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A Qualitative Analysis of Latina Adolescents' and their Mothers' Perspectives on Adolescent Dating Violence

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A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF LATINA ADOLESCENTS’ AND THEIR MOTHERS’ PERSPECTIVES ON ADOLESCENT DATING VIOLENCE

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

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Abstract

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF LATINA ADOLESCENTS’ AND THEIR MOTHERS’ PERSPECTIVES ON ADOLESCENT DATING VIOLENCE

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Adolescent dating violence is a prevalent and disconcerting reality for many adolescents. Communication with others (e.g., parents, older siblings, friends) about dating violence may buffer some negative outcomes associated with experiencing dating violence. Although researchers are attending more to this public health problem, what we know about the messages that adolescents receive about dating violence is limited, especially for Latina teens. To address this gap in the literature, 18 Latina adolescents (14-17 years) and their mothers participated in semi-structured interviews to explore their beliefs about what dating violence means to them, messages that are shared about dating violence with mothers and friends, adolescents’ help seeking preferences and behaviors, and reasons for and against talking with parents about problems in dating relationships. Interviews were transcribed and coded for emergent themes. Participants described many examples of problems in dating relationships including some traditional forms of dating violence (e.g., physical harm) and some advancing forms of dating.
abuse (e.g., aggression through social media). Messages that Latina adolescents receive from parents and friends include advice to “try to work it out or get out of the relationship” and “talk to someone.” Barriers to seeking help from parents and others included “worry about parent’s response” and “lack of closeness or trust.” Themes of supports to seeking help from parents and others included having a “close and trusting relationship” and having had “an established pattern of communication.” Latina adolescents also suggested they may prefer to seek help for problems in dating situations from friends and older siblings. Results suggest that Latina adolescents and their mothers may be knowledgeable about problems in dating situations. However, the messages that Latina adolescents receive differs by who is giving the message and Latina teens may hesitate talking to their parents about problems in dating if they fear negative parental reactions or they do not sense that parents can effectively facilitate the conversations. Given that many victims of dating violence do not tend to disclose their dating problems or seek help, these results highlight the importance of educating parents on how to promote open and effective communication. Results also highlight the importance of informing peers and siblings on how to respond when their friends/siblings experience dating problems. Finally, results suggest implications for primary prevention programs guided by support for culturally tailored interventions.
A Qualitative Analysis of Latina Adolescents’ and Their Mothers’ Perspectives on Adolescent Dating Violence

According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011) 22.4% or 1 in 5 of adult female survivors of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner report having first experienced some form of dating violence when they were between 11 and 17 years old (Black, Basile, Breiding, Smith, Walters, & Merrick, 2011). This long-standing public health concern is most precarious for adolescents and young adults. The Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (2002) reported women ages 16 to 24 experience relationship violence at rates higher than other age groups. In 2008, women ages 12 and older reported 552,000 intimate partner victimizations equating to a rate of 4.3 victimizations per 1,000 females 12 years of age and older (Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). In addition, male partners committed the majority of female victimizations (Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

Teens are at a higher risk than adults for experiencing intimate partner abuse or dating violence for a number of reasons (Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001). As compared to adults, adolescents tend to lack life experience, rely on equally inexperienced or misinformed peers, seek independence and less support from family, and may inaccurately perceive aspects of violence as signs of “true love” (Callahan, Tolman & Saunders, 2003; Foshee et al., 2000; Smith & Donnelly, 2001; Wolf, Ly, Hobart, & Kernic, 2003). In addition, adolescents may perceive
abusive behaviors differently than adults or professionals by accepting some abusive behaviors as typical between two people in a consensual relationship (Jaycox et al., 2006; Lewis & Fremouw, 2001). These differences can place adolescents at greater harm than adults, as teens may be ill equipped to negotiate abusive relationships and handle making the optimal decisions that dating violence experiences require.

Prior work in understanding the types of problem dating situations that adolescents might encounter and their response strategies has demonstrated the importance of looking at the entire span of a relationship and peer and family influences (Sullivan, Erwin, Helms, Masho, and Farrell, 2010; Sullivan, Masho, Helms, Erwin, Farrell, and Taylor, 2012). For example, Sullivan, Erwin, Helms, Masho and Farrell (2010) examined qualitative interviews of 44 African American middle and high school students (61% female) to identify their perceptions of problem situations in dating experiences and relationships. Emergent categories and themes included six categories of problem situations (e.g., Approach and Initiation; Conflict, Conflict Resolution, and Break-ups; Communication, Connection, and Emotion; Aggression and Victimization; The Role of Others; and Media and Technology) and 18 themes of problem situations (e.g., difficulty approaching potential dating partners, age and maturity differences, intentional malicious communication, physical and relational aggression, peer and parent influences, and media used to monitor or control behavior). The findings suggest urban youth frequently acknowledge experiencing or witnessing problems in dating situations involving aggression and/or victimization. In addition, their experiences are not limited to a certain stage of dating but can occur at any point in a relationship (e.g., from the early stages of approaching or initiating a dating relationship to the break-up stage). Additionally, Sullivan, Masho, Helms, Erwin, Farrell, and Taylor (2012) later examined 38 of the initial 44 qualitative interviews (61% female) to
supports and barriers for engaging in appropriate responses to problems in dating situations. Emergent themes included nine themes of supports and nine themes of barriers spanning across three sets of factors (individual, peer, and family). The findings suggest that among the themes identified by adolescents, those that were most reported suggest that adolescents felt supported to respond optimally to dating problems when they felt confident in their ability to address dating problems, felt they received supportive advice from peers, and received support, advice, and messages about relationships from family members. Adolescents felt hindered to make optimal responses when they felt difficulty in regulating emotions (e.g., anger, anxiety, sadness), received mixed messages or un-supportive advice from peers, and perceived a lack of support or unhelpful advice from family. These results highlight the importance of understanding adolescents’ perceptions and experiences of problems in dating relationships and understanding the factors that will facilitate healthy choices about dating relationships.

