victimization, and other maladaptive outcomes. First, descriptive

statistics for peer aggression and victimization are reviewed for the purposes of thick

description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and to illustrate the types of peer violence

experienced by the sample for contextualization of their qualitative data. Subsequently,

an overview of the qualitative data is presented, followed by an in-depth review of each

theme generated from the coding process, including definitions, summaries of content,

and exemplar quotations. Tables with coding matrices are used to summarize coding

density and saturation and highlight trends described narratively for each theme.

Descriptive Statistics for Peer Victimization and Aggression

Thirty-day prevalence rates for peer victimization and aggression are reported in

Table 7 for the total sample and separately by gender. For peer victimization, rates ranged

from 8 to 73% for the total sample. Over one-third of the sample had experienced 7 of the

10 acts of peer victimization in the past 30 days, including physical and relational

victimization. For peer aggression, prevalence rates ranged from 11 to 73% for the total

sample. Similar to the peer victimization scale, over one-third of the sample had

perpetrated 8 of the acts of peer aggression, including physical and relational aggression.

Boys and girls generally reported comparable 30-day prevalence rates of peer

149

victimization and aggression, with only one significant gender difference. Specifically, boys reported significantly higher prevalence rates than girls for telling someone that they wouldn't like them unless they did what they wanted them to do, $\chi^2 (1, 37) = 4.75$, $p<.05$.

Ranges, means, standard deviations, and effect sizes by gender are presented in Table 8 for peer victimization and aggression. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) identified no significant differences in means by gender for victimization and aggression. A bivariate correlation was also calculated for peer victimization and aggression, which revealed a moderate correlation ($r = .30$) that did not differ significantly by gender.

Table 7. *Thirty-day prevalence of peer victimization and peer aggression.*

	Total (%)	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	χ^2
Victimization				
Been hit by another kid	64.9	66.7	63.2	2.74
Been pushed or shoved by another kid	45.9	38.9	52.6	2.51
Another kid threatened to hit or physically harm you	40.5	38.9	42.1	2.12
Been threatened or injured by someone with a weapon (gun, knife, club, etc.)	8.1	5.6	10.5	0.31
Had a kid say they won't like you unless you do what he or she wanted you to do	37.8	33.3	42.1	1.16
Had someone spread a false rumor about you	73.0	72.2	73.7	2.47
Been left out on purpose by other kids when it was time to do an activity	24.3	33.3	15.8	4.75
Had a kid try to keep others from liking you by saying mean things about you	59.5	55.6	63.2	3.63
Had a kid tell lies about you to make other kids not like you anymore	43.2	27.8	57.9	4.90
Had a kid who is mad at you try to get back at you by not letting you be in their group anymore	29.7	33.3	26.3	5.13
Aggression				
Thrown something at someone to hurt them	37.8	38.9	36.8	2.46
Been in a fight in which someone was hit	48.6	61.1	36.8	4.94
Threatened to hurt a teacher	13.5	11.1	15.8	0.31
Shoved or pushed someone	67.6	77.8	57.9	6.13
Threatened someone with a weapon (gun, knife, club, etc.)	10.8	22.2	0.0	4.73
Hit or slapped someone	73.0	77.8	68.4	2.28
Threatened to hit or physically harm someone	43.2	50.0	36.8	2.24
Told someone you wouldn't like them unless they did what you wanted them to do	18.9	33.3	5.3	4.75*
Spread a false rumor about someone	32.4	44.4	21.1	4.58
Tried to keep others from liking another kid by saying mean things about him or her	51.4	55.6	47.4	3.45
Left another kid out on purpose when it was time to do an activity	29.7	27.8	31.6	1.45
Said things about another kid to make other kids laugh	64.9	66.7	63.2	3.39
Didn't let another kid be in your group anymore because you were mad at them	54.1	50.0	57.9	3.70

*Note: N=18 boys and 19 girls. * p<.05.*

Table 8. *Means, standard deviations, effect sizes, and observed ranges for peer victimization and peer aggression by gender.*

	Total		Boys		Girls		F	d	Range
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
Victimization	1.81	0.69	1.66	0.56	1.94	0.78	1.58	.41	1.00-3.90
Aggression	1.78	0.66	1.84	0.67	1.73	0.65	0.27	.17	1.00-3.69

Note: N=18 boys and 19 girls.

Qualitative Coding and Themes

     Overview. Qualitative coding generated 13 themes across the 12 risky peer

situations. Some of these themes represented direct positive and negative outcomes or

consequences associated with the risky situations (e.g., General Risk for Harm;

Aggression, Victimization, and Bullying), whereas others represented more descriptive

themes of positive and negative processes and contextual factors associated with the risky

situations (e.g., Interpersonal Connection and Friendships; Monitoring, Information, and

Assistance). Further, some themes contained a mixture of specific outcomes and

processes/contextual factors (e.g., Communication could represent the outcome of a

situation or could represent a process associated with a situation that led to a different

distinct outcome).

     All of the themes were mentioned by at least one-third of the youth interviewed

(range 15 to 39 youth sources per theme). Ten themes were mentioned by over half of the

youth, and five themes were mentioned by over 75% of youth. Two additional themes

were created to account for students who explicitly stated that there were no potential

positive outcomes (*N*=37) or no potential negative outcomes (*N*=5) in a given situation.

Table 9 presents the theme names, numbers of youth who mentioned each theme (e.g., 30

students discussed content at any point during their interview that was coded into the

General Risk for Harm theme), numbers of separate instances, or references when youth

discussed content within each theme (e.g., among the 30 students with interviews, or

sources, coded into the General Risk for Harm theme, there were 60 separate comments

coded into that theme), and descriptive statistics for each theme (ranges, means, and

Table 9. *Sources, references, ranges, means, and standard deviations for peer themes.*

Theme Name	Number of Sources	Number of References	Range of References per Student	*M* References per Student	*SD* References per Student
General Risk for Harm	30	60	0-5	1.54	1.17
Aggression, Victimization, and Bullying	34	62	0-5	1.59	1.12
Interpersonal Connection and Friendships	39	163	1-10	4.18	2.21
Communication	23	37	0-4	0.95	1.02
Emotion	27	48	0-5	1.23	1.29
Power, Control, and Pressure	32	50	0-4	1.28	0.97
Image, Respect, Status, and Reputation	18	26	0-5	0.67	1.01
Monitoring, Information, and Assistance	15	17	0-2	0.44	0.60
Rule-Breaking and Consequences	31	63	0-7	1.62	1.48
Trust and Values	23	33	0-2	0.85	0.81
Maturity and Age Differences	16	22	0-2	0.56	0.75
Financial or Material Possessions	21	31	0-3	0.79	0.89
Fun, Enjoyment, or "Something to Do"	21	30	0-2	0.77	0.81
No Positives in a Situation	37	94	0-5	2.41	1.33
No Negatives in a Situation	5	5	0-1	0.13	0.34

Note: N=39 students.

standard deviations). Although the reference numbers represent text segments of varying length per reference, ranging from a few words or clauses to full paragraphs, these numbers provide a useful supplement to the number of interviews coded per theme in evaluating not only the saturation of content across students, but also the density or frequency of discussion of content within themes.

The total number of references generated by participants was calculated for the total sample ($N=641$) and separately by gender ($N=311$ for boys, 330 for girls; $M=16.37$ and 16.50 references per boy and girl, respectively). Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) revealed no differences in mean levels of coding by gender. These findings suggest that the coding structure is developed with comparable total amounts of coded text represented across boys and girls.

Given the variety of risk situations presented to youth, the fit of coding was evaluated not only across gender, but also across the protocol situations. Table 10 presents the distribution of coding across themes for each of the risk situations. Each risk situation presented to students generated responses that were coded within 7 to 13 different themes ($M=9.50$ themes per risk situation). Conversely, each theme represented potential positive or negative content associated with 3 to 12 different risk situations ($M=8.77$ risk situations represented within each theme). Additionally, there were five students who indicated that there were no instances of potential negative content in two of the risk situations presented, and between 1 and 17 students who indicated that there were no potential positives across every situation presented ($M=7.83$ students per situation). These findings suggest that, with only a few exceptions, students

Table 10. *Analysis of themes by type of peer risk situation.*

Themes	Risk Situations (Protocol A)						Risk Situations (Protocol B)						Total Situations per Theme
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
General Risk for Harm	1	14	7	2		1	1	2	1	3	13	6	11
Aggression, Victimization, and Bullying	5	4		2	20	5	2	3	2	1	1	12	11
Interpersonal Connection and Friendships	11	5	2	15	13	13	12	7	17	6	17	4	12
Communication	2		4	1	2	8	3	8			1	1	9
Emotion	2	7	1	3	2	6	7	8	2		1	3	11
Power, Control, and Pressure	15	3	2			1	15	2	1	4			8
Image, Respect, Status, and Reputation	4	2		7	3	2		1	2	2			8
Monitoring, Information, and Assistance	1	2	4		1		1	2	1	4	1		9
Rule-Breaking and Consequences	1	9	14	4	1		4	8	1	12		2	10
Trust and Values	4		7	3	5		3	6	3				7
Maturity and Age Differences	1									14	3		3
Financial or Material Possessions	2			7	1		13			2			5
Fun, Enjoyment, or "Something to Do"	2	9	1			1	1	2	1	2	1	8	10
Total Themes Per Situation	13	9	9	9	10	7	11	11	10	10	8	7	
No Positives in Situation	9	4	15	5	17	11	1	6	11	7	1	7	12
No Negatives in Situation	1										4		2

Notes: N=39. For Protocol A, N=20. For Protocol B, N=19. Blank cells represent cells in which no data was coded (i.e., no positives or negatives were mentioned for a given theme/situation combination). Numbers within cells represent the number of sources (or students) who discussed content within a given theme for each risk situation presented. Risk situations 1-12 are summarized in Appendix D.

viewed all of the peer situations as holding at least some element of risk for teens. Further, these findings highlight both the variety of potential outcomes as well as process and contextual factors anticipated by youth within each given situation (i.e., one situation may lead to many different possible positive or negative outcomes), as well as the similarity of potential outcomes and process/contextual factors that could occur in different situations (i.e., one type of positive or negative outcome may occur in a variety of different risky situations).

Finally, because themes contained references to both potential positive and negative content associated with the risky peer situations, the coding structure was evaluated based on the valence (i.e., positive versus negative) of coding contained within each theme (see Table 11) as well as within each risk situation (see Table 12). Table 11 highlights the number of students who identified positive and negative content within each theme, as well as the number of text segments or references coded as positive or negative content within each theme. All of the themes contained at least some potential positive outcomes and/or process/contextual factors (range of 2 to 86 positive references per theme by 2 to 33 students per theme), and all but one theme contained potential negatives (range 0 to 77 negative references by 0 to 37 students). Across themes, the percentage of positive references varied from 3.2 to 100% per theme, and the percentage of negative references varied from 0 to 96.8%, creating an overall total of 35.5% positive content and 64.5% negative content coded across all themes. In sum, all of the students identified at least one potential negative outcome, and all but three of the students

Table 11. *Analysis of prevalence of coding per theme identified as potential positive and negative content in peer situations.*

	Sources		References		References	
Themes	Potential Positives or Good Things	Potential Negatives or Bad Things	Potential Positives or Good Things	Potential Negatives or Bad Things	Positive Content (%)	Negative Content (%)
General Risk for Harm	2	30	3	57	5.0	95.0
Aggression, Victimization, and Bullying	5	33	5	57	8.1	91.9
Interpersonal Connection and Friendships	33	37	86	77	52.8	47.2
Communication	16	10	21	16	56.8	43.2
Emotion	9	23	11	37	22.9	77.1
Power, Control, and Pressure	5	32	7	43	14.0	86.0
Image, Respect, Status, and Reputation	9	12	11	15	42.3	57.7
Monitoring, Information, and Assistance	8	7	10	7	58.8	41.2
Rule-Breaking and Consequences	2	30	2	61	3.2	96.8
Trust and Values	3	22	4	29	12.1	87.9
Maturity and Age Differences	8	9	10	12	45.5	54.5
Financial or Material Possessions	13	13	16	15	51.6	48.4
Fun, Enjoyment, or "Something to Do"	21	0	30	0	100.0	0.0
Positive and Negative Source and Reference Totals	36	39	160	291	35.5	64.5

Note: N=39. Note that source and reference column totals are not additive, as students typically discussed content within multiple themes over the course of their interviews and often produced text segments that were coded in multiple locations.

Table 12. *Distribution of potential positive and negative content by theme and peer risk situation.*

Themes	Risk Situations (Protocol A)						Risk Situations (Protocol B)						Total Positive/ Negative Ratio per Theme
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
General Risk for Harm	0/1	2/16	1/9	0/3		0/1	0/1	0/2	0/1	0/3	0/14	0/6	3/57
Aggression, Victimization, and Bullying	0/5	0/4		1/1	1/21	0/5	0/2	0/3	0/2	1/1	0/1	2/12	5/57
Interpersonal Connection and Friendships	6/8	5/1	0/2	10/14	2/14	8/12	16/3	5/3	8/16	5/1	18/2	3/1	86/77
Communication	2/0		2/3	0/1	2/0	2/10	4/0	8/1			1/0	0/1	21/16
Emotion	0/2	2/5	1/0	0/4	0/2	1/6	5/6	1/7	0/2		1/0	0/3	11/37
Power, Control, and Pressure	5/16	2/1	0/2			0/1	0/16	0/2	0/1	0/4			7/43
Image, Respect, Status, and Reputation	3/2	0/2		5/3	1/3	1/1		0/1	0/2	1/1			11/15
Monitoring, Information, and Assistance	1/0	0/2	1/3		0/1		1/0	1/1	1/0	4/0	1/0		10/7
Rule-Breaking and Consequences	0/1	0/11	0/15	0/4	0/1		0/6	1/7	0/1	1/13		0/2	2/61
Trust and Values	1/3		1/7	1/2	0/5		1/2	0/7	0/3				4/29
Maturity and Age Differences	1/0									8/10	1/2		10/12
Financial or Material Possessions	1/1			1/6	0/1		12/7			2/0			16/15
Fun, Enjoyment, or "Something to Do"	2/0	11/0	1/0		1/0		1/0	2/0	1/0	2/0	1/0	8/0	30/0
Total Positive References per Situation	23	22	7	18	7	12	40	18	10	24	23	13	216/426
Total Negative References per Situation	38	42	41	38	48	36	43	34	28	33	19	25	
Positive References (%)	37.7	34.4	14.6	32.1	12.7	25.0	48.2	34.6	26.3	42.1	54.8	34.2	
Negative References (%)	62.3	65.6	85.4	67.9	87.3	75.0	51.8	65.4	73.7	57.9	45.2	65.8	

Notes: N=39. For Protocol A, N=20. For Protocol B, N=19. Blank cells represent cells in which no data was coded (i.e., no positives or negatives were mentioned for a given theme/situation combination). Numerators within cells represent number of positive references or responses; denominators within cells represent number of negative responses (i.e., 1/2 reflects one statement of a positive outcome coded in a given theme and two statements of negative outcomes mentioned by youth within a given theme). Risk situations 1-12 are summarized in Appendix D.

identified at least one potential positive outcome associated with the risk situations presented to them.