Understanding adolescents’ perceptions of dating relationships and dating violence is important because adolescent victims of dating violence are at risk for poor health outcomes (e.g., eating disorders, low self-esteem, suicidality, depression, anxiety), tend to engage in high-risk behaviors (e.g., fighting with peers, drug use, alcohol use, sexual activity), may encounter unsafe environments (e.g., access to firearms, exposure to community and/or domestic violence) and exhibit poor academic performance (e.g., low grade point averages) (Ackard, Eisenberg, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007; Banyard & Cross, 2008; Banyard, Cross, & Modecki, 2006; Eaton, Davis, Barrios, Brenner, & Noonan, 2007; Erickson, Gittleman, & Dowd, 2010; Gover, 2004; Miller, Naimi, Brewer, & Jones, 2007; Plichta, 1996; Rickert, Vaughan, & Wiemann, 2002; Thompson, Wonderlich, Crosby, & Mitchell, 2001; Vogel & Himelein, 1995; Yan, Howard, Beck, Shattuck, and Hallmark-Kerr, 2009). For example, Ackard and Neumark-Sztainer (2002)
examined the associations between dating violence (i.e., physical violence, emotional violence, sexual violence) and psychological health outcomes (e.g., eating disorder behaviors, self-esteem, suicide, and emotional health) among a nationally representative sample of 81,247 adolescents (50.4% female). They found that victimized teens reported poorer self-esteem, more depressed mood, more anxiety, and more suicidal ideation than non-victimized teens. The findings suggest that adolescents (male and female) with experiences of dating violence are at a higher risk for poor outcomes when compared to teens without dating violence experience.

Despite the prevalence of dating violence among teens and the potential impact on adolescent health, teens are often reluctant to seek help for issues related to dating violence or relationship problems. The minority of teens that seek help turn to non-parental sources (e.g., friends, other family members, community figures) leaving the majority of parents of victimized teens unaware of the abuse (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999; Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2004). In addition, parents sometimes underestimate their teens’ exposure to dating violence, which in turn can create a barrier to communication. However, the role of parental support is important given that non-parental sources can sometimes be inadequate. For example, adolescent peers may be incapable of providing effective assistance to violent dating situations (Ocampo, Shelley, & Jaycox, 2007). Given these realities, identifying what would make communicating and help seeking from parents easier or harder for adolescents is an important area to explore.

Prior work in other health-related areas has demonstrated the importance of parent-adolescent communication (Ornelas, Perreira, Ayala, & Guadalupe, 2007; Pokhrel, Unger, Wagner, Ritt-Olson, & Sussman, 2008). The role of parent-child communication in helping adolescents make safe sexual choices may provide some insights into the relevance of dating violence communication. For example, studies in this area have found that parents who speak to
their adolescents openly and repeatedly about sex are likely to have adolescents who delay initiation of sexual activity and make better choices about birth control (Guillamo-Ramos et al., 2007; Kotchick, Dorsey, Miller, & Forehand, 1999; Pick & Palos, 1995). Furthermore, sexual risk factors are correlated with dating violence risk factors. However, no studies have examined parent-child communication about dating violence, specifically for Latino youth.

The purpose of the current study was to obtain rich descriptions of beliefs and experiences about dating violence from the perspective of Latina adolescents and their mothers. Despite the growing presence of Latinos in the United States, little research exists regarding dating violence among Latino teens. Some available studies suggest that Latinas are more likely to be victimized by dating violence than other adolescent girls (Foshee et al., 1996; Howard, Beck, Kerr, & Shattuck, 2005; Ingram, 2007; Whitaker et al., 2006). As a result, understanding their perspectives on dating behaviors and dating violence could aid prevention planning for this high-risk group of youth.

The goal of obtaining in-depth meanings and beliefs surrounding dating violence was achieved by conducting separate semi-structured interviews with Latina adolescents and their mothers. Interviews can often yield richer descriptions than what is possible through survey methods. In particular, qualitative methodology helps to describe individual experiences. The literature review will discuss Latina adolescents in the context of dating violence and the importance of parent-child communication in positive health outcomes.

**Literature Review**

**Prevalence**

Dating violence is a public health concern among adolescents. Studies have indicated that the rates of dating violence victimization and perpetration continue to increase. Prevalence rates
of dating violence are often derived from national studies and convenience samples of adolescents (Bergman, 1992; James, West, Deters, & Armijo, 2000).

For example, data from the Add Health study, a nationally representative sample of adolescents in grades 7-12, indicates that 32% of adolescents reported experiencing any type of psychological or physical violent dating behaviors within 18 months of completing the survey. More specifically, 29% of adolescents reported experiencing predominantly psychological violence and 12% of adolescents reported experiencing physical dating violence (Halpern, Oslak, Young, Martin, & Kupper, 2001). In the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, a national sample of high school students, 9.4% of adolescents in 2011 (down from 9.8% in 2009) reported being victims of dating violence (e.g., being hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend) within 12 months prior to the survey (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). Finally, the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) includes a national survey led by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The database gathered information about the prevalence, characteristics, and consequences of victimization from 77,200 households. NCVS findings indicated 23% of adolescent females and adult women experienced some form of dating violence (Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007).

Convenience samples indicate that 10.5%-76% of adolescents report being victimized by a form of dating violence. Bergman (1992) found 10.5% of adolescents attending one of three Midwestern high schools reported sexual dating violence, 12% reported physical dating violence, and 17.7% reported having experienced a combination of sexual and physical dating violence. Furthermore, 28% of the sample reported being victimized by emotional, sexual, and/or physical dating violence. Holt and Espelage (2007) found 37% of adolescents in grades 7 through 12
reported having experienced physical dating violence while 62% reported experiencing
emotional dating violence.

In addition to victimization, studies confirm that dating violence perpetration is prevalent
(Malik, Sorenson & Aneshensel, 1997; O’Donnell et al., 2006; Wolf & Foshee, 2003). James,
West, Deters, and Armijo (2000) identified the extent of dating violence as reported by 37
students (46% female, 27% white, 19% Latino) ages 14 to 18 (average of 17 years old) attending
an alternative high school. The researchers found that 63-76% of adolescents reported having
been victims and perpetrators of emotional and/or psychological abuse. The Multisite Violence
Prevention Program (MVPP), a longitudinal study of violence among middle school youth,
reported that 29% of youth report perpetrating dating violence against their dating partner
(Miller, Gorman-Smith, Sullivan, Orpinas, & Simon, 2009). In particular, 31.5% of female teens
and 26.4% of male teens have physically abused a dating partner (Simon, Miller, Gorman-Smith,
Orpinas, & Sullivan, 2010). Together these sources suggest that the prevalence of dating
violence varies and ranges from 9.8% to 76%, depending on the population being sampled and
dating violence terminology.

The compilation of prevalence rates rendered from national, convenience, and
community samples highlights the problem of dating violence as a troublesome experience for
many adolescents. Moreover, dating violence varies further by adolescent race/ethnicity, gender,
and age. Specifically, ethnic minority adolescents, females, and older adolescents are more
likely to experience dating violence than other youth (Holt & Espelage, 2005; Wolfe, Crooks,
Chiodo, & Jaffe, 2009).

National studies indicate that, as compared to White adolescents, Black teens and Latino
teens are more likely to experience dating violence victimization. In particular, in 2011, 12.2% of
Black adolescents (down from 14.3% in 2009) and 11.4% (down from 11.5% in 2009) of Latino adolescents report having experienced dating violence as compared to 7.6% (down from 8.0 in 2009) of White teens (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). As evidenced by the minimal difference in rates for Latinos from 2009-2011, findings suggest that sometimes Latino adolescents face a higher risk than Black teens. Ackard and Neumark-Sztainer (2002) examined the prevalence of date-related violence (without sexual violence) and rape among 81,247 high school adolescents (50.4% female) who completed the 1998 Minnesota Student Survey. Although, the sample was predominantly white, the sample included teens identifying as Asian American, Black, American Indian, Mexican American, and Puerto Rican. Overall, only 1.5% of the sample identified as one of the two Latino subgroups (Mexican American or Puerto Rican). Despite the smaller proportion of Latinos, Mexican American females reported higher rates of experiencing physical dating violence, with no sexual violence, as well as, higher rates of date rape experiences (sexual violence) as compared to Black females. In addition, Latinas (Puerto Rican and Mexican American) reported higher rates of experiencing both physical dating violence and sexual violence as compared to Black females. These findings suggest that Latina adolescents are at a high risk for victimization.

Within the Latino culture, the increased odds for experiencing dating violence may reflect an interaction between dating violence, cultural factors, and individual factors. For example, the prevalence of dating violence varies by immigrant status (cultural factor). Silverman, Decker, and Raj (2007) addressed the variability that being a female immigrant (not having lived in the United States all of her life) may introduce to experiences of dating violence. The data from 7,970 females (74% White, 10.27% Latino) in grades 9 and 10 who participated
in the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey (MYRBS) from 1997 to 2003 was analyzed. The study’s findings state that regardless of other factors that typically increase dating violence risk for immigrants (e.g., sexual experiences), Latina immigrants reported a lower risk of dating violence experiences than non-immigrant Latinas. The trend in risk differences based on immigration status may be influenced by acculturation. Sanderson, Coker, Roberts, Tortolero, and Reininger (2004) assessed 4,525 Latinos, 14 years or older, in the ninth grade, from 13 high schools in the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley during 2000 to 2001. Data was collected to investigate the relationship between acculturation and dating violence victimization (physical and sexual) on Latino youth. Female adolescents, particularly those who reported higher levels of acculturation (i.e., speaking more English than Spanish, having parents born in the United States, a lack of interest in their ethnicity, and perceiving ethnic discrimination) reported higher rates of physical dating violence victimization than their acculturated male peers. In particular, Latina adolescents who reported speaking English-only were 89% more likely to have experienced dating violence victimization than English/Spanish speaking or Spanish-only speaking peers. Speaking Spanish-only actually reduced victimization likelihood by 48%.

Similar findings for acculturation as a risk factor for dating violence victimization have been noted elsewhere (Ramos, Green, Booker, & Nelson, 2010; Sanderson, Coker, Roberts, Tortolero, & Reininger, 2004; Smokowski, David-Ferdon, & Stroupe, 2009)

Beyond race/ethnicity, dating violence can begin as early as the first dating experience; however, the risk of experiencing dating violence increases over time with adolescent age. Arriaga and Foshee (2004) found that the severity of violent acts and the perpetration of dating violence increased over two longitudinal time points from 20% to 32%. In addition, victimization showed a similar increased trend from 36% to 48%. For example, in the YRBS
(Center for Disease Control, 2009) dating violence was significantly higher for 12th grade students than 9th and 10th graders. Specifically, 7.9% of adolescents reported dating violence victimization in 9th grade, 7.9% in 10th grade, 8.3% in 11th grade, and 11.5% in 12th grade. Other studies have also found that older adolescents were more likely than younger adolescents to experience dating violence (Halpern, Oslak, Young, Martin, & Kupper, 2001; Howard, Qui, & Boekeloo 2003; Howard & Wang, 2003a; Howard & Wang, 2003b; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2008).

The increase in dating violence with age is likely related to adolescents increased opportunities for dating experiences as they become older. For example, although teens report having started dating when they were as young as 9 years old, studies have shown that 15 is the average age of dating and that parents monitor their children less as children get older (Gover, 2004; Jackson, Cram, & Syemour, 2000; Milan, Lewis, Ethier, Kershaw, & Ickovics, 2005; Zimmer-Gembeck, 1999). Thus, older adolescents may have more dating opportunities in general but they are also more likely to have dating opportunities that are not monitored by adults thereby potentially increasing their risk of engaging in risk behaviors (e.g., unprotected sexual intercourse, dating violence).

Differences in dating violence prevalence also differ by adolescent gender. In particular, researchers have yielded higher lifetime prevalence of severe physical and sexual dating violence among adolescent females than males and the way in which females and males perpetrate and/or experience dating violence tends to differ (Bennett & Fineran, 1998; Bergman, 1992; Betz, 2007; Muñoz-Rivas, Graña, O’Leary, & González, 2007; Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001). For instance, females are typically at an increased risk for sexual victimization and are more likely than males to report being physically and unwillingly forced into sexual intercourse
In addition, 77% of female high school students, compared to 67% for male teens, endorse experiencing some form of sexual coercion, including unwanted kissing, hugging, genital contact, and sexual intercourse (Jackson, Cram, & Seymour, 2000). The literature shows that females are more likely to engage in emotional violence (e.g., raise their voice, threaten self-harm) and use less traditionally aggressive methods of physical violence (i.e., pinching, slapping, scratching, kicking). Males may tend to use more aggressive forms of physical violence (i.e. punching, strangling, throwing their partner) on females.