Table 12 further explores the data summarized in Table 11 by breaking down each instance of potential positive and negative content identified by youth across every theme and peer risk situation combination. For example, students produced 60 coding references within the theme of General Risk for Harm, occurring across 11 peer risk situations, and within any given situation in which General Risk for Harm was coded, students identified between 0 and 2 instances of positive content (identified by numerators within the table cells) and between 1 and 16 instances of negative content (identified by denominators within cells). Across all of the coding, students ranged from producing 0 instances of potential positive or negative content in a variety of theme by situation combinations to as many as 18 instances of positive content (Interpersonal Connection and Friendships within the risky peer situation regarding meeting an internet friend in-person) and as many as 21 instances of negative content (Aggression, Victimization, and Bullying within the risky peer situation involving rumors and gossip in the peer group). In total, across all of the coding by situation combinations this analysis reveals potential positive content-per-situation totals ranging from 7 (risky peer situation involving lying to a parent and relational aggression) to 40 (risky peer situation involving gifts from friends with associated pressure), and a range of 19 to 48 potential instances of negative content (risky peer situations involving meeting an internet friend in-person and relational aggression, respectively). Across situations, these reference totals

translate to a range of 13 to 55% positive content, or 45 to 87% negative content, per situation.

The following sections summarize the content of coding within each theme, including presentation of definitions and exemplar quotations, as well as reference to data within Tables 9-12 on the distribution of content across combinations of themes, situations, and positive/negative valences. Themes are presented based on a review of their theoretical relevance to one another, progressing from themes regarding harm and victimization, to themes related to interpersonal and intrapersonal processes within peer relationships, and concluding with themes of a more concrete or tangibly-defined nature. Further, this order of presentation loosely clusters around the themes' valences, proceeding from more heavily negative or risk-based themes, to moderately balanced or mixed themes, and concluding with the most heavily positive or benefit-based theme.

General risk for harm. This theme included references to specific, serious threats of harm as well as non-specific risks for general danger. Although the majority of this theme's coding (95%) reflected potential negative outcomes, two students identified positive outcomes of *avoiding* such threats for harm. Over 75% of students discussed content relevant to this theme, across all but one risk situation, with greatest salience in situations involving leaving a party and attempting to meet an internet friend in-person.

One of the most commonly identified risks for serious harm was the risk for rape when meeting a friend who had previously only been known online, lying to parents about your whereabouts, or being pressured by a friend who minimizes your values or belief system. Several students discussed the risks when meeting an online friend because

"it might be a grown-up" who could "try to rape you" because even though you were "friends online…you don't really know what the person looks like." Further, they could be "lying about their age" or "stalking you." One girl thought that students could be raped by friends who pressured them to go along with things that made them uncomfortable.

> Let's say you were hanging out…with a guy…he would try to hurt you in a way, like rape…You would probably tell him to stop and if he didn't stop, then that's not good at all. Bad things can happen if they keep saying…not to make a big deal about it and to just relax.

In addition to rape, meeting an internet friend in-person was identified as a risk for a number of other negative outcomes. One girl said that they might "lie to you" about their identity online, and when you met them, "they might be some type of con artist and try to rob you for your stuff." Another girl said that "they might be grown ups" and "might shoot up [your] school or the people [at your school], might kidnap them or…hurt them." Other students also added that the internet friend could end up being an "older person" who "might be dangerous," a "stalker," or a "predator." One boy even noted that based on the anonymity of the internet, two people could meet in-person and only then discover that "they are from different gangs and they might hurt each other."

Leaving a party to go somewhere else and lying to parents were situations identified as placing teens at-risk for getting "hurt" by ending up in a place where "dangerous" or "bad things" were going on. One boy explained that if you left a party, you might end up going to "a place where something bad is going on…like selling drugs or…somebody could get hurt…there could be a fight there." A girl added that it was

important to "make sure you're safe" because going to another location could lead to "getting caught speeding, or getting into an accident…you can go to somebody's house and they have some kind of private party and you might end up getting hurt." Students also discussed the risk for getting "chased by cops," getting "killed," being "robbed," going to a place where "somebody might have a weapon," or encountering "a shooting somewhere and you don't know where you're at and you could get shot."

Other students were less certain of specific dangers in the risk situations, despite their general awareness of a threat or risk for harm in some way. For example, one girl discussed the risk for being "hurt," but when asked for elaboration she simply noted, "I don't know. It's just, something doesn't sound right." Students worried about leaving a party or lying to parents in order to go somewhere that otherwise would not be allowed because "you don't know what you're putting yourself into" and "you don't know what people are capable of doing." However, as some students noted, leaving a party could be positive if you were able to go to a "safer place" or avoid "staying out too long" at a party where peers might try to "trap" you or "keep you there to do bad things by force."

Aggression, victimization, and bullying. This theme included references to aggression and victimization as outcomes or consequences associated with the risky situations presented, including various types of physical, relational, and verbal acts. Students also referred to aggressive and controlling peers as "bullies," suggesting the type of power imbalance characterized in the bullying literature (e.g., Olweus, 1995). Nearly 90% of students discussed content within this theme across 11 of the 12 situations. The majority of content reflected possible negative outcomes (92%); however, some students

discussed positive outcomes, such as enjoying watching fights, having fun with playful aggression, and making friends with people who can offer physical defense. Across the situations in which aggression and victimization were discussed, social factors and the peer group were particularly salient, including ways that peers were involved with relational aggression, instigation, and "boosting up" physical fights.

Physical aggression was the most commonly discussed form of aggression, and could result from a variety of peer situations. Students explained that "you could get hurt" by trying to force your way into a social group that was trying to exclude you because "trying to get into somebody's conversation [would] start a fight." In such a situation, the group that is trying to exclude a peer would "probably get really angry and stuff and start pushing, and then they get into a fight…because you can't be in their group." Fights could also result from interactions with friends who used pressure or control strategies to exert power among peers, as well as when friends tried to minimize behaviors that went against someone else's beliefs. In addition to the variety of situations that could lead to aggression, the associated sequelae ranged from hurt feelings and minor injuries to serious injury or even death in circumstances involving gangs and weapons.

Physical aggression could also emerge from interactions that began as "playful" but escalated in some way. For example, one girl explained how people could be playing and rough-housing, but then one person might "get a little too rough and end up hurting" the other person, leading that person to "have to do something to hurt you [back]." Students discussed how one person could get "physically rough" and the other person might "take it seriously" and "want to get rough back." Students also explained how

unintentional injury could result from "play" aggression that went too far, leaving the injured person to wonder if the actions were truly playful or actually a disguised form of aggression. For example, a student might "get physical and…say [they were] just playing, but somebody comes up with a busted lip or a black eye," and then people "might not believe you" or might "think that you're *really* trying to beat them up." A girl added that even though a student "says they're just playing around, they might not be playing around," and might say they are "trying to be rough accidentally" when really they were trying to hide their intentions of "trying to be rough…for real." Further, "playful" verbal aggression, such as "saying negative things about you or your parents" or making "your mama jokes," could escalate "to the point where one of us gets serious," or someone gets "injured" or "hurt."

Although most examples of physical aggression were described as negative outcomes in peer situations, some students identified positive elements of aggression. For example, some students thought that playful aggression could be fun if everyone was "just playing" and "not serious." However, even "serious" aggression was described by some students as necessary, fun, or enjoyable. Students discussed the benefits of friendships with peers who could offer defense, "help you out in fights," and help students avoid getting "pushed around anymore." One girl said that she enjoyed watching peers fight: "Potential positives? Seeing a good fight…because if there's nothing you can do about them fighting—if you can't beat 'em, join 'em, basically….If you can't beat the people spreading rumors…then join them watching it." Another girl shared how students' desires to "see a good fight" could lead to relational instigation, and a boy added that

peers were unlikely to help break up such fights because they "probably want to see a fight, so they are probably not going to do nothing about it."

> You learn who your real friends are [when rumors get started]. It can…lead them to a fight or an argument…because of something stupid… stupid lies because they want to see a fight. They boosting your head up to do stuff…instigating the situation [because] they just wanted to see a good fight.

In addition to physical aggression, relational aggression was common in peer situations and could "make two friends fight" or "break up" a friendship because peers were "lying" about things and made "other kids think [the rumors] are true." Relational aggression was described as a way of being "in control" of others' friendships because of the ways it could be used for social manipulation or instigation of conflicts. Because of these risks, one girl explained that it was important to think through your actions with close friends who could use their intimate knowledge against you.

> If you tell your best friend that you don't wanna hang out with them anymore… they might get upset and start spreading rumors about you, because they know everything about you and they might start telling people things about you….They know so much about you [that they could easily share with a] group of kids.

Although many students discussed relational aggression as a catalyst for subsequent conflict or physical aggression (e.g., instigation or "boosting up" fights), in some cases relational aggression could also result from prior physical aggression. One girl said that peers could use relational aggression to "instigate to start a fight," and then after the fight

they could use relational aggression to damage the reputation of the person who lost the fight by saying to peers, "'She beat your tail!' 'You beat her tail!' Blah, blah, blah."

Other aggressive behaviors were also discussed, such as being "picked on" by controlling friends or teased for "chickening out" when peers tried to pressure you to do something that made you uncomfortable. Controlling peers were also described as acting "kind of like a bully" by using their social power to dominate peers. Students thought that teens "shouldn't be telling someone what to wear and who to talk to" because that was like "bullying around" peers or being treated like "another person's property." Students explained that controlling peers could use fear as part of their control tactics because if someone is "scared" and "thinks they are going to beat you up…then you listen to them."

Interpersonal connection and friendships. This theme explored processes and contextual factors related to students' ideas about the meaning of peer and friend relationships, behaviors and characteristics that define good versus bad friendships, and benefits (53%) and drawbacks (47%) to various friend- and peer-based situations. This theme was the most commonly (100% of students) and frequently (162 references) discussed. Further, content was discussed across every situation, with both positive and negative references in all but one of the situations.

Students described a variety of defining elements of a good or bad friendship. For example, some students described peers simply as "being mean" or "being nice," and friendships as "real," "true," or "bad." Such descriptors were most commonly used for friendships in which one student was controlling, pressuring, or using another teen. By contrast, other students offered greater detail in their descriptions of friendship qualities.

One girl talked about the differences between having good friends who could be counted on for support in difficult times, as opposed to "fake friends" who "chicken out" when you need them the most. Another girl talked about the importance of honesty and trust in relationships, and the risk that "if you're not [honest], the relationship will slowly start to break away." A boy said he liked to "hang with both the popular and unpopular" groups of kids because he is a "true friend" and wants to "be there for everybody" rather than being a "fake friend" who abandons less popular friends to hang out with new groups.

Across situations, simply having friends was identified by many students as positive because it is "nice to meet new people," good to "be a little more social," and important to make new friends in order to be able to "do a lot of new stuff" with them. In a few cases, students noted the importance of friends from a social-emotional perspective, such as having someone who will "be a good friend to you" and "be there" when you need them, having "somebody that you can bond with," or having a chance to "be best friends" with someone you care about. More commonly, though, students noted more concrete benefits, such as "having more people to talk to," having friends to "hang out" or "play with," having someone to "go to the movies and malls" with, and having someone to "invite you over to their house and have sleepovers." Having friends was noted as particularly valuable because "if [you] get in any trouble," they can be called upon to "come help," and will "back you up" or "have your back" in a fight.

Conversely, students also noted the negative implications of not having enough friends or not having "as many friends as you *would* have [if you worked harder at expanding your social network]." Such negative outcomes included feeling "lonely,"

167

having to "be all alone," "hang around by [yourself]," or not having "good friends" for

support "when something bad happens." Losing friends was described as particularly

hurtful, and could result from relational aggression or friends deciding to "drop" you and

hang out with a new group. Students explained that such experiences could leave a friend

feeling hurt, mad, or sad, "because all those years or weeks...that y'all have been hanging

out and having fun" and then they "just leave you to go hang out with somebody else."

Meeting someone in-person who had previously only been known online was

described by many students as a positive opportunity to enhance your friendship and also

avoid the negative outcomes associated with a lack of friends. Students said that meeting

in-person was positive because of the chance to "hang out," "meet new people," "know the

person more," and "have another friend…who cares about you." Students believed that

you "might have a lot of stuff in common" or even solidify a "lifetime friend." One girl

thought that it could be "boring" to only talk online without spending time together in-

person, and another girl discussed the benefits of meeting an online friend.

> Some friends, when they talk online, they really don't like to be friends for a long,
>
> long time. So, that's why I think it's good [not to wait too long to meet up]… I
>
> think that's really a good positive thing…hang out in-person and not just online.