Although traditional views of dating violence have focused on a male-batterer/female-victim model (Geffner & Rosenbaum, 2002; Milan, Lewis, Ethier, Kershaw, & Ickovics, 2005) recent work is building on the gender differences in dating violence and finding a growing occurrence of reciprocally violent relationships or mutually violent relationships where male and/or female partners may be perpetrators and/or victims (Gray & Foshee, 1997; Mulford & Giordano, 2008; Wolfe et al., 2003). Thus, adolescent females are both at risk of being victims but also at risk for being perpetrators of dating violence. In fact, some studies suggest that female teens may actually be more likely than male adolescents to perpetrate dating violence (Foshee, 1996; Williams, Ghandour, & Kub, 2008). Milan et al. (2005) found that adolescent females were more likely to report perpetrating relationship violence than males, and their dating relationships were more likely to be characterized by mutual violence. Foshee (1996) indicated that, across the board, female youth perpetrate more dating violence than adolescent males, even when controlling for acts of self-defense. Similarly, O’Keefe (1997) assessed 1,012 Los Angeles area high school students and found that female adolescents were significantly more likely to engage in dating violence with 43% of females and 39% of males reporting having perpetrated
physical violence. Given these statistics, researchers are now paying more attention to predictors of dating violence perpetration among adolescent girls. For example, Foshee, Reyes, and Ennett (2010) analyzed questionnaires completed by 1,666 North Carolina area 8th-10th graders and reported that girls who experience depression, engage in marijuana use, and show aggression towards peers were significantly more likely to perpetrate dating violence than girls who did not endorse those risk factors. In addition, socializing with peers who also engaged in dating violence tended to increase the odds of perpetration. These findings point towards multisystemic influences on female dating violence perpetration and support the growing evidence that females and males appear to be at risk for both dating violence perpetration and victimization. However, male-enacted dating violence is typically more invasive for females and leads to greater risk of harm for females than female-enacted dating violence (Cleveland, Herrera & Stuewig, 2003).

In summary, the occurrence of dating violence in adolescent relationships is prevalent and influential in the lives of many adolescents. The data presented above demonstrates that Latino adolescents, particularly Latinas, are at high risk for experiencing dating violence. In addition, within the Latina community, risk for dating violence may vary based on individual and cultural factors. Findings on the general adolescent population indicate that dating violence victimization is likely to increase with age and differ by gender. However, despite a trend towards mutual violence between males and females, dating violence victimization appears to remain most devastating to female youth.

In contrast to the knowledge on dating violence prevalence, relatively little research exists regarding the beliefs and experiences of dating violence among Latino adolescents. Furthermore, relatively little research exists regarding the health risk and protective factors associated with Latina adolescents’ experience of dating violence (Howard, Beck, Kerr, &
Shattuck, 2005; Ingram, 2007). As a result, more work is needed on how Latina adolescents define and perceive abusive relationships, their help seeking preferences and behaviors, and whom they communicate with about these experiences. This type of data could help in the development of prevention programs aimed at helping Latino youth develop healthy dating relationships.

**Dating Violence Beliefs and Attitudes**

The roots of dating violence beliefs and attitudes are likely to stem from how professionals and teens define dating violence. The terms “adolescent dating violence”, “teen dating violence” and “intimate partner violence” (Rennison, 2001) are often employed to represent the abuse that occurs within the context of adolescent romantic relationships, with physical, sexual, and emotional violence being the most cited types of abusive dating behaviors for adolescents (Smith & Donnelly, 2001).

**Traditional Conceptualizations.** Physical dating violence is defined by physical force used to intentionally cause harm. Physically violent dating behaviors include physical contact (e.g., punching, slapping, biting, or grabbing), physical intimidation (e.g., being held down), or the use of weapons to inflict harm (e.g., throwing objects) (Ackard, Eisenberg & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007; Yan, Howard, Beck, Shattuck & Hallmark-Kerr, 2009). In addition to the potential for bodily harm, physical dating violence often has a chronic reoccurrence rate and a poor prognosis as the abuse becomes progressively worse over time (Smith & Donnelly, 2001). Sexual dating violence is defined by non-consensual sexual acts and may include the most invasive acts of all three types of dating violence. Sexual violence includes unwanted sexual contact, physical force to engage in sexual acts against the partner’s will, or physical force to engage in sexual acts against a partner who is not able to verbalize consent, and “date rape”
Finally, emotional dating violence, the most commonly reported of the three types of dating violence (Smith & Donnelly, 2001), is conceptualized as verbal or psychological abuse which may occur in-person or through private means of communication (e.g., telephone, text messages, email). Emotional dating violence’s relatively high prevalence is due in part to the fact that the evidence of emotional abuse can be easily masked and rendered less noticeable than physical scars or sexual trauma. Therefore, victims may have less “evidence” to show for the abuse and there appears to be minimized chances for abusers to be caught or held accountable for their actions. Emotional violence may include deliberate attempts by a partner to induce feelings of jealousy or fear in another partner (Carlson, 1999; Wolfe et al., 2003) or trauma to a partner through non-physical or non-sexual acts, threats, or coercion such as being called names, insulted, treated disrespectfully, sworn at, and threatened with violence (Cano, Avery-Leaf, Cascardi, & O'Leary, 1998; Halpern, Oslak, Young, Martin, & Kupper, 2001). In addition to the varied ways in which dating violence can occur, it can take place anywhere such as directly in homes, vehicles, schools (Roscoe & Callahan, 1985) or through indirect modes such as through electronic access (e.g., phone calls, text messages, emails, social networking websites) (Draucker & Martsof, 2010).

Adolescents’ Conceptualizations. Although researchers have sought to clearly define abusive behavior in dating and romantic relationships, adolescents may have different conceptualizations of dating and dating violence than adults or professionals (Barter, 2009; Gover, 2004; Zeitler et al., 2006). The four commonly cited types of dating violence may be seen by adolescents as too simplistic to fully capture the complexity of dating violence experiences. In addition, forcing dating violence behaviors into categories may not always identify unhealthy
behaviors that fall between two categories or might be better plotted on a continuum. For example, Draucker, Martsolf, Stephenson, Heckman, Ferguson, Perkins, & Cook (2012) conducted individual qualitative interviews with 85 young adults ages 18-21 to obtain retrospective descriptions of teen dating violence experiences. The participants’ descriptions of 114 aggressive relationships helped researchers construct a two-dimensional typology of 7 types of aggressive relationships (based on severity and frequency). Turbulent relationships emerged from descriptions of “frenzied and dramatic” aggressive relationships that were also characterized by “frequent break-ups and reunitings”. Both partners perpetrated aggressive acts. Maltreating relationships emerged from relationships characterized by “a variety of types of aggression” such as “threatening” and “controlling”. These types of relationships were predominately perpetrated by one partner. Brawling relationships emerged from descriptions of “sporadic aggressive events” that appeared less “chaotic” than turbulent relationships and was typically perpetrated more by one partner than the other. Volatile relationships emerged from descriptions of “sporadic aggressive events” that included a “rapid increase in anger and sudden physical aggression” often perpetrated by one partner than the other. Bickering relationships emerged from descriptions of frequent “peevish arguments or wrangling” perpetrated by both partners. Deprecating relationships emerged from descriptions of relationships where one partner “belittled or slighted” the other partner on a routine basis. Finally, Intrusive relationships were those where one partner was more likely to seek to “spend time with or dictate the actions” of the other partner.