Some of the most common negative outcomes in friendships arose from an

imbalance or asymmetry of power. For example, one girl explained that it was bad to "try

to hang out with a group that really don't want to be friends" because of the lack of

reciprocity within the friendship. Being "used" by popular kids was a similarly

imbalanced friendship "because they don't *really* want to be your friend" and "they're just

168

using you" in exchange for popularity. Friends who exerted control or pressure were identified as negative because "they're trying to make you do something that you don't want to do," "you can't think for yourself," and "you might lose your friend if…you talk to someone they don't want you to talk to" or break out from under their control. Such friendships were described as "not fair," and students believed that they were at increased risk for doing something that makes them feel "uncomfortable" when friends such as these exerted pressure or minimized the importance of their own beliefs and values. Despite these risks, though, some students discussed the benefits of at least having "a couple of new friends" rather than being alone, even if such sacrifices meant that "you're not going to have real, *real* friends." Even these controlling friends were noted for having some positive attributes, such as helping to manage or improve your social status or telling you "if you look bad…so you won't walk around and people pick on [you]."

As discussed further within other themes, friendships could often be disrupted by relational aggression. Even long-term friendships could be destroyed by relational aggression among peers, and the damage could occur even if the rumors were simply "instigation." Further, one girl explained how getting "picked on" could "lower self-esteem," "lower confidence," and "lower the chances of you making any more friends" in the future. Social exclusion was described by one boy as being "not right" and "not fair" because friends could "drop [you] and leave [you] alone, like [you're] nothing…like trash, and he goes to the trash can and finds [new] friends." However, some students viewed such acts as simply attempts at building broader social connections, such as one girl who thought it was important to branch out and make new friends, while retaining the

safety of old groups in case things didn't work out with the new group: "Sometimes everybody don't want you to be their friend, so you got to kind of make choices to see who is your friend" but if the new group rejects you, then you can "just go back to your old friends."

Communication. This theme included a mix of positive (57%) and negative (43%) elements of peer and family communication. Over half of students discussed content within this theme across nine risk situations, including verbal and nonverbal methods of communication. Examples of positive communication included talking out conflicts with peers, honestly communicating with peers or parents, and communicating needs, values, or limits to peers. Difficulty with communicating in these ways or attempting to force your way into peers' conversations were identified as negative aspects of communication. In this way, communication could represent specific positive or negative outcomes (i.e., the communication itself is the outcome of interest), or communication could represent processes or contextual factors associated with risky situations that could then lead to other outcomes.

Clear, effective self-expression was a common positive outcome, and was particularly rewarding with peers who tried to control, pressure, or use other students. For example, if peers minimized a violation to a student's values or pressured the student, a positive outcome was "doing the right thing by asking them nicely [to] stop." Although communicating about values and boundaries was predominantly a positive experience for youth, some students discussed the difficulty in handling situations when peers "won't listen." One boy talked about the importance of telling a peer about your comfort with

"playful" aggression, and noted that when peers didn't respect that communication, it was important to "take it serious," "tell them to stop," and go "tell somebody" if you need help in getting your message across. Others said that nonverbal actions could be effective in such situations, such as ignoring peers or simply leaving "because if it's making you uncomfortable, then you shouldn't be around [it]." Regardless of the style, standing up to controlling peers was described by one boy as a positive experience of self expression.

> You could ignore them…they can't tell you [what to do]….If they say, "You
>
> don't look right" and [tell you] what kind of clothes [to wear] and stuff, you can
>
> say, "I know I can wear anything I want and I *do* look right in these clothes."

A common negative outcome within this theme occurred in the situation in which a student tries to hang out with a group of kids who don't really want to be friends with him or her. Students did not like the fact that "they're trying to force their way into the conversation" because such behavior was "annoying," "bothering," and "bugging" to the group, and demonstrated poor communication skills. Forcing yourself into a conversation was viewed as an inappropriate behavior because "you don't have no business in the conversation," and the conversation could be "about something personal or important."

Finally, students discussed the positives and negatives associated with honest and dishonest communication. One boy said that if friends are "lying to their mom," then a positive outcome would be to "tell their mom that [the friends] are lying" rather than to "go along with it." Otherwise, one girl explained "you are telling yourself that you [are a type of person who will] lie too." Only one girl thought that lying to parents could be positive because "sometimes you have to lie to your mom about something to make sure

that she doesn't get hurt… sometimes you have to lie to protect your mom." Other examples of the importance and value placed on honest communication occurred within the peer group. For example, one girl thought that good friends would "tell you [the truth], like, if you look bad or if you don't" rather than simply placating or lying to you. Relational aggression and rumors within the peer group were also identified as an opportunity for using open, honest communication for conflict resolution. One girl said that, "if it was rumors, they should ask…if it's true or not, and if it's not true, then squash it. But if it's true…just talk it out if you are best friends."

Emotion. This theme addressed discrete emotions that could result from various risky peer situations, as well as emotion regulation as a process that could contribute to other outcomes in peer situations. Further, this theme contained references to other emotional processes, such as the development of empathy. Over two-thirds of students discussed positive (23%) and negative (77%) emotional experiences across all but one of the peer risk situations presented. Despite the emphasis on peers and friendships within the risk situations, few students highlighted the interconnection of social and emotional needs, such as the importance of feeling cared for or emotionally supported within friendships. By contrast, more common within this theme were references to feeling comfortable or uncomfortable with peers who tried to pressure you to go against your own beliefs and values in a situation.

Feeling "comfortable" was identified as an important goal for students to strive for in risky peer situations, and feeling "uncomfortable" was described as a salient risk in various situations, but most commonly when being pressured by peers to leave a party

and go somewhere else or to engage in an activity that violated their beliefs or values. Students thought that "you shouldn't hang out with [kids] if they don't make you feel good" because if "it makes [you] feel uncomfortable" and you "really don't feel right doing it" then you shouldn't "hang out with them anymore." In fact, students questioned whether peers were true friends if they continued doing things to make you feel uncomfortable, "because if they are your friends, they shouldn't be doing things that make you uncomfortable—they should be doing things to make you comfortable."

Feelings of comfort or discomfort were also described as important warning signs or indicators to students about risky situations. For example, one girl said that if a teen's friends were leaving a party with a stranger or going to a strange place, then "that kid *should* feel uncomfortable…because you shouldn't leave…and go to a place that [you've] never been to [before]." However, another girl thought that when students felt uncomfortable, they should work on stretching their comfort zones, in order to expand their opportunities for having fun, meeting new people, and going new places.

Students discussed the contrast between feeling "appreciated" by friends versus feeling controlled, used, or dismissed. For example, giving gifts to a friend was described as a way to "show that you have feelings and that you're kind and friendly," which allows the recipient to feel "appreciated" and see "that somebody at least cares about [them]." Such positive emotions associated with feeling "cared about" were also identified as a positive outcome of meeting an internet friend in-person, because if you meet each other "it shows that you have another friend, so it's somebody else who cares about you." By

contrast, feeling controlled, used, or dismissed by friends could lead to sadness and hurt feelings because of the lack of interpersonal connection or friendship.

Emotion regulation was primarily discussed in regard to anger that could escalate to aggression. For example, students said that the inability to "calm down and apologize" could move students from stages where "they'll get mad" to readiness "to have an altercation," and difficulty regulating their initial anger could contribute to peer aggression in those conflicts. One girl described her difficulty with emotion regulation as "blacking out," which could occur if she was angered or witnessed an injustice to peers.

> If [the popular kids] make me mad, I'm going to *black out*…I hate when people make me mad. I get *angry*… [If a kid tried to approach the popular group] and the group of people don't like him, they might just start like this: "Move! We don't like you! We don't want to be friends with you! Just get out of my face!" …and he might start crying…if it's…somebody I know, I might *black out* [with anger] and I don't want to black out!

Finally, some students expressed insight into how others would feel in given situations and demonstrated a developmental range of empathic statements. For example, some students had difficulty enumerating potential positive and negative outcomes in the situations presented, but simply noted that they thought that the students in the situations were "being mean" or "being nice." These students seemed to grasp the potential emotional impact on students who were the recipients of such "mean" or "nice" behavior, but had difficulty elaborating beyond that point. Others made statements highlighting their empathic insight and social-emotional/moral reasoning, such as one boy who said

that being "dropped" by a friend was wrong to do "because he wouldn't like it if somebody did that to him" since such actions would "probably hurt [his] feelings."

Power, control, and pressure. This theme included references describing the use of peer pressure or social power to attempt to control peers, and it generally contained discussion of power, control, and pressure as an interpersonal process or contextual factor, rather than as a specific outcome or consequence per se. Over 80% of students discussed content within this theme, across 8 of the 12 risk situations. Students primarily discussed the negative implications (86% negative references) of being controlled or pressured, particularly by older friends, friends who gave gifts in order to gain power in a relationship, and friends who attempted to pressure other students in social situations. However, some students (N=5) referred to positive outcomes (14%), including exercising good judgment in standing up to peer pressure or getting out of risky situations.

Students identified the risk of feeling pressured by peers who spent lots of money on them or bought them gifts with some expectation for reciprocity. One girl thought that in addition to pressure because "they spent all their money on him," students might also "think it's okay to push him around." A boy added that the individuals who bought the gifts would "get mad" and "try to use" the gift-recipient to get what they wanted. For example, he said that peers might "make him do their homework, or something like that."

Being pressuring by peers was viewed by many students as a negative outcome. A boy explained that students should strive to "make choices that you think are good" and "not let anyone put pressure on you" to do otherwise. A girl also stated that allowing yourself to be controlled by peers meant that "you're going to end up missing out" on

175

being yourself and doing what you want to do. She added that missing out on adolescent experiences was bad "because you're going to get older and some things you can't bring back…you can't go back in time" and recapture who you would have been or what you would have been able to do. Further, pressure and control were identified bidirectionally as negative experiences for those individuals exerting and experiencing pressure.

> You should never tell someone what to do, even if you think you're the best person in the school. You should never think of yourself as highly as you do… because then they can get cocky, and they could brag a lot, and they can really be annoying. Then they won't end up having any friends.

> Older and popular groups of friends were identified as a particular risk for "peer pressure," negative "influence," and "forcing you to do something you don't want to do." Students identified the risk of being influenced to smoke, drink, go to clubs with "fake ID's," steal, and get involved with "bad habits" because the older or popular kids "will influence him to do the stuff that they do." A boy discussed this risk for being influenced.

> The kid is a kid, and is trying to hang out with people that's a lot older, instead of hanging with people his age…The person may be a bad influence on you and you may do the same things that they did…like if they are drinking, then they may tell you to drink…and your habits might go bad and you will just keep on drinking.

> Although most content coded within this theme reflected potential negative outcomes, some students identified situations with peer pressure as positive opportunities to stand up for yourself and your beliefs, and to "be a leader" rather than "follow." One boy said that "you should just be your own person" rather than succumb to pressure and

176

influence, and another talked about ignoring friends who tried to control you as a way of communicating limits and standing up for yourself. A girl said that even if friends tried to pressure you, you should "follow your own footsteps and your own dreams—wear what you want…talk to who you want." Another girl talked about the importance of rising above peer attempts to influence or control you as an opportunity for personal growth.

> Make your options for yourself…you don't *have* to do anything. Just say you're not [doing it]. They're not…anyone who can boss you around. The only person who can boss you around is *you*…You got to learn how to make decisions…be above their influence…learn to be confident, independent…And then you end up learning how you be…When you get older, you're going to have to make a lot of [decisions], so when you do that, it…helps you get ready for it and for life.

Image, respect, status, and reputation. This theme included descriptions of popularity, social status, and the importance of trying to "be social" among the peer group. Additionally, students described the impact of various social processes (e.g., relational aggression, peer pressure and control) on peer status, reputation, and popularity. This theme included descriptions of students' self-respect and respect for others, including the bidirectional influence of these forms of respect. In this way, peer status could represent a contextual influence on other outcomes associated with risky peer situations, or other factors could affect changes in one's peer status (i.e., loss or gain of status and respect as an outcome). Almost half of students discussed content within this theme, across 8 of the 12 situations, with an approximately even balance across positive (42%) and negative (58%) content.

Popularity, status, and social reputation were sometimes linked to tangible items such as fashion, and other times linked to behaviors such as treating peers with respect. Among the more concrete factors associated with popularity, students said that "getting more clothes to wear" could impact social status, and "your sense of style" was important and could be connected to getting good fashion advice from popular peers. One boy said that students could get picked on or be talked about behind their backs because "they can't afford the stuff" that other kids think is important (e.g., clothing, material goods). A girl added that peers who tried to control what you wear could improve your social status by improving your "fashion sense" and preventing people from "treating [you] badly… making fun of [you] just because of what [you] wear."

Similar to fashion, other outward signs of status and popularity included the status of peers with whom students associated. For example, older individuals were described as desirable groups for increasing social status because "you might…hang out with the big people instead of the little people and you might think that you are better than they are because you are hanging with bigger people." Also, "trying to hang out with the popular kids" was described as a method to "get some more respect," and one boy said that some students would tolerate controlling behaviors from popular peers simply because "some people just [want] to fit in." Another boy said that associating with high-status peers could be doubly important for lower-status students because "they want to be noticed" to improve their own status and "don't want to be pushed around anymore," and powerful peer associations could offer some defense in that regard.

Students also discussed the importance of treating others with respect and not acting "fake" just to "be friends with the popular group." For example, one girl talked about the importance of "treating [a] person out of friendship" rather than simply focusing on "their social network." A boy also shared his perspective on the importance of being kind to everyone, in order to be friends with "both the popular and the unpopular" groups of kids. Further, as one boy explained, becoming self-absorbed with power and popularity could make students "get cocky" and ultimately contribute to them not "having any friends" as a result of their boastful and "annoying" interpersonal style. In this way, others explained, popularity could "mean that people look at you in a different way" with a "bad reputation" because of the "bad profiles" and "disrespectful" behaviors characteristic of the popular peers with whom students were associating.