In addition, drawing the line between behaviors that are playful versus those that are abusive may be difficult for adolescents (Johnson et al., 2005) and how youth define abusive behaviors may vary by context, gender, gender role beliefs, and knowledge about the subject. To
begin with, adolescents may not be adequately equipped with the skills to discriminate non-abuse from abuse in varying contexts. In fact, teens may justify or accept the use of violent dating behaviors within certain contexts or as a means of expressing emotions (Cohall, Cohall, Bannister, & Northridge, 1999; O’Keefe, 1997; Sears, Byers, Whelan, Saint-Pierre, The Dating Violence Research Team, 2006; Simon, Miller, Gorman-Smith, Orpinas, & Sullivan, 2010; Smith, Winokur, & Palenski, 2005). For example, Johnson et al. (2005) conducted 13 focus groups with 120 urban young adults and teens (92% 14-19 years old, 97% African American, 56% female) in Washington DC. Both male and female teens justified male-perpetrated dating violence as a means to correct behavior (e.g., punishing the female partner for being disrespectful) and express emotions (e.g., jealousy). Black and Weisz (2004) surveyed 30 Mexican American adolescent focus group participants (50% female; mean age of 13.4 years) from two urban cities. The intent of the focus groups was to examine the thoughts and attitudes about dating violence among a Latino sample. Overall, the results of the qualitative investigation identified an acceptance of violence as commonplace in some contexts. For example, some teens reported expecting to be a victim of dating violence as an act of retaliation by a partner if the female had “caused” jealousy or infidelity to occur in the dating relationship. These findings suggest that a certain amount of violent dating behaviors may be accepted or tolerated among teens, particularly Latino adolescents.

**The Influence of Context on Adolescents’ Conceptualizations.** Furthermore, some behaviors that would fit the definition of dating violence may be minimized by teens or justified based on the context in which those behaviors occur. Therefore, when interviewing Latina adolescents, we can expect that the beliefs Latina adolescents report in regards to dating violence may include explanations or contexts that justify violence in dating relationships. In addition,
when discussing dating violence Latina teens may not divulge some dating behaviors that would classically be defined as violent. These findings suggest that there is a real value in having teens operationalize what dating violence means to them.

The Influence of Gender on Adolescents’ Conceptualizations. Adolescent beliefs about abusive dating behaviors also vary by adolescent gender. In particular, males may be more likely to justify by context while females justify by emotions. For instance, Johnson et al. (2005) found that male adolescents indicated dating violence helps males relieve frustration, improve self-esteem, and maintain power within a relationship. Meanwhile, female adolescents expressed sentiments of accepting violent dating behaviors as acts of love and commitment. The differences between how adolescent males and females define abusive behaviors are particularly salient in the Latino community. For example, Smith, Winokur, and Palenski (2005) assessed a convenience sample of 171 urban Latino adolescents 15 to 20 years old to explore how perceived acceptance of aggressive behaviors related to an adolescents’ definition of dating violence. The researchers found Latina teens were less accepting, than males, of physical or emotional abuse in their relationships but were also more likely to hold a lower threshold for defining aggressive or violent behaviors as forms of dating violence. In comparison, male youth who perceived the use of physical and emotional dating violence as acceptable were more likely to use severe terms to define dating violence (e.g., beating, striking, rape, or murder).

The gender differences observed in Latino adolescent perceptions and definitions of dating violence may be a reflection of traditional cultural gender beliefs. For example, Rayburn et al. (2007) examined reactions to violent dating behaviors and the categorization of dating violence in a sample of 41 predominantly 15-year-old Latino adolescents (37% female) from a Los Angeles public high school. The findings suggested that male-enacted dating violence was
seen as more negative than female-enacted abuse as male-enacted violence evoked the most severe classifications of dating violence. The perception that violence is more or less acceptable based on gender is reflective of traditional cultural beliefs. Furthermore, endorsing traditional gender roles (e.g., having a belief that female partners should be submissive to male partners) may be indicative of a greater acceptance of dating violence (Ulloa, Jaycox, Marshall, & Collins, 2004; Ulloa, Jaycox, Skinner, & Orsburn, 2008). For example, a theory regarding the link between gender roles and the experience of dating violence posits that traditional gender role beliefs support an imbalance of power between males and females (Adames & Campbell, 2005).

The occurrence of dating violence then is not only a result of the gender power imbalance but also a means towards maintaining the “status quo” of male dominance/female submissiveness (Sanderson, Coker, Roberts, Tortolero, & Reninger, 2004). In contrast, a belief in equal gender roles may reflect a less accepting attitude towards dating violence as one seeks to restore a balanced gender system. Findings by Ulloa, Jaycox, Skinner, and Orsburn (2008) help to highlight these concepts. The researchers assessed the association between gender stereotypes and attitudes about dating violence in a sample of 442, ninth grade urban Latino youth (49.3% female, 76.1% Mexican American) from five schools within the Los Angeles Unified School District. Overall, results show that Latina adolescents found dating violence to be less socially acceptable than Latino males. In addition, the researchers found that Latina females were more likely than male youth to believe in equal gender roles and less likely to accept dating norms that allow violence or abuse. Thus, beliefs and attitudes about dating violence for Latina adolescents may be a reflection of gender and gender role beliefs.