Some elements of social status and image were connected to behaviors that were encouraged by peers or behaviors that were "peer pressured." For example, students might get "picked on" for "chickening out" if they didn't go along with what their more popular or socially powerful peers wanted them to do. And, once students were labeled in this way, their "ability to make new friends" could be damaged because of the simultaneous damage to their own self-respect and social status. A boy said that such pressure could lead students to engage in risky behaviors or do things that they otherwise would not have done in order to build or maintain their social status. He said, "You don't know what [the popular group] is going to ask. They might say jump off a building or something, and he has to do that to be cool."

Relational aggression was identified as a primary means of striking out against others' status or reputation. For example, a girl explained that if a student tried to "drop" an old group of friends in order to become friends with a more popular group, "the other group of kids would probably be like, 'You shouldn't be cool with them because they are a bad person…' and they'd probably spread rumors about the friend." Despite the prominence of discussion about "false rumors" that could damage friendships and status, some students noted that rumors could be positive if they were the type of "rumor that helps you out a little" by improving your visibility to the social group or improving your reputation among peers. In addition to relational aggression, physical aggression could impact students' image and status via the impact of peers who would "boost up" fights. Such instigation could set students up to feel as though they had to fight in order to maintain their social standing with peer instigators.

Monitoring, information, and assistance. This theme included positive (59%) and negative (41%) outcomes associated with sharing information with peers, offering advice or assistance to friends, and monitoring attempts by peers and parents. Although this theme was the smallest, with only 17 references from 15 students (38% of sample), the content was spread across 9 of the 12 risk situations, pointing to the theme's widespread relevance, despite its infrequent prevalence. Monitoring typically represented a process-related factor that could contribute to other specific outcomes (e.g., parental monitoring could lead to behavioral consequences), whereas receiving assistance was more commonly described as a specific outcome associated with risky situations.

The most common negative outcomes noted by youth involved risks associated with evading parental monitoring. For example, students thought that it was important to "never, *ever* lie" because otherwise parents would not "know where they are…[if] something bad happens." One girl believed that her "mama might actually help" if she was in trouble or needed advice, and she emphasized the importance of telling the truth so that parents could effectively monitor and assist teens with problem situations. A boy explained the importance of parental monitoring for teens.

> You shouldn't lie to your parents about things like where you're going or what you're doing, 'cause if you're doing something bad, your parents have to know about it so they can help stop it. [You] shouldn't be lying to…your friends' parents [because your friends could get hurt or in trouble too].

Helping friends was a common positive outcome discussed by students, which could be accomplished instrumentally with hands-on assistance or by sharing information or advice. For example, several students discussed the benefits of having "an older group of friends that [you] can hang out with" because if you were "in a situation" or "got in any trouble, [you] can call on [them] and they can come help." Older friends were particularly helpful because they could "have [your] back" or "help you out in fights" since they "are probably twice [the] size" of other same-aged peers. Offering information or assistance to peers was viewed by some as helpful and well-intentioned, such as "asking [friends] to stop" if they are breaking rules, in order to "try to help them out" and keep them "from getting in trouble." However, one girl explained that it was important to consider peers' motivations when they shared "helpful" information "because you're going to think they

181

were helping you" by telling you things other people were saying or doing behind your back, "but then it turns out they just wanted to see a good fight," and their information-sharing was really a form of relational aggression or instigation.

Rule-breaking and consequences. This theme included almost exclusively negative references (97%) to specific consequences that occur as a result of youth breaking rules in risky peer situations. For example, students discussed substance use, assault, theft, cheating on tests, and using fake IDs, and they discussed the risks for getting in trouble at home, school, or through the judicial system. By contrast, only two positive outcomes were identified. A boy discussed the chance to keep a friend out of trouble by speaking up about rules and the risk of punishment, and a girl talked about the possibility of getting away with rule-breaking when hanging out with older friends. Over three-quarters of students discussed content within this theme, across 10 of the 12 risk situations.

Lying to parents about your whereabouts was frequently identified as a risk for getting in trouble because such plans usually "backfire." Students believed that "you're gonna have to tell eventually" either because "moms just know when you're lying" or because "something [could] happen" during the time when you had "lied to your mother or father about where you are." Further, when asked to lie to parents to cover for their friends, students believed that they risked getting in trouble for not "telling the truth even though they knew [something bad] was happening." In such cases, students could get in trouble with parents if their friends got hurt, but they also risked becoming an accomplice to a crime if they left a party or lied to their parents in order to go along with a friend who

had been planning on "committing a crime." Students feared that in such situations, they could end up as "a witness to [a] problem" with which they would have preferred to avoid involvement. In addition to "getting in trouble" with family, students also risked losing "freedom to do stuff" in the future because of the loss of trust. However, one girl thought that it was better to "just call your mom and dad" to ask for help and ensure your own safety, even though "you will probably end up on punishment."

Older friends were identified as a risk for younger students because "they might get you in trouble…pull you into some scheme…and then you get in trouble along with them." Students said that "older people do bad things," including behaviors that were not appropriate for younger peers (e.g., going to clubs, drinking, smoking), as well as illegal acts, such as stealing, selling drugs, and committing violent crimes. One boy said that older peers might "buy cigarettes…liquor…drugs" for younger friends, placing the younger peers in a difficult position because "you'll never know [if] they'll still be your friends…if you turn them in." Further, if older students were able to "influence [you] to do the stuff that they do," and if "[you] get caught…they are not going to be there— they're going to leave [you]" to take the punishment for them. Particularly with older, more powerful, or manipulative peers, students could "take the blame for everything" because peers "set you up" to take the fall for them. However, even with same-aged peers, students discussed this frustration with getting "blamed" for physical fights that were instigated by the peer group, because when peers "boosted your head up" to get in a fight, ultimately "you are going to get in trouble—they are not going to get in trouble."

Trust and values. This theme highlighted the negative outcomes (88%) associated with loss of trust in relationships and experiences with peers that violated a student's values or beliefs, as well as positive outcomes (12%) associated with maintaining trust and acting in ways that were congruent with a student's values. In addition to loss of trust and the associated "cost [on] the relationship," students discussed the difficulty in knowing who to trust in some problem situations. Thus, the loss or gain of trust could represent a specific outcome associated with risky peer situations, whereas discussion about knowing who to trust or not trust in risky situations was more process-based or contextually descriptive in nature. Over half of students discussed content within this theme, across 7 of the 12 risk situations.

Students discussed the role of trust in peer relationships, as well as values about how friends should treat one another. For example, students talked about the importance of being a friend who can be counted on and trusted in difficult times. Particularly with instigation and relational aggression, students discussed difficulty knowing "whether [someone] is your friend or not" because students could be placed in the middle of two sides of a story, asked by friends to decide if "you…believe them over your [other] friend." In these situations, students had great difficulty knowing who to trust. Further, students discussed the importance of doing the "right thing" in friendships, emphasizing the values of fairness, trust, justice, and benevolence. One girl simply said that "the world will be better if people start being nice to each other," and a boy said "you don't really have to if you don't want to, but if you share, good things will happen to you."

184

Going against one's beliefs or values was described as an important negative outcome in several situations, particularly in a situation where peers tried to trivialize a student's discomfort or unease with a value- or boundary-violation. One boy said that if peers were "doing something that [a student] doesn't believe in…they should stop, because that's going against…their grain." Another boy added that such belief-violations could "hurt" a student's "religion…family, heritage, and them." In situations where the peer group was violating someone's values or beliefs, the student could "feel very uncomfortable" and "not feel right doing" whatever the group is doing, and as a result, they might feel like peers "don't respect [them]."

Maturity and age differences. This theme included benefits (46%) and costs (54%) of hanging out with older friends or peers, identified by over 40% of students, and it contained primarily descriptions of maturity and age differences as processes and contextual factors associated with risky peer situations. Although this theme was coded across three different situations, it was primarily focused within a situation framed around older friends. Hanging out with older friends was described as enjoyable because these peers were more "mature" and offered access to the privileges of older individuals. However, these privileges came with risks of negative influence or encouragement to engage in dangerous or age-inappropriate behaviors.

Older friends were described as being "fun" as well as offering specific benefits, such as assistance and access to privileges. Older friends could be helpful in problem situations, and specifically could offer greater physical defense and safety than same-aged peers. One girl thought that it was "a good thing…to hang out with [older siblings'

185

friends] because…your brother or sister can watch out for you while you're with them"
but you can still "get to hang out with [the older group] and have fun with them." Others
explained that "older people can do stuff—do what they want," such as "go to teen clubs,"
"drive you around," "go get something to eat like Burger King, McDonald's, or the mall,"
and "get in movies [rated] PG-13." Peer status could also be enhanced by the chance to
"hang out" with older crowds and portray an impression of being "better than [peers]
because you are hanging out" with older friends.

Students also discussed the ways in which older friends could influence younger
peers, both in good and bad ways. A boy thought that older friends could help you "to
grow up" so that "instead of being at the bottom, at least you are trying to move up to the
top…because you don't want to be a kid all your life—you've got to grow up some day."
A girl also explained the importance of the maturation process that could emerge by
learning how to stand up to older or more powerful peers with confidence. However,
older friends were also viewed as being capable of having negative influence "because
you don't know what they're gonna do" and "they might be drug dealers…doing bad
things." In addition to such negative influences, students discussed basic gaps in access to
activities between older and younger individuals that could complicate attempts at
friendship. For example, "younger kids cannot go some places," like adult clubs or to
"dangerous" activities or locations. Students also thought that it would be easy "to get
caught up in what they're doing" if older friends were involved in illegal or inappropriate
behaviors while younger students were hanging out with them.

Financial and material possessions. This theme included positive (52%) and negative (48%) references to gift-giving and receiving, as well as discussion about the meaning or importance assigned to material possessions among teens and their peers. In some cases, students discussed concrete costs and benefits of outcomes or consequences related to these financial or material possessions, whereas in other cases students talked about the interpersonal or relational implications of possessions. Over half of the students interviewed discussed content within this theme, across 5 of the 12 situations, with particular emphasis in situations involving gift-giving with pressure or expectations for reciprocity and being used by popular peers.

Giving and receiving gifts within a friendship context was described as positive because it was a sign that an individual likes, appreciates, or cares about you. One girl said that a gift recipient "thinks [the gift-givers] are really good people…and they really like him because they are spending a whole lot of money." Another girl added that "if he wasn't their friend, [he wouldn't be] buying him nothing." However, students also talked about the risks of "getting all this good stuff from people" who "barely know [you]," suggesting that "they just want to buy [your] friendship." For these students, the risk of "being used" was a salient negative outcome, because as one boy said, "friendship doesn't come with a price tag." Gifts could also result in pressure or power imbalances in relationships, "because they spent all this money on him and they are pressuring him…and they think it's okay to push him around." For example, students might say, "You owe me!" or "they might just hurt you" if you don't comply with their demands after they have given you gifts. Despite these risks, one boy said that students might accept

187

gifts because "you might need the stuff, 'cause you, like, in a deep position right now and you got no money to go buy it yourself."

Students identified a number of concrete risks associated with gift-giving and spending large amounts of money on peers. For example, one girl was concerned that if you "spent a lot of money" you might not have any "more money…to buy lunch" or to "get some candy from the candy store" for a younger sibling. Popular peers might convince you to give away personal or valuable items, such as "your parents' stuff," "something sentimental, like…from your deceased grandparent," or things "that don't belong to you." A student could also "run out of things [their peers] want eventually," and with nothing tangible to contribute, "you're gonna lose the friendship…cause you ran out of stuff." One girl even feared that gift-recipients might start "running out of space to put all of [the gifts] in their room."

Material possessions were identified as contributors to status within the peer group. For example, having controlling friends who tell you how to dress was identified as a positive if they help "people just to fit in" with fashionable clothes. Further, students could be the targets of relational aggression "if they can't afford the stuff that [other kids] can," even though students acknowledged that "it's not their fault" that they don't have the material goods that others do. One girl noted that teens who "might not have very good things or nice things" may be less likely to be "in a group" and may be "lonely" as a result. Older peers were revered for having these types of valued material possessions because of their increased likelihood of having a job. As a result, older peers were also viewed as more likely to loan money or goods as a form of assistance to younger friends.

Fun, enjoyment, or "something to do." In this theme, students exclusively discussed positive outcomes of having fun or enjoying themselves in risky peer situations. Over half of the students discussed content within this theme across 10 of the 12 risk situations presented. However, the opportunity to "have fun" was particularly salient within situations involving leaving a party to go somewhere else and engaging in "playful" aggression with peers. In most cases, students discussed actively seeking out and engaging in fun activities, but some students also discussed the importance of getting out and doing "new things" in order to avoid boredom.

Despite the risks identified by youth in a variety of risk situations, the possibility of meeting new people, going to new places, hanging out with friends, and doing fun activities stood out as an important potential positive outcome. Several students thought that it was fun to "meet new people," "try new things," and "go to new places…instead of just going to the same old places" or "having to sit around the house" all day by themselves and getting "bored of it." One girl explained the importance of going to new places in order to stretch your comfort-level with different activities and people, such as in the following situation about leaving a party to go somewhere else.

> [A good thing is] the benefit of learning a new place, being more comfortable going to new places…because if you're uncomfortable going to new places, then you'll be uncomfortable trying and doing new things, which would put your life into a rut of doing the same thing over and over and over again.

Other fun activities discussed by youth included teen parties, going out to eat or to a friend's house, watching a movie, going to the mall, playing outside, and hanging out

with friends. Play aggression was also described by some students as fun because it is "just playing" and not serious. For example, one boy said that if a friend got playfully aggressive with him, he would banter with his friend and engage in fun, athletic, and rough activities: "He's saying that he's just playing, so…I'd start to get rough too…[I'd say,] 'Oh! You don't know how to…play rough. Let's play football—we're playing tackle. C'mon! Let's go play!'"