The Influence of Consequences on Adolescents’ Conceptualizations. Adolescents’ knowledge regarding the ramifications of dating violence may also play a role in their dating
violence beliefs and attitudes. For example, Jaycox et al. (2006) conducted an intervention effectiveness study with 2,540 Latino adolescents (51.7% female) from 10 schools within the Los Angeles United School District. The program (i.e., Break The Cycle’s Ending Violence curriculum) focused on educating teens about the legal issues related to dating violence. Despite a lack of improvement in dating violence incidence (i.e., dating violence perpetration or victimization) at 6-months follow-up, initial results suggest that increasing legal knowledge may reduce the acceptance of dating violence (e.g., female perpetrated violence) among Latino adolescents. Thus, beliefs and attitudes of dating violence for Latina youth may be influenced by access to information and level of knowledge about violent dating behaviors.

Overall, various factors may influence the beliefs and attitudes Latina teens will describe in regards to violent dating behaviors and dating violence. Teen definitions of dating violence may describe concepts similar to those accepted in the professional community. However, teen definitions may also reflect common thinking within the adolescent population. For example, although Latina teens may tend to be less accepting of violent dating behaviors, they may report difficulty discriminating non-abusive from abusive behaviors depending on the context in which they have experienced dating violence. In addition, the types of attitudes Latina teens have regarding traditional gender roles will likely influence dating violence definitions. Finally, it cannot be assumed that all Latina teens will experience dating violence. Therefore, when interviewing Latin adolescents, the information gathered might reflect the amount of knowledge participants possess about dating violence and its ramifications, which apart from actual experiences influence the definitions, beliefs, and attitudes they hold about dating violence.

**Help Seeking**

The numerous negative outcomes associated with dating violence experiences call for
researchers to not only focus on teens’ beliefs about dating violence but also focus on beliefs and behaviors regarding help seeking. Adolescent help seeking in regards to dating violence experiences appears to be one of the least studied themes in the dating violence literature. The reason behind this trend is twofold. First, adolescents who experience dating violence rarely seek support (Bergman, 1992; Jackson, Cram, & Seymour, 2000). Findings suggest that the rates of help seeking are low regardless of which role an adolescent plays (e.g., victim or perpetrator). For example, Ashley and Foshee (2005) sampled 484 eighth and ninth graders (predominately white) from rural North Carolina to assess help seeking in regards to dating violence experiences. Findings indicated that 60% of victims and 79% of perpetrators reported never seeking help for dating violence experiences. Second, findings indicate that when adolescents do seek help, they maintain preferences and criteria for selecting help givers, which makes help seeking a careful process.

**Barriers and Supports to Seeking Help.** The reasons behind which adolescents avoid help seeking are varied and can range from wanting to remain anonymous to fears about how others will react. For example, adolescents often perceive police intervention to be the least suitable response for dating violence experiences due to the risk of being identified. Findings suggest that only 7% of teens will seek help from police (Zwicker, 2002). Many victims of partner violence fear that bringing legal ramifications may bring unwanted repercussions, such as retaliation by the abuser or potential for public embarrassment (Gallopin & Leigh, 2009; Wolf, Ly, Hobart & Kernic, 2003). Teens also fear that adults will react negatively, make matters worse, place judgment (e.g., blame the help seeker or make him/her feel guilty), or avoid the issue (Gallopin & Leigh, 2009; Weisz, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, & Black, 2006). Ultimately, the potential to be identified and known as a teen who experiences dating violence or fearing
potential negative reactions may outweigh the benefits of seeking help and may explain why many teens chose to carry the burden of their dating violence experiences on their own.

Despite a lack of help seeking among the majority of youth with dating violence experience, the existing dating violence literature indicates that a minority of youth who experience dating violence may seek help, particularly females (Watson, Cascardi, Avery-Leaf, & O’Leary, 2001). Teens’ preferences for help givers reflect a reliance on friends as the first line of defense, followed by family members, and then community figures, with some exceptions (Carlson, 1999; Gallopin & Leigh, 2009; Ocampo, Shelly, & Jaycox, 2007). For example, Gallopin and Leigh’s (2009) review of Break the Cycle’s Dating Violence Awareness program provides insight into teen perceptions of help seeking and teen perceptions of support resources. The sample consisted of 41 teens (37% female) predominantly between the ages of 14 and 17 who participated in four mixed-gender focus groups in Washington, DC. The overall findings indicated that teens would first turn to a friend, rather than a parent or another adult, for help with dating violence experiences. Despite a preference for peer support, adolescents reported turning to an adult would depend on the quality of the relationship with the parent (e.g., closeness of the parent-child relationship, the quality of the home environment, parental rules regarding dating in general) or the quality of the relationship with another familiar adult (e.g., trustworthiness of teacher or counselor). Even if teens have a close or warm relationship with their parents, they reported being more interested in seeking help from unfamiliar adults (e.g., domestic violence advocates, anonymous sexual abuse hotline) where the risk of being judged seemed minimized and the safety of confidentiality was maximized.

Similarly, Latino adolescents may rank their preferences for help givers. For example, Ocampo, Shelley, and Jaycox (2007) explored the attitudes that Latino adolescents hold
regarding help seeking and help giving related to dating violence. The sample consisted of 1,655 predominantly 15 year old Latino adolescents (50% female) who completed surveys and 43 focus group participants between the ages of 13 and 14 (50% female). Overall, the researchers found that Latino adolescents would confide in friends first, then family (e.g., siblings, parent or guardian) and, to a lesser extent, other members of the community (e.g., counselor, lawyer, police). Ultimately, as compared to their peers, Latina adolescents are similar in that they are likely to seek help from various sources (primarily friends) but may be divergent in an increased likelihood, than non-Latino peers, to seek help from family.

The Type and the Quality of the Help Received. Help seeking is further complicated by the fact that the type and quality of support an adolescent receives from any given person may vary. For example, Ashley and Foshee (2005) reported that help seeking might be categorized in one of three ways, emotional support (e.g., expressions of concern or encouragement), informational support (advice given to assist in effective problem-solving), or instrumental assistance (direct assistance with proper steps and resources). The most appropriate type of support depends on the unique needs to each situation.

However, Weisz, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, and Black (2006) surveyed 526 students (47.2% female) in an urban, Midwestern, public high school. The researchers found that adolescents typically obtained appropriate emotional support (e.g., nurturing responses of support or understanding) but that obtaining informational and instrumental types of assistance was dependent on the severity of the dating violence experience. In other words, adolescents seeking help for severe dating violence experiences often encountered avoidance rather than support. The quality of support that teens can expect from school counselors may be limited due to inadequately trained counselors and limited resources. For example, a national random sample
of 550 high school counselors suggests that 81.3% of school counselors are not aware of an adolescent dating violence response protocol in their school and 90% have not received training on how to assist teens who come to them with the problems they may experience in dating situations (Khubchandani, Price, Thompson, Dake, Wiblishauser, & Telljohann, 2012). Thus, despite the likelihood of receiving positive emotional support for some, milder problems, teens that experience dating violence may find that they are not likely to obtain adequate assistance in the school settings and obtaining the help may become more difficult with an increased severity of violence. These findings are striking given that teens spend a large portion of their day in the school environment and that the more severe the violence, the more critical it is to obtain help. In addition, these findings are also saddening given the availability of empirically supported school-based prevention programs (e.g., Safe Dates, Foshee & Langwick, 2004).

Seeking Help from Peers. Furthermore, each of the three main identified sources for help (i.e., peers, family, community figures) can vary in helpfulness. Peers are accessible but may not be well equipped to guide a help seeking teen. For example, as described, peer support is where teens are most likely to turn first (Weisz, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, & Black, 2006). In fact, 86% of female high school students reported they would confide in a friend first, when asked whom they would talk to if someone they were dating attempted to control, insult, or physically harm them and teens typically know at least one victimized peer (O’Keefe & Trester, 1998; Zwicker, 2002). In addition, teens with witnessed victimization (a peer has witnessed the abuse) are more likely than teens that experience isolated or unwitnessed abuse to seek help (Black, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, & Weisz, 2008). Therefore, peers may be in a unique position to provide assistance, normalize feelings associated with dating violence as youth can identify with each other, and maybe even encourage a victim to seek help. In fact, prevention
programs such as the RISE program (Respect in Schools Everywhere; Weiser & Moran, 2006 as cited in Connolly & Friedlander, 2009) recognize peers as vehicles for change by empowering youth to prevent dating violence. However, adolescents tend to be limited in the help they can provide, some teens may escalate the problem, and some teens may be reluctant to intervene at all (Adelman & Kil, 2007; Ocampo, Shelley, & Jaycox, 2007; Rayburn et al., 2007; Ulloa, Jaycox, Marshall, & Collins, 2004). Peers lacking the life experience necessary to cope with difficult experiences may provide incorrect or inadequate advice and place the adolescent help seeker in an even more precarious situation. The boundaries with close friendships may often be blurred and adolescents may see their friends as third-party participants in their dating relationships. Findings suggest that the friends of partners in a romantic relationship may play a role in escalating dating conflicts within the dating relationship (e.g., due to jealousy and possessiveness) (Adelman & Kil, 2007). Furthermore, some teens may choose to avoid victimized peers to avoid conflicts of their own. Research shows that 25% of adolescents report witnessing dating violence among peers and witnessing dating violence or associating with victimized peers has been shown to be predictive of dating violence victimization for the observer (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Foshee et al., 2004; Schnurr & Lohman, 2008; Swart, Stevens, & Ricardo, 2002; Zwicker, 2002).

Seeking Help from Family. Despite the fact that adolescents may turn to peers first, we know that adolescents do turn to parents or siblings for help seeking based on the quality of the relationship. The quality of the parent-child relationship can be guided by how involved parents are, how well parents monitor, and the extent to which adolescents allow parents to be involved or monitor. Parental involvement and monitoring are closely linked to the amount of help a parent can provide and are influential on adolescent outcomes (Abbott, Hall, & Meredith, 2005;
Chase, Treboux, & O’leary, 2002; DiClemente et al., 2001; Foshee, Benefield, Ennet, Bauman, & Suchindran, 2004). Parental involvement suggests that parents who are involved and available may be able to influence the impact that dating violence risk factors can have on their teens. For example, Howard, Qiu, and Boekeloo (2003) examined correlates of adolescent dating violence in a sample of 444 teens ages 12 to 17. Parental monitoring was a correlate that was found to be negatively associated with dating violence victimization. In other words, adolescents who were more monitored by their parents were less likely to experience dating violence than adolescents who were less monitored by their parents. The protective influence of mothers’ high monitoring over risk of dating aggression has also been found to be true Latina and Black adolescents girls, particularly those living in high-crime neighborhoods (East, Chien, Adams, Hokoda, & Maier, 2010). Within the family, teens may also seek guidance from their siblings and the quality of the sibling relationship may be guided by cultural factors. This is particularly relevant for Latina adolescents. For example, Black and Weisz (2004) gathered thoughts and attitudes of dating violence from focus groups of Mexican-American adolescents. The researchers found that, for mainly cultural reasons, Latina adolescents preferred to seek support and assistance from siblings (e.g., older sisters, brothers) than parents. The preference to rely on siblings appeared to stem from a belief that brothers retaliate on behalf of sisters due to a Latino cultural role that brothers play in helping to be the “men of the house” (i.e., protectors of female family members).

Seeking Help from the Community. Lastly, although least frequently accessed, community support can also serve a help seeking purpose (Salazar, Wingwood, DiClemente, Lang, & Harrington, 2004). Banyard and Cross (2008) found that along with parental support (e.g., parents are available when needed), community support (e.g., feeling that neighbors could be helpful in problematic situations) was helpful in buffering the association between
victimization and negative outcomes for teenagers. In particular, adolescents who felt strong neighborhood support were less likely than teens with less support to have suicidal thoughts, feel depressed, and use substances. In addition teens with more community support tended to have positive educational attitudes and outcomes (e.g., positive attachment with school, high grade averages, graduating from high school), factors that are related to dating violence victimization risk (Eaton, Davis, Barrios, Brenner, & Noonan, 2007).

In summary, adolescents seek support from various sources and may acquire a range of types of support. Typically teens are likely to rely on friends for support but peers are not always the most experienced sources of functional support. In addition, youth are more likely to go to someone they do not know well but trust to maintain confidentiality than someone they do know who may judge them. Anonymity and trusting relationships appear to be essential factors for identifying whom a Latina teen will speak with about dating violence experiences.

**Communication**

Adolescents may not seek parents as the first line of defense for dating violence help but parents typically have more life experience than teen peers and have more of a personal investment in their children than other sources of support. Parent-child communication can help encourage healthy relationship choices and moderate the relationship between dating violence and poor outcomes (Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Dittus, & Bouris, 2006). Therefore, it is important to understand the barriers and support to parent-child communication and how to improve the chances that teens will seek parental support.