Discussion

Summary and Discussion of Findings

The current studies explored the themes of potential outcomes, processes, and contextual factors discussed by youth with respect to potentially risky dating and peer situations. These themes were examined within a framework of potential positive and negative content (i.e., costs and benefits, good and bad things) anticipated by youth, as well as being examined for relevance across various potentially risky situations. Some of these themes represented direct positive and negative outcomes or consequences associated with the risky situations, whereas some represented more descriptive themes of positive and negative processes and contextual factors associated with the risky situations, and other themes contained a mixture of outcomes and processes/contextual factors. As hypothesized, the data supported the a priori themes of aggression and victimization, interpersonal connection and relationships, emotion, and sexuality. Further, the remaining a priori themes were also supported in the final coding structure in combination with emergent theme content (e.g., parental and peer monitoring and information-management, problem behaviors and rule-breaking as well as consequences for these behaviors).

Consistent with previous findings, the prevalence of aggression and victimization within this predominantly urban, low-income, minority sample of youth indicates that a substantial number of youth had dating and peer-based perpetration and/or victimization experiences. For dating violence, the ranges of self-reported lifetime perpetration (7 to 54%) and victimization (15 to 71%) cluster around the ranges of these behaviors reported

191

across the adolescent dating violence literature of 10 to 76% prevalence of perpetration and 25 to 76% of victimization (Avery-Leaf et al., 1997; Close, 2005; Foshee, 1996; Foshee et al., 1996; Holt & Espelage, 2007; James et al., 2000; Jouriles et al., 2005). Also similar to previous research, the current study found slightly lower rates of self-reported acts of dating violence perpetration than victimization. For peer-based experiences, thirty-day prevalence rates for aggression (11 to 73%) and victimization (8 to 73%) were grossly similar to rates in previous studies with similar demographic samples, that have suggested overall prevalence rates may exceed 40 to 50% for such behaviors (e.g., Farrell et al., 2000; Sullivan et al., 2006).

With respect to gender differences in prevalence, patterns of dating violence perpetration and victimization within the current study were also consistent with previous research, which has generally demonstrated higher rates of dating violence perpetration by adolescent females despite more comparable rates of victimization across gender (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Avery-Leaf et al., 1997; Feiring et al., 2002; Foshee, 1996). Within the current study, on average girls reported perpetrating more dating violence than did boys, and victimization was comparable across gender. Specifically, girls reported greater lifetime prevalence of threatening to hit or throw something at partners and slapping partners. Boys did report higher prevalence of victimization on two specific items (being pushed or shoved, and having something thrown at them that could hurt), whereas their mean levels of victimization did not differ significantly from girls. Further, girls only reported higher victimization than boys for a single item assessed (being made to describe where they were every minute of the day), which is consistent with some

192

research that suggests that girls may be more psychologically victimized than boys (Foshee, 1996; Muñoz-Rivas et al., 2007).

For peer-based aggression and victimization, although some previous research suggests that boys may have higher rates of physical aggression and overt victimization (e.g., Farrell et al., 2000; Sullivan et al., 2006), only one gender difference was found for the current sample, with boys reporting higher prevalence than girls of telling someone they wouldn't like them unless they did what they wanted them to do. The lack of widespread replication of gender differences in the current study may relate to the small sample size of the current study, which may have failed to adequately represent the normative experience for students.

In addition to gender differences, grade-based differences in prevalence were examined, but only for participants in Study One on dating violence due to sampling differences across studies. In general, eighth and tenth grade students did not show significant differences in prevalence of dating violence perpetration or victimization, despite some evidence in the literature for a developmental trend of increased perpetration and victimization from early to mid-adolescence (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004). In fact, only one item (telling a partner they could not talk to someone of the opposite sex) was reported more frequently by tenth grade students than eighth, both for perpetration and victimization experiences. The lack of replication of this age-based pattern in the current study may relate to a number of factors. First, despite random selection, the small sample size of the current study may have failed to adequately represent the normative experience for students within these age groups and grades.

Additionally, the current sample of urban, minority youth had higher prevalence of some

forms of dating violence perpetration and victimization than the rural, primarily White

sample from previous research (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004), which is consistent with

research highlighting the elevated risk for dating violence among racial/ethnic minority

youth, and specifically among African American youth (Howard & Wang, 2003a,b).

Recent research has begun to explore possible mediating influences on the differential

trajectories of ethnic minorities in dating violence perpetration and victimization (Foshee

et al., 2008); however, further examination of these developmental trajectories is needed.

      With regard to the qualitative findings of the current studies, given the high levels

of dating and peer-based aggression and victimization experienced by the current sample

and the focus within the situations presented on potential risk for violence, the strong

support for the a priori hypothesized theme of Aggression and Victimization was

unsurprising. Within Study One on dating, emergent coding on sexual harassment was

combined with this a priori theme within the final coding structure, and within Study

Two on peers, emergent coding on bullying behaviors was also combined with the a

priori theme, allowing for the themes of Aggression, Victimization, and Harassment and

Aggression, Victimization, and Bullying to encompass various acts of physical, verbal,

relational, sexual, and bullying behaviors for dating and peer domains, respectively.

Consistent with previous research, the current studies highlighted the importance of

youths' beliefs about violence as an element of their cognitive processing in dating and

peer situations that may place them at-risk for violence or other maladaptive behaviors

(de Castro et al., 2005; Goldstein et al., 2008; Josephson & Proulx, 2008; Lochman & Dodge, 1994; Pettit, 1997; Sears et al., 2007).

The current studies also elucidated a number of ways that the boundaries between "playful" and "real" aggression can intentionally or unintentionally become blurred. Although previous research has identified the relevance of this issue for adolescent dating violence (Johnson et al., 2005) and within children's forms of aggression and play (e.g., Frey & Hoppe-Graff, 1994; Sánchez-Martin et al., 2000; Whiting & Edwards, 1973), in general this topic has received limited attention within adolescent dating and peer violence literatures. The current research on dating violence extends previous findings (Johnson et al., 2005) by providing more detailed accounts of the unintentional (e.g., accidentally crossing the line) and intentional (e.g., using "playfulness" as a guise for true, harmful intentions) mechanisms by which these boundary-violations can occur. Previous research with adult populations has proposed forms of "rational-appearing" aggression (Björkqvist, Österman, & Lagerspetz, 1994, p.31), which may serve similar purposes to the aggression described within peer-based experiences of exacting aggressive intentions against individuals while reducing overt culpability for those intentions. Future research should evaluate the prevalence and implications of these types of "playful" aggression among adolescents in order to better inform dating and peer-based prevention and intervention efforts.

Finally, consistent with developmental theories of the interrelations of peer and dating domains within the adolescent period (Brown, 2006), the current study highlighted a number of ways that aggression and victimization experiences may span peer and

dating domains. For example, peers could be asked to defend or intervene on a friend's behalf when dating violence occurred, and this connection between dating and peer violence has been supported in the literature (e.g., Black & Weisz, 2004). The current data highlighted distinctions between verbal, physical, relational, and sexual acts of aggression and victimization, and also suggested the types of control and power imbalances characteristic of bullying behaviors (e.g., Olweus, 1995). However, this data also suggests that the boundaries between these various forms of aggression and victimization are often blurred, insofar as some forms of aggression (e.g., verbal, relational) may be used to instigate other forms (e.g., physical) because of instigators' desires to see dating partners and/or peers fight. Such peer instigation or "boosting up" aggression has been demonstrated in previous research to have particular relevance for urban youth from similar socioecological contexts (e.g., Farrell et al., 2007), and the current research confirmed this finding as well. Insofar as youth feel compelled to manage their image or social status via direct confrontation or physical violence, this form of relational instigation may serve as a unique mechanism of aggression for youth from similar socioecological contexts (e.g., Miller-Johnson et al., 2005).

Two additional themes related to violence and victimization resulted from the emergent coding process: General Risk for Harm (for dating and peer situations) and Victim-Blaming, Minimization, and Double-Standards (for dating situations only; data from the hypothesized theme of Gender Roles and Inequities was merged within this theme). The General Risk for Harm theme highlighted two important processes in youths' consideration of potential positive and negative outcomes in risky dating and peer

situations. First, although students recognized serious threats for harm (e.g., abduction by an internet predator), some students still discussed their willingness to engage in risky behaviors (e.g., meeting an internet partner in-person) despite these risks. These types of behavioral willingness and intention have been studied in regard to adolescent risk-based decision making (e.g., Reyna & Farley, 2006); however, the current studies expand previous research by embedding these theoretical concepts within real-world examples of risky situations that have been demonstrated to be relevant and salient for the current sample. Future research should continue to explore ways that these cognitive processes can be used to inform violence prevention programs, as well as expanding research on ways that students' perceptions of potential positive and negative aspects of situations may influence various steps or stages in decision-making processes.

Secondly, some students exhibited difficulty articulating specific threats, despite a general recognition of risks for harm. This finding could be explained by adolescents' reticence to disclose more specific information to interviewers, or might represent these adolescents' cognitive capacities for anticipating future consequences. Alternatively, these students may have been exhibiting early developmental stages of gist-based thinking (e.g., Reyna & Farley, 2006), wherein they intuitively grasped the potential risk for harm in situations presented, but did not elaborate further on specific pros and cons of the risky situations. Future research could expand upon this hypothesis by examining various models of risk-based decision-making (e.g., risky deliberators, risky reactors, gist-based decision-makers; Reyna & Farley, 2006) within these or other socioecologically relevant risk situations.

Finally, with regard to Study One's risky dating situations, the theme of Victim-Blaming, Minimization, and Double-Standards addressed a number of beliefs known as "rape myths" that have been widely linked within the literature to sexual aggression and intimate partner violence. Examples of rape myths include beliefs that women "deserved it" or "asked for it" if they were raped or sexually assaulted, denial of rape's seriousness or excusal of the aggressors' behaviors based on demographic or reputational characteristics of the victim, denial or minimization of acquaintance rape, and the expectation that women are responsible for their own rape prevention (Fay & Medway, 2006; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Each of these beliefs was represented within the current data, along with stereotypic views about differences in what boys and girls want in relationships and gender-stereotyped sex roles, which have been associated in the literature with increased risk for dating violence (Foshee et al., 2004; Josephson & Proulx, 2008; Lichter & McCloskey, 2004).

Arguments, Conflicts, and Break-Ups was an emergently-coded theme related to risky dating situations that highlighted the subjective difficulty reported by adolescents in handling these experiences within dating relationships, as well as the role of peer involvement within dating conflicts. Both of these findings are consistent with previous adolescent dating research (e.g., Adelman & Kil, 2007; Brown, 1999, 2004, 2006). Maladaptive conflict resolution and the rapid escalation of conflict to lead to aggression were discussed within the current Study One, and also have been associated with dating violence in the literature (Josephson & Proulx, 2008). However, maladaptive conflict resolution was also discussed as contributing to the rapid progression from minor

disagreements to break-ups within adolescent relationships, which may be related to the typically low levels of commitment characteristic of dating at this developmental stage (Brown, 2006). Further study of these processes within dating relationships is particularly important, given the links between maladaptive conflict resolution, sensitivity to interpersonal rejection, and dating violence (e.g., Brendgen et al., 2002; Josephson & Proulx, 2008).

Issues related to Jealousy and Cheating emerged as important factors associated with dating conflict and break-ups, dating- and peer-based aggression, and issues of power and control within the current Study One. The data within this theme was particularly relevant, given the relations between jealousy and adolescent dating violence established in the literature (e.g., Cano, Avery-Leaf, Cascardi, & O'Leary, 1998; Roscoe & Callahan, 1985). Some adolescents discussed the difficulty in knowing the boundaries or limits around flirtation and expression of jealousy, or in understanding the meaning of jealousy when expressed toward them by a partner. This difficulty may be related to the novelty of dating and romantic relationships in the adolescent developmental period (e.g., Brown, 2006), the reliance on similarly inexperienced peers for advice and support with problematic dating situations (e.g., Sousa, 1999; Weisz, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, & Black, 2007), and the tendency for some teens to attribute jealousy and related controlling behaviors as signs of care, concern, or love from their partner (Johnson et al., 2005; Roscoe & Callahan, 1985).

Given the focus within the current studies on dating and peer-based situations, there was also a strong emphasis of coding within the a priori hypothesized themes of

199

Interpersonal Connection and Relationships (dating situations) and Interpersonal Connection and Friendships (peer situations). Previous research has highlighted the unique role of social influences on adolescent risk-based decision-making and implications for long-term adjustment (e.g., Boyer, 2006; Reyna & Farley, 2006). Further, previous research and developmental theories stress the importance and high value placed on social connections and relationships during adolescence and relevance for the peer domain in adolescent risk-behaviors (Brown, 2004). Within the current studies, youth explored the meaning of dating relationships and friendships in both concrete (e.g., people to do fun things with) and more abstract ways (e.g., support, trust). This finding is consistent with research suggesting that across the adolescent developmental period, peer and dating relationships increase in emotional intimacy, trust, self-disclosure, social problem solving, and emotional depth (e.g., Bierman, 2004; Brown, 2006; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Yoon et al., 2004).

One specific trend within the current data was the importance and high value placed on love and romantic relationships, paired with the novelty of dating for teens. Consistent with previous research, within this context of intensely wanting dating experiences but lacking knowledge or skills to facilitate such experiences, youth may grapple with establishing boundaries and creating meaning or understanding around definitions of love and romantic interactions (Johnson et al., 2005; Swart et al., 2002). Previous research has shown the connection between adolescents' lack of experience in relationships and increased risk for dating violence (Smith & Donnelly, 2001), as well as

adolescents' desire for interventions focusing on building healthy relationship skills (Sears et al., 2006).

Two themes with specific relevance for relationship skills and experiences were the emergent theme of Communication and the a priori hypothesized theme of Emotion. Students' discussion of content within these themes was consistent with the underlying developmental processes characteristic of the adolescent developmental period (e.g., Byrnes, 2003; Rosenblum & Lewis, 2003). For example, students recognized nuances of communication and emphasized the importance of communication style and other interpersonal/contextual factors in addition to simply focusing on the content of messages. Students also discussed discrete emotions and emotion regulation processes, as well as making statements that reflected a range of empathic insight and development, and endorsing the use of more cognitively sophisticated forms of social intelligence (e.g., Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 2000) to intentionally affect emotional experiences of partners or peers. These themes were also relevant insofar as they offered insight into interpersonal processes and intrapersonal skills associated with aggression. Indeed, skill deficits in effective use of communication and emotion regulation may be related to dating and peer-based aggression, and have been targeted by violence prevention programs (e.g., Boxer & Dubow, 2002; CPPRG, 1999; Foshee et al., 2000; Frey et al., 2000, 2005; Lochman & Wells, 2002; Wolf & Foshee, 2003).

An additional emergent theme related to interpersonal connections and relationships, Power, Control, and Pressure, highlighted the role of these relational dynamics within dating and peer contexts. Similar to the nature of jealousy within

adolescents' experiences of dating violence, the exertion of power and control within dating relationships could be interpreted by teens as a sign of love, care, or concern (Cano et al., 1998; Johnson et al., 2005; Roscoe & Callahan, 1985). The connection between control and power-assertion in dating relationships with psychological dating violence has been supported in the literature (Sears et al., 2006). Further, pressure could be exerted by peers outside of adolescents' dyadic dating relationships, and the role of peer pressure in dating violence experiences has also been supported in previous research (Smith & Donnelly, 2001). In addition to the role of peer pressure on dating violence, peer pressure was also an important interpersonal/social dynamic contributing to increased risk for engaging in rule-breaking or other problem behaviors, consistent with previous research on the roles of peer influence and selection effects on adolescent risk behaviors (e.g., Boyer, 2006). Further, students highlighted the particular salience of peer pressure by friends or peers of high social status (e.g., older or popular peers), consistent with research on the importance of social status during the adolescent period (e.g., Brown, 2004).

Peer pressure and influence were also relevant to the theme of Image, Respect, Status, and Reputation, which integrated elements of the a priori theme of Image, Status, and Social Functioning with emergent concepts of respect and social reputation. For example, the general importance and value placed on peers and social acceptance emphasized within the adolescent literature (e.g., Brown, 2004) was evident within this theme. Also within this theme, students discussed the dual nature of peer status as being defined by tangible items and social status of friends, as well as by social skills and

intra/interpersonal qualities of individuals. These findings are consistent with previous adolescent research highlighting the multifaceted nature of social status, popularity, and unpopularity (e.g., Arnett, 2007; Hartup, 1996; Kinney, 1993).

Specifically within dating situations, youth highlighted the importance of social status, peer approval, and links between dating partners' social status and peer perceptions of one's own social status, consistent with the status-based phase of dating proposed within the literature (Brown, 1999). However, within the context of a developmental period in which social status and peer acceptance are particularly salient, competition for friends, romantic partners, and social visibility may generate conflicts that result in the use of social or relational aggression (Xie, Cairns, & Cairns, 2005), and this delicate balance of maintaining sufficient social visibility without becoming a social target was discussed within this theme. Students also discussed the similarly delicate balance between standing up for one's own beliefs versus maintaining the status quo with peers, and such peer status-related factors may be especially relevant for adolescents and their decision-making processes (Boyer, 2006).

Finally, consistent with previous research (e.g., Farrell et al., 2007) students discussed the importance of image and respect, including ways that aggression may result from students' desires to protect or correct their image and reputation among peers. Although status and respect could be defended physically, students also discussed the role of social or relational aggression in maintaining social hierarchies. Such use of aggression has been described within the literature as being particularly relevant during

adolescence because of the salience of peer acceptance, competition for friends, and social visibility (Xie et al., 2005).

Sexual reputation was one element of the a priori hypothesized theme of Sex and Sexuality (Study One only) that emerged as an important element of dating experiences, with differential implications for boys and girls. For example, whereas boys could improve social status based on their sexual reputations, girls were at significant risk for damaging social status based on actual or perceived sexual experience. However, girls were also placed in the unique position of attempting to negotiate balances between being socially visible among their peers in regard to their dating, without drawing excessive or negative attention related to their dating and sexual experiences. Such gender-based double standards and inequities have been researched within the context of rape myths and victim-blaming and may be associated with dating violence experiences (Fay & Medway, 2006; Foshee et al., 2004; Josephson & Proulx, 2008; Lichter & McCloskey, 2004; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

Within the theme of Sex and Sexuality, students addressed risks for long-term consequences associated with sex, including sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, and other risky sexual behavior, and these variables have been associated in previous research with dating violence (Decker et al., 2005; Howard & Wang, 2003a,b; Howard et al., 2007a,b; Pittman & Wolfe, 2002; Silverman et al., 2001). Ongoing public debate focuses on the appropriate nature and content of sex education for teens and empirical support for effectiveness in addressing these and other adolescent sexual concerns (Orgocka, 2004 and Santelli et al., 2006 as cited in Rye & Drysdale, 2009). However, of

note within this theme was the extent to which students also explored and addressed the emotional significance of sexuality in romantic relationships. Previous research has also supported the importance of addressing the emotional components of sexual activity within sex education interventions (e.g., Allen, 2008).

The theme of Monitoring, Information, and Assistance was comprised of data from the a priori hypothesized theme of Parent Monitoring and Peer Influences and emergent content on related topics of information-management and seeking or providing assistance via monitoring, information-sharing, or other means. Specifically for dating, students discussed ways in which partners could exert control over one another via monitoring their activities or whereabouts, but also spoke in positive terms about the benefits of maintaining relationships with these monitoring and controlling behaviors. In some cases, such behaviors were described as being helpful or forms of assistance to the partner. Similar ambivalence and confusion about partner/peer monitoring, control, and appropriate boundaries in dating relationships have been studied in previous research and in some cases may contribute to adolescent dating violence experiences (Cano et al., 1998; Johnson et al., 2005; Roscoe & Callahan, 1985). Further, given the typical reliance of teens on their often inexperienced peers for advice and support with problematic dating situations (e.g., Sousa, 1999; Weisz et al., 2007), consideration of how students themselves define peer-based assistance in risky dating situations is particularly important.

Students also discussed parental monitoring and the importance of honest disclosure to parents despite many students' reticence to do so. Research has consistently

confirmed the influence of parental monitoring, attachment, warmth, and structure (e.g., authoritative parenting) on adolescent risk behaviors (e.g., Arnett, 2007; Boyer, 2006; Collins & Laursen, 2004), and poor parental monitoring has specifically been associated with dating and peer-based aggression and victimization (Brendgen, Vitaro, Tremblay, & Lavoie, 2001; Lambert, Ialongo, Boyd, & Cooley, 2005; Lavoie et al., 2002; Leadbeater et al., 2008; Richards, Miller, O'Donnell, Wasserman, & Colder, 2004). Further, students also discussed ways that peers could offer instrumental assistance, including physical defense against aggressive peers, as well as social/relational assistance (e.g., via information sharing). However, such actions were sometimes described as a guise for underlying aggressive intentions, relational aggression, instigation, and "boosting up" fights, similar to the forms of relational, social, and "rational-appearing" aggression studied during adolescence and adulthood (e.g., Björkqvist et al., 1994; Crick, 1996; Underwood, 2003; Xie, Farmer, & Cairns, 2003).

The emergent themes of Trust (dating study) and Trust and Values (peer study) were closely related to the topics discussed within the theme of Monitoring, Information, and Assistance, insofar as students discussed the risks of loss of trust with parents when students lied or evaded parental monitoring attempts. Further, students discussed ways that peers could violate trust by sharing information with other peers in manipulative or relationally aggressive ways, leaving students uncertain of who they could trust and feeling stuck in the middle of friends' conflicts. Such betrayals of trust have been described within the relational and social aggression literatures (Crick, 1996; Xie et al., 2005), and are particularly relevant to relationships during the adolescent period because

206

of the developmental shift toward increased intimacy, interdependence, social comparison, and self-disclosure (Bierman, 2004; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Yoon et al., 2004). These developmental trends in friendships and peer relationships were also evident in students' discussions of friendship-based value systems. Particularly within the peer-based situations, students focused on the importance of standing up for beliefs and values in friendships, and acting in ways that are congruent with one's values.

The theme of Rule-Breaking and Consequences represents data from the a priori hypothesized theme of Problem Behaviors and emergent data on consequences for rule-breaking at home, school, and in the community. Within this theme, students discussed substance use, minor rule violations (e.g., lying, cheating on tests, sneaking out of the house), and more serious problem behaviors and legal violations (e.g., theft, violence), with consequences ranging from trouble with parents to school-based punishments and legal involvement. Students' discussion of such problem behaviors within the context of risky dating and peer situations is consistent with previous research highlighting the relations between dating and peer-based aggression, victimization, substance use, externalizing behaviors, and other health risk behaviors (Basile et al., 2006; Broidy et al., 2003; Brook et al., 1996; Cairns et al., 1989; Chase et al., 2002; Close, 2005; Crick et al., 2002; Crick et al., 1999; Farrell et al., 2005; Farrington, 1986; Giancola & Parker, 2001; Gover, 2004; Howard & Wang, 2003a,b; Howard et al., 2007a,b; Huesmann et al., 1984; Pittman & Wolfe, 2002; Prinstein et al., 2001; Silverman et al., 2001; Xie et al., 2001). Given these associations within previous research, and given the interrelated risks for various negative outcomes in risky situations discussed by students within the current

studies, previous recommendations for "bridging the gap" across various problem behaviors in youth prevention programming seem particularly relevant (Pittman & Wolfe, 2002).

Issues related to age and maturity emerged for both dating situations (Maturity, Age, and Experience) and peer-based situations (Maturity and Age Differences). Within the dating situations, students emphasized the importance of gaining dating experience (frequently with more experienced partners), the often intense desire for building mature dating relationships, and the difficulty some students perceived in doing so with same-aged dating partners and peers. Within the peer-based situations, students emphasized the desire to build mature friendships, obtain access to privileges of older individuals, and learn how to be mature and confident interpersonally. Students discussed the risks of being negatively influenced by older individuals who were perceived to be more likely to be engaging in risk behaviors, but also the benefits of hanging out with older, more "mature" people. Insofar as older peers may be more likely to be engaged in risk behaviors, or may be engaging in behaviors that are developmentally non-normative for younger peers, these risks for negative peer influence represent important considerations in youths' own trajectories toward risk behaviors (e.g., Igra & Irwin, 1996).

Previous research confirms that adolescents are particularly interested in intervention programs that focus on building healthy, mature relationship skills that focus on positive elements of emotion and behavior, rather than emphasizing risks or threats of negative outcomes (e.g., Allen, 2008; Sears et al., 2006). Given this context, future intervention and research should focus on ways that students can fulfill their desires for

208

"mature" ways of coping, interacting with peers/partners, and using emotional/behavioral skills with same-aged peers. In other words, such intervention might focus on "maturity" as a characteristic to be learned and practiced rather than as a purely age-based phenomenon.

Finally, two additional emergent themes emphasized more concrete or tangible elements of Financial or Material Possessions and Fun, Enjoyment, or "Something to Do." The value placed by adolescents on social status and functioning was evident across both of these themes, insofar as students discussed links between material possessions and social status/popularity and the importance of meeting new people, going to new places, and doing fun things with peers during adolescence. Some examples of gift-giving with expectations for reciprocity in other formats (e.g., expectations of sexual favors in exchange for material goods) focused on negative implications, but in many cases students discussed the positive outcomes of gaining desired tangible items. The common gender asymmetry associated with such gift-giving may be similar to patterns of asymmetry characteristic of the rape myth literature and the literature associating dating violence with gender-stereotyped sex roles (Fay & Medway, 2006; Foshee et al., 2004; Josephson & Proulx, 2008; Lichter & McCloskey, 2004; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). One similar implication across both of these themes is the importance of resources for youth. For example, youth discussed the importance of engaging in fun, social activities with peers and avoiding boredom. To the extent that families, schools, and community-level resources can provide appropriate structures and outlets for youth to meet this need,

reliance on risky behaviors for achieving these goals may be reduced (e.g., Wegner &

Flisher, 2009).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the unique strengths of the current studies in examining perceived

positive and negative outcomes in risky dating and peer situations among samples of

urban, predominantly African American youth, several limitations exist that should be

considered when interpreting the current findings. First, the current study relied solely on

qualitative interviews and self-report measures. Although research has supported the use

of self-report with adolescents, with indications that adolescents are reasonably honest

and reliable in their self-disclosures (e.g., Oetting & Beauvais, 1990), it is possible that

some youth may have restricted their self-report due to some form of demand

characteristics, lack of rapport with the interviewer, or other self-reporting biases. This

critique may be particularly relevant for Study One insofar as the dating violence

perpetration and victimization scales were read aloud to students, rather than being

completed confidentially, per the study protocol. However, the use of private,

computerized administration of questionnaire measures should have reduced this risk to

some extent within Study Two. Also, although youth participating in the study

experienced fairly high levels of aggression and victimization in peer and dating contexts,

youths' responses to potentially risky situations in these contexts may often reflect

perceptions of potential negative and positive outcomes and associated process and

contextual factors versus lived experiences in these situations. Further, as with any

qualitative method of inquiry, the current study was designed for descriptive purposes, rather than being intended for wide generalization based on statistical confidence.

One suggestion for future research would be to utilize the current descriptive data to inform measurement development, program implementation, and other facets of research that might be evaluated with quantitative methods. In this way, the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods may offer complementary functions in informing the field of prevention and intervention work. Additionally, future research might integrate assessments from multiple informants or behavioral observation across varying contexts if possible, as suggested by previous research (e.g., Crick et al., 1999). However, such research strategies present their own pragmatic limitations insofar as informants may only be able to report on observations within specified contexts, behavioral observations may be limited to publicly observable behaviors, and risky dating and peer behaviors (including aggression) are often surrounded by secrecy and exhibited in private settings. A related limitation of the current study is the lack of reporting on dating violence behaviors by both partners within the relationships being discussed. Such investigation and integration of both partners' perspectives would have strengthened the current study, and is particularly relevant to adolescent dating relationships that are most commonly mutually violent with instances of repeated and re-victimization (e.g., Gray & Foshee, 1997; Holt & Espelage, 2007; O'Leary et al., 2008).

An additional limitation of the current studies was the relative homogeneity of the samples (urban, predominantly lower income, predominantly African American). Because the samples included only two Caucasian students and four Hispanic/Latino

students, comparisons between groups could not be adequately supported with the current data. Further, methodological improvements to the Spanish-speaking portion of the study could enhance future research (e.g., improved adherence to the back-translation process, gathering more specific sub-cultural data on participants beyond the larger category of "Hispanic/Latino") (Brislin, 1970; Chang, Chau, & Holroyd, 1999; Hall, Wilson, & Frankenfield, 2003; Suzuki, Ponterotto, & Meller, 2001). Although the findings of the current study generate informative conclusions regarding potential positive and negative outcomes within risky dating and peer situations for similar socio-demographic groups, caution should be exercised in generalizing the current findings to groups of different backgrounds. Future research could expand upon the present findings by sampling a wider range of individuals, including younger and older individuals, individuals from different socioeconomic statuses and residential contexts, and individuals of different racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Although the developmental context of adolescence is a particularly relevant time for the study of dating and peer-based aggression, victimization, and other related risky behaviors, the current study was unable to examine developmental trends. Given the developmental considerations relevant to the adolescent period (e.g., social, cognitive, and emotional development), and specifically to adolescent dating and peer-based interactions and risk-taking behaviors, future research could study students' perceptions of positive and negative elements of risky dating and peer situations longitudinally to better understand the impact of these developmental factors on the behavioral enactment of risk behaviors over time. Further, the current research should not be generalized to

dating and peer-based aggression, victimization, and risk behaviors for individuals of other ages because of the unique manifestation and developmental context of these behaviors, but future research could elucidate ways that the current data are consistent or different for people of different ages or with different types of dating or peer/social experiences.

The present research represents an important initial step toward better understanding the types of positive and negative features anticipated by youth in regard to risky dating and peer situations. However, the ultimate goal of such research is to better inform the development and implementation of prevention and intervention efforts, and future work is needed in that regard. For example, future research could examine differential profiles of decision-making and risk behavior enactment based on profiles of positive and negative outcome expectations. Future research might also evaluate ways of integrating the process of discussing positive versus negative predictions regarding risky situations within prevention and intervention programs.

In conclusion, the current study presents a unique perspective on students' perceptions of potential positive and negative outcomes in risky dating and peer situations. The influence of these perceptions on actual decision-making processes in real-world risk situations represents an important direction for future research. Although the current study does have some specific limitations to its scope and interpretability, it offers a valuable first step in understanding the role of these perspectives in youths' thinking about risk. Future work should build upon the framework of the current investigation and expand exploration of cultural values, expectations, and norms to

promote increased understanding of these perceptions both within similar socio-demographic groups and also across other groups as well. This research also offers valuable information for prevention and intervention efforts, and future research should expand upon this framework to improve prevention and intervention programs that target this population.

General Conclusions and Implications for Prevention

The current two studies highlight themes of potential positive and negative outcomes (i.e., costs and benefits, good and bad things) anticipated by youth in response to potentially risky dating and peer situations. These findings suggest that students are able to generate ideas of possible outcomes and address related process and contextual factors in response to potentially risky situations, and these thoughts may influence subsequent decision-making processes regarding behavior in such situations. Further research is needed to explore ways in which these anticipated positive and negative outcomes may influence various steps within decision making models (e.g., various steps of the SIP model), including possible influences on aggression and other risk behavior enactment. The findings also offer insight for researchers and prevention/intervention implementers into youths' perceptions about commonly encountered situations that may place them at risk for aggression, victimization, and other risky behaviors.

Thirteen themes were consistent across both dating and peer risk situations, and four themes were uniquely identified for potentially high-risk dating situations. The majority of these themes contained both positive and negative anticipated outcomes; only three themes across both studies were identified as purely positive or purely negative in

valence. The generally mixed-nature of these themes highlights the complexity in youths' appraisal processes and factors involved in anticipating possible outcomes in potentially risky situations. In other words, even though situations may seem inherently risky or fraught with potential negative aspects, youth identified significant potential positive elements as well. Consideration of both the positive and negative elements of risky situations represents a novel contribution to the violence prevention literature, and is of particular relevance given research suggesting that adolescent decision-making may be more heavily influenced by potential positive outcomes than by perceived risks (Boyer, 2006; Reyna & Farley, 2006). Further, this attention to youths' perspectives on positive and negative elements of risky situations is critical in moving prevention and intervention science towards a paradigm of intervention grounded in the experiences and perspectives of youth, rather than proceeding with an assumption of shared perceptions of risk in situations that may be perceived more positively by youth than by adults involved in prevention and intervention efforts.

In general, the dating and peer situations were purposively constructed with parallel contextual frameworks and similar themes tended to emerge for situations with similar contextual risk (i.e., similar themes tended to be coded for dating partners and peers involved in a similar risk situation). One specific difference across the dating and peer studies was the presence of students who directly stated that there were no anticipated negative outcomes for several peer risk situations, whereas no students identified a complete lack of risk for any dating situation. This finding may suggest that certain types of risky behaviors are perceived as more highly negative (and/or less highly

positive) when involving dating partners rather than peers. However, because the current studies were not directly comparatively analyzed and age differences exist in the respective samples, additional research is needed to examine potential qualitative and/or quantitative differences in anticipated positive and negative outcomes across contexts.

Future research might examine qualitative and/or quantitative similarities and differences in anticipated positive and negative outcomes with a situational-focus. Such research might help to elucidate contextual factors that influence students' risk perception, and those findings would be useful in informing prevention and intervention programs. In addition to the comparative research that could be undertaken via theme and/or situational analysis across the dating and peer contextual domains currently under investigation, additional variables might also be examined. For example, future research might examine qualitative and/or quantitative differences in patterns of responding by gender, victimization/perpetration history, age/grade, or other relevant sociodemographic variables. One limitation of such comparative research is the extent to which peer and dating domains overlap during the adolescent period, making it difficult to clearly categorize all social interactions as "purely" peer versus "purely" dating experiences. However, the richness of contextualization offered in students' qualitative descriptions of their experiences may counterbalance such limitations.

An important consideration when evaluating the current studies is that decision-making is informed by more than simply the potential positive and negative outcomes or pros and cons of the situation. Researchers must consider students' goals, contextual factors, perceived likelihood of the pros and cons actually occurring, and personal value

assigned to those pros and cons if they were actually to occur. Future research might probe more deeply into such issues by constructing a measure with risk situations and related positive and negative outcomes, such as those identified in the current studies, and subsequently asking students to quantitatively rate factors such as "how good/bad would it be if X outcome occurred?" Alternatively, studies might explore a type of tipping point for students, considering "what would it take to get you to/not to do X behavior in Y situation?" With such approaches, risk for engagement in specific situations could be viewed on a continuum, and reduction of risk propensity (i.e., movement on the continuum) could become a target variable for intervention programming. One benefit of such approaches would be the inherent acknowledgement of the contextual complexities surrounding adolescent risk behaviors, including the motivational components and developmental needs being met by youth via their risk engagement.

Further qualitative research could also be effective in understanding ways that youths' positive and negative outcome perceptions may influence various steps of the SIP or other decision-making models. For example, students could talk through their internal processing of risk situations structured around each of the SIP steps (i.e., presenting students with a situation, allowing them to select a goal, generate possible responses, evaluate each of the responses, select a response). Those qualitative interviews could then be analyzed based on categories of students who are known to have viewed the situations to possess certain types or certain amounts of potential positive/negative outcomes. Better understanding of how students use their appraisals of potential positive and negative outcomes in risk situations to inform their decision-making processes represents a key

step toward improving prevention and intervention programs designed to target those cognitive structures and decision-making processes.

Finally, the current study begins to address important elements of youth risk-taking that have historically been neglected by violence prevention and intervention work: motivation to engage in certain behaviors and situations, and readiness for change versus ambivalence towards change. Although some students may lack skills or resources to facilitate their engagement in more adaptive behaviors, those skill-building components may not be sufficient to facilitate change for all students. Indeed, across a variety of other health-risk domains (e.g., substance use, sexual risk-taking, medical treatment non-adherence), attention to individuals' decisional balances of perceived costs and benefits has proven particularly beneficial in increasing intrinsic motivation for behavioral change, reducing ambivalence about change, and enhancing effects of problem-solving/skill-building phases of intervention (e.g., LaBrie et al., 2008; Miller & Rollnick, 2002; Suarez & Mullins, 2008; Walters et al., 2009). The focus within the present studies on positive and negative aspects of risky situations represents a relatively novel contribution to the adolescent violence prevention literature. Future research about ways to integrate these types of components within prevention and intervention programs will be a critical next step towards building programs with appropriate focus on motivational as well as skills components that best meet the needs of youth.

Further, this focus within the present studies highlights the type of attention to "bridging the gap" among various risk behaviors with culturally- and contextually-relevant prevention and intervention programming that has been advocated for within

various bodies of adolescent health literature (e.g., substance abuse, sexual education, violence prevention) (e.g., Peters et al., 2009; Pittman & Wolfe, 2002). For example, the current studies highlight the types of real-world risk situations commonly encountered by youth that may place them at risk for a variety of negative outcomes across a variety of health risk domains. Such attention to youths' assessments of potential positive and negative outcomes, processes, and contextual factors in such risk-ambiguous situations represents an important contribution to the literature. This attention to both positive and negative outcomes highlights the types of "gray-zone" thinking that have begun to be examined within some health research. For example, research suggests that the types of black-or-white approaches to prevention that have previously been utilized in some fields (e.g., abstinence-only sex education, zero-tolerance substance abuse policies) may not be the most effective strategies for youth risk behaviors (e.g., Neighbors, Larimer, Lostutter, & Woods, 2006; Santelli et al., 2006). However, these types of zero-tolerance policies are still fairly prevalent with less attention to risk- or harm-reduction approaches that have demonstrated greater utility in these other health risk domains.

In sum, the current studies offer unique insight into the perspectives of predominantly urban, low-income, African American students regarding situations that they commonly face that may place them at risk for violence perpetration, victimization, or other maladaptive behaviors and outcomes. This type of insight is imperative for creating prevention and intervention programs constructed from a "bottom-up" rather than "top-down" approach. Such insight can influence program development in several ways. First, at a concrete level, curricular examples and activities, intervention processes, and

219

skill-building components can be informed by youth and convey socioecological

relevance and credibility. Additionally, to the extent that programs can explore and

represent the complexity of youths' perceptions of both positive and negative elements of

risk behaviors and risky situations commonly faced, an implicit level of credibility can be

communicated to youth. For example, the acknowledgment that some "negative"

behaviors may actually have some adaptive or beneficial functions for youth may create

windows for discussion around the complexity of students' experiences, rather than

closing down avenues for such discussion. Although the current study does have some

specific limitations to its scope and interpretability, it offers a valuable first step in

understanding the role of students' perceptions of potential positive and negative

outcomes in risky dating and peer situations. Future work should build upon this

framework to facilitate the creation of prevention and intervention programs that address

the complexities of youths' decision-making to engage in risk behaviors.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Source: Sullivan, T.N., Erwin, E.H., Helms, S.W., Masho, S.W., & Farrell, A.D. (manuscript submitted). Problematic Situations Associated with Dating Experiences and Relationships among Urban Adolescents: A Qualitative Study.

Table 13. *Domains and themes of problematic dating situations from preliminary study.*

	Number of Sources		
Domains/Theme Names	Total	Boys	Girls
Approach and Initiation			
Difficulty in Approaching Potential Dating Partner	20	14	6
Uncomfortable or Inappropriate Approaches	14	2	12
Conflict, Conflict Resolution, and Break-Ups			
Flirting, Cheating, and Jealousy	32	11	21
Personality, Attitudes, and Values	24	6	18
Age and Maturity Differences	15	1	14
Balancing Multiple Priorities	7	4	3
Communication, Connection, and Emotion			
Emotional Connection and Commitment	33	13	20
Emotional Expression	26	10	16
Defining Boundaries	11	4	7
Intentional Malicious Communication	4	0	4
Aggression and Victimization			
Physical and Relational Aggression	26	9	17
Playing Around	14	4	10
Sexual Victimization	10	0	10
Witnessing Dating Violence	6	4	2
Lack of Support or Responsiveness for Victims	4	0	4
The Role of Others			
Intersection of Peer and Parent Influences	31	6	25
Instrumental Peer Involvement in the Dating Process	21	8	13
Reputation and Status	6	2	4
Media and Technology			
Media Used to Monitor or Control Behavior	11	3	8
Disrespectful or Annoying Behavior	9	3	6

Table 14. *Dating risk situations for study one and the domains in which the problem situations were coded from the preliminary study.*

247

	Domains of Problem Situations in Dating Experiences from the Preliminary Study					
Risk Situations: Protocol A	Approach and Initiation	Conflict, Resolution, and Break-Ups	Communication, Connection, and Emotion	Aggression and Victimization	The Role of Others	Media and Technology
1. A boy or girl is hanging out at a friend's house at night with some other teens and ends up alone in a bedroom with a girl or boy they are uncomfortable with.	*		*	*	*	
2. A boyfriend or girlfriend always tells their partner what to wear and always wants to know who they are talking to.		*	*	*		*
3. A boy or girl your friend is going with starts lying to your friend's mom about things like where they are going or what they are doing and tells your friend to go along with it.			*		*	
4. A friend is walking down the hall at school and another boy/girl who your friend doesn't want to be with tries to approach them by putting their arm around them and making comments about how they look.	*		*	*	*	
5. Someone really likes a boy or girl but knows that they are just talking to them because they want a physical relationship in return.	*		*	*	*	
6. Other teens at school are always trying to start stuff between other couples by talking behind their back.		*	*	*	*	*

Risk Situations: Protocol B	Domains of Problem Situations in Dating Experiences from the Preliminary Study					
	Approach and Initiation	Conflict, Resolution, and Break-Ups	Communication, Connection, and Emotion	Aggression and Victimization	The Role of Others	Media and Technology
7. A teen is going with someone who buys them nice things all the time, but now this person is pressuring them to do things because they spent all of this money on them.		*	*	*	*	
8. Someone sees their boyfriend or girlfriend touching and flirting with another person but they say that person is just a friend.		*	*	*	*	
9. A friend is going with someone who is a lot of years older than they are.		*	*	*	*	
10. A boy or girl is dancing with someone and that person starts dancing too close and touching them. When they ask them to stop, the person says to stop making such a big deal about it, and says that's just the way everyone dances.	*	*	*	*	*	
11. A boyfriend or girlfriend starts to get a little physically rough with their partner but says it's just playing around.			*	*		
12.Someone you know has been e-mailing with a boy or girl who says they are the same age and wants to meet them in person.			*	*		*

Note: Situations 1-6 represent protocol A; situations 7-12 represent protocol B. Students were randomized to protocol condition. For protocol A, N=21. For protocol B, N=22.

Appendix C

Dating Violence Perpetration and Victimization Scales

Sources: Foshee, V.A., Linder, F., MacDougall, J.E., & Bangdiwala, S. (2001). Gender differences in the longitudinal predictors of adolescent dating violence. *Preventive Medicine, 32,* 128-141.

Foshee, V.A., Benefield, T.S., Ennett, S.T., Bauman, K.E., & Suchindran, C. (2004). Longitudinal predictors of serious physical and sexual dating violence and victimization during adolescence. *Preventive Medicine, 39,* 1007-1016.

Response Format: The following 4-point scale is used for all the items: 0 = *never*, 1 = *1-3 times*, 2 = *4-9 times*, 3 = *10 or more times.*

Scale Instructions: The next thing we want to ask you about involves some different experiences related to dating or relationships. I'm going to read you a list of items, and for each item I'd like to know how often anyone that you've ever been on a date with has done the following things to you. You can use this scale [*show student visual aid*], and you can just tell me the number for your answer, if you'd like. 0 means that this has never happened to you, 1 means that it has happened 1 to 3 times, 2 means that it has happened 4 to 9 times, and 3 means that it has happened 10 or more times. For these questions, we want to know how often has anyone that you have ever been on a date with done the following things to you. Remember, when we use the word '*date*,' we mean any experience with a date, or being in relationships with someone special, going with someone, etc. Only include it when your dating partner did this to you first. In other words, don't count it if they did it to you in self defense.

Victimization Subscale
1. Threatened to hit or throw something at you.
2. Scratched you.
3. Slapped you.
4. Slammed or held you against a wall.
5. Kicked you.
6. Pushed or shoved you.
7. Threw something at you that could hurt.
8. Punched or hit you with something that could hurt.
9. Damaged something that belonged to you.
10. Would not let you do things with other people.
11. Told you that you could not talk to someone of the opposite sex.
12. Made you describe where you were every minute of the day.
13. Insulted you in front of others.
14. Put down your looks.

15. Blamed you for bad things that they did.
16. Said things to hurt your feelings on purpose.
17. Threatened to start dating someone else.
18. Did something just to make you jealous.
19. Brought up something from the past to hurt you.

Scale Instructions: Now I'm going to ask you about the same list of experiences, but this time we want to know how many times *you* have done these things to another person that you have been on a date with. Again, only include it when you did it to your dating partner first. In other words, don't count it if you did it to them in self defense.

Perpetration Subscale
1. Threatened to hit or throw something at your dating partner.
2. Scratched your dating partner.
3. Slapped your dating partner.
4. Slammed your dating partner or held them against a wall.
5. Kicked your dating partner.
6. Pushed or shoved your dating partner.
7. Threw something at your dating partner that could hurt.
8. Punched or hit your dating partner with something that could hurt.
9. Damaged something that belonged to your dating partner.
10. Would not let them do things with other people.
11. Told them that they could not talk to someone of the opposite sex.
12. Made your dating partner describe where they were every minute of the day.
13. Insulted them in front of others.
14. Put down their looks.
15. Blamed your dating partner for bad things that you did.
16. Said things to hurt their feelings on purpose.
17. Threatened to start dating someone else.
18. Did something just to make your dating partner jealous.
19. Brought up something from the past to hurt them.

Sources: Sullivan, T.N., Erwin, E.H., Helms, S.W., Masho, S.W., & Farrell, A.D. (manuscript submitted). Problematic situations associated with dating experiences and relationships among urban adolescents: A qualitative study.

Farrell, A.D., Erwin, E.H., Allison, K.W., Meyer, A., Sullivan, T., Camou, S. et al. (2007). Problematic situations in the lives of urban African American middle school students: A qualitative study. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 17,* 413-454.

Table 15. *Peer risk situations for study two and triangulation with relevant literature*

Peer Risk Situations: Protocol A	Relevant Domains from Dating-Based Problem Situation Research (Sullivan et al., 2009)	Relevant Themes from Peer-Based Problem Situation Research (Farrell et al., 2007)
1. Someone is friends with a group of kids who try to tell them what to wear, who to talk to, and who to be friends with.	Conflict, Resolution, and Break-Ups Communication, Connection, and Emotion Aggression and Victimization Media and Technology	Negative View of Self Individuation Peer Pressure Social Victimization
2. A group of friends is hanging out at a party one night. Someone suggests leaving the party and going somewhere else, but one kid feels uncomfortable leaving and going to a new place they've never been to before.	Approach and Initiation Communication, Connection, and Emotion Aggression and Victimization The Role of Others	Experiencing Conflicting Norms Peer Pressure Protecting or Correcting Image Exposure to Drug/Alcohol Use Witnessing Acts of Violence/Other Traumatic Events
3. Someone starts lying to their mom about things, like where they are going or what they are doing, and tells their friend to go along with it.	Communication, Connection, and Emotion The Role of Others	Individuation Experiencing Conflicting Norms Not Having a Close Relationship with a Parent or Guardian Peer Pressure

Peer Risk Situations: Protocol A (cont.)	Relevant Domains from Dating-Based Problem Situation Research (Sullivan et al., 2009)	Relevant Themes from Peer-Based Problem Situation Research (Farrell et al., 2007)
4. Someone really wants to be friends with a popular group of kids, but they know that the kids in that group are only being nice in order to get something in return.	Approach and Initiation Communication, Connection, and Emotion Aggression and Victimization The Role of Others	Negative View of Self Individuation Social and Resource Comparison Peer Pressure Protecting or Correcting Image Victimization (Social, Chronic)
5. Other kids at school are always trying to start stuff between two friends by talking behind their back and spreading rumors.	Conflict, Resolution, and Break-Ups Communication, Connection, and Emotion Aggression and Victimization The Role of Others Media and Technology	Social and Resource Comparison Change or Loss of Proximal Relationship Protecting or Correcting Image Group Instigation of Conflict Quick Escalation to Violent Outcome Social Victimization
6. Someone at school keeps trying to hang out with a group of kids who don't really want to be friends with that person. The kid approaches this group at lunch and tries to force their way into the conversation.	Approach and Initiation Communication, Connection, and Emotion Aggression and Victimization The Role of Others	Negative View of Self Emotion Dysregulation Victimization (Social, Chronic)
Peer Risk Situations: Protocol B		
7. A kid meets a new group of friends who buys them nice things all the time, but now the group is pressuring this kid to do things for them because they spent all of this money on them.	Conflict, Resolution, and Break-Ups Communication, Connection, and Emotion Aggression and Victimization The Role of Others	Social and Resource Comparison Resource Deficiency Change or Loss of Proximal Relationship Peer Pressure Social Victimization Pressure and Opportunity to Make Money Illegally

Peer Risk Situations: Protocol B (cont.)	Relevant Domains from Dating-Based Problem Situation Research (Sullivan et al., 2009)	Relevant Themes from Peer-Based Problem Situation Research (Farrell et al., 2007)
8. A kid is hanging out with a group of friends who are doing things that make them feel uncomfortable and that go against what they believe in. When this kid asks the friends to stop, they say to chill and stop making such a big deal about it.	Approach and Initiation Conflict, Resolution, and Break-Ups Communication, Connection, and Emotion Aggression and Victimization The Role of Others	Individuation Experiencing Conflicting Norms Change or Loss of Proximal Relationship Peer Pressure Protecting or Correcting Image Social Victimization Being Exposed to Drug/Alcohol Use Witnessing Acts of Violence
9. Someone's best friend seems to be trying to "drop" them and starts hanging out with another group of kids instead.	Conflict, Resolution, and Break-Ups Communication, Connection, and Emotion Aggression and Victimization The Role of Others	Negative View of Self Individuation Social and Resource Comparison Change or Loss of Proximal Relationship Protecting or Correcting Image Social Victimization
10. A kid wants to start hanging out with a group of people who are a lot older.	Conflict, Resolution, and Break-Ups Communication, Connection, and Emotion Aggression and Victimization The Role of Others	Social and Resource Comparison Assuming Adult Roles Change or Loss of Proximal Relationships Protecting or Correcting Image Witnessing and Dealing with Adult Adjustment Problems Being Exposed to Drug/Alcohol Use Witnessing Acts of Violence/Other Traumatic Events Pressure and Opportunity to Make Money Illegally

Peer Risk Situations: Protocol B (cont.)	Relevant Domains from Dating-Based Problem Situation Research (Sullivan et al., 2009)	Relevant Themes from Peer-Based Problem Situation Research (Farrell et al., 2007)
11. Two kids have been friends online for awhile but have never met in person. Now one of them wants to hang out together and meet each others' friends from school.	Communication, Connection, and Emotion Aggression and Victimization Media and Technology	Not Having a Close Relationship with a Parent or Guardian Victimization (Sexual, Physical) Witnessing and Dealing with Adult Adjustment Problems
12. Two kids are hanging out and one of them starts to get a little physically rough, but says that they are just playing around.	Communication, Connection, and Emotion Aggression and Victimization	Emotion Dysregulation Hostile Attribution Change or Loss of Proximal Relationship Peer Pressure Protecting or Correcting Image Crossing the Line Quick Escalation to a Violent Outcome Physical Victimization

Note: Situations 1-6 represent protocol A; situations 7-12 represent protocol B. Students were randomized to protocol conditions. For Protocol A, N=20. For Protocol B, N=19.

Appendix E

Physical and Relational Aggression Subscales and Overt and Relational Victimization Subscales of the Problem Behavior Frequency Scales (PBFS)

Sources: Farrell, A. D., Kung, E. M., White, K. S., & Valois, R. F. (2000). The structure of self-reported aggression, drug use, and delinquent behaviors during early adolescence. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 29,* 282-292.

Sullivan, T. N., Farrell, A. D., & Kliewer, W. (2006). Peer victimization in early adolescence: Association between physical and relational victimization and drug use, aggression, and delinquent behaviors among urban middle school students. *Development and Psychopathology, 18,* 119-137.

Response Format: The following 6-point scale is used for all the items: 0 = *never*, 1 = *1-2 times*, 2 = *3-5 times*, 3 = *6-9 times*, 4 = *10-19 times*, 5 = *20 or more times*.

Scale Instructions: In the *last 30 days*, how many times have you done the following…

Physical Aggression Subscale:
1. Thrown something at someone to hurt them
2. Been in a fight in which someone was hit
3. Threatened to hurt a teacher
4. Shoved or pushed someone
5. Threatened someone with a weapon (gun, knife, club, etc.)
6. Hit or slapped someone
7. Threatened to hit or physically harm someone

Relational Aggression Subscale:
1. Didn't let another kid be in your group anymore because you were mad at them
2. Told someone you wouldn't like them unless they did what you wanted them to do
3. Tried to keep others from liking another kid by saying mean things about him/her
4. Spread a false rumor about someone
5. Left another kid out on purpose when it was time to do an activity
6. Said things about another kid to make other kids laugh

Scale Instructions: In the *last 30 days*, how many times has this *happened to you*?

Physical Victimization Subscale:
      1. Been hit by another kid
      2. Been pushed or shoved by another kid
      3. Another kid threatened to hit or physically harm you
      4. Been threatened or injured by someone with a weapon (gun, knife, club, etc.)

Relational Victimization Subscale:
      1. Had a kid say they won't like you unless you do what he/she wanted you to do
      2. Had someone spread a false rumor about you
      3. Been left out on purpose by other kids when it was time to do an activity
      4. Had a kid try to keep others from liking you by saying mean things about you
      5. Had a kid tell lies about you to make other kids not like you anymore
      6. Had a kid who is mad at you try to get back at you by not letting you be in their group anymore

Vita

Sarah Wray Helms was born on January 15, 1980, in Roanoke, Virginia. She graduated from Patrick Henry High School in Roanoke, Virginia in 1998. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with a minor in Education from Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina in 2002, where she graduated Summa Cum Laude. She began her graduate training in Clinical and Developmental Psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia in 2005, and earned a Master of Science in May 2007. Sarah Helms is currently a doctoral candidate in the Clinical Psychology program, with a dual focus in Developmental Psychology through the Developmental-Clinical Scholars Program at Virginia Commonwealth University. She plans to complete her clinical internship training during the 2009-2010 academic year at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in Child Clinical and Pediatric Psychology.