**Parent-Child Communication around Dating Violence.** The benefits that parent-child communication can provide may be influenced by various factors (e.g., parental knowledge about adolescent dating violence, quality of the parent-child relationship, effectiveness of
A survey conducted by the Empower Program, a program to raise awareness about dating violence, found that 54% of parents admit they’ve not spoken to their children about dating violence (Liz Claiborne Inc, 2000). In addition, the Family Violence Prevention Fund (2004) reports that 81% of parents believe dating violence is not an issue for adolescents or admit not knowing that dating violence is a problem. These findings suggest that parents need to be more informed. Parental unawareness may impede the ability to communicate with teens about dating violence and being uninformed can hamper effective solutions. Another factor that influences parent-adolescent communication is that adolescents may make it difficult for parents to approach them for conversations. Richardson (2004) sampled 1,214 Midwestern adolescents (54% female) to pinpoint topics that adolescents would like to discuss with their parents. Despite an interest in discussing general family issues, teens rarely endorsed wanting to discuss more sensitive topics such as drugs and sexual activity. Given the sensitive nature of dating violence, adolescents may also be less inclined to discuss dating violence as compared to less sensitive topics about their dating relationships.

**Linking Parent-Child Communication about Sexual Topics to Dating Violence.**

Aside from minimal survey data (i.e., Empower Program, Family Violence Prevention Fund) we do not know enough information on how parents and adolescents communicate about dating violence. Therefore, we can speculate on what parent-child communication regarding dating violence is like based on the larger literature on parent-child communication about other sensitive, health-related topics (e.g., sexual activity). Looking at parent-child communication through the lens of the literature on sexual activity is relevant for a two reasons. First, sexual behaviors and dating violence risk are correlated. Secondly, the aim of parent-child communication regarding sexual activity is to increase awareness and build skills for healthy
relationships. Furthermore, building healthy relationships is at the core of the adolescent dating violence literature and building communication about healthy relationships is at the core of the present study.

Sexual promiscuity in adolescents, with multiple partners, is associated with dating violence victimization risk (Howard & Wang, 2003a; Howard & Wang, 2003b) and increased risk for STDs/HIV which is further associated with dating violence. Findings indicate that on average, 51.6% of adolescent females with a diagnosed STD/HIV also report dating violence victimization (Decker, Silverman, & Raj, 2005). The interactions of these factors are particularly salient for ethnic minority females who tend to experience initial dating and sexual relationships at early ages, when they are unlikely to be developmentally ready for such mature experiences.

For example, Latinas participating in focus group discussions reported dating experiences that began before age 10 and the researchers linked these findings to supporting evidence that Latina teens are at higher risk for early sexual activity and pregnancy (Adams & Williams, 2011). In one of the first studies to examine the relationships between dating violence victimization and/or perpetration and sexual behavior among adolescent minority girls, Allyne-Green, Coleman-Cowger, and Henry (2012) found that Latina and Black teens (ages 16-18) who reported being victimized by or perpetrating dating violence were also more likely to have engaged in risky sexual behaviors (e.g., vaginal sex, oral sex, drinking during sexual encounters) and having had vaginal intercourse at a younger age than girls who did not report having had any dating violence experiences. These results enhance other findings that suggest that dating violence victimization is associated with the decreased likelihood of Black and Latina females to use a condom consistently in sexual relationships, and ultimately increasing the chances of STDs/HIV or unintended pregnancies (Ramos, Green, Booker, & Nelson, 2010; Teitelman,
Pregnancies also carry dating violence risks with some pregnant adolescents reporting experiencing continued or increased violence before, during, and after their pregnancies (Glass et al., 2003; Wiemann, Agurcia, Berenson, Volk, & Rickert, 2000).

**Supports to Parent-Child Communication about Sexual Topics.** Given the health risks involved between dating violence and sexual behaviors, the choices that adolescents make about their sexual health are intertwined with their dating violence risk. Furthermore, problem solving around health choices are often related to the parent-child relationship and parent-child communication about sex is related to adolescent sexual health (Baumeister, Flores, & Marin, 1995; Corona, Lefkowitz, Sigman, & Romo, 2005). Research shows that adolescents perceive closer relationships with their parents and reduced high-risk behaviors when there is open communication with parents about sex (Hutchinson, Jemmott, Jemmott, Braverman, & Fong, 2003; Karofsky, Zeng, & Kosorok, 2001). Therefore, how parents relay messages is just as important as what parents say. For example, Whitaker, Miller, May, and Levin (1999) examined 372 Black and Latino youth across three states to examine the relationship between parent-teen communication and teen-partner communication about sexual topics. The researchers found that parents (mothers and fathers) who were open, skilled in the topic of conversation, and comfortable speaking to teens about sexual topics were likely to have teens who, in turn, discussed risks of sexual behaviors with their partners and were likely to use condoms.

Beyond the context and content of conversation, the timing of conversations is also important. In fact, the earlier parents speak to their teens, the better (Beckett et al., 2010; Wilson, Dalberth, Koo, & Gard, 2010). Talks about sexual intercourse should begin with the onset of dating or before as research suggests that adolescent females are more likely to make healthier
choices (e.g., delaying initiation of sexual activity, consistent condom use) when there is communication with parents before becoming sexually active as compared to after initiation (Hutchinson, 2002).

The literature on sexual topic communication also suggests that direct and repeated communication can have an impact on reducing high-risk sexual behavior (e.g., multiple partners, refusing birth control). For example, adolescents tend to report having a close relationship with their parents and a greater ability to communicate with their parents when parents engage them in repeated discussions about a wide range of sexual topics, rather than one-time or infrequent discussions (Martino, Elliot, Corona, Kanouse, & Schuster, 2007).

The literature on parent-child communication and youth sexual health demonstrates that youth are more likely to have discussions about sexual topics with their mothers than with their fathers (Angera, Brookins-Fisher, & Inungu, 2008; Daddis & Randolph, 2010; Raffaelli & Green, 2003; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1999) and maternal influences, particularly through communication, can have an effect on adolescent teens’ decisions regarding sexual activity (Guillamo-Ramos et al., 2007; Kotchick, Dorsey, Miller, & Forehand, 1999; Pick & Palos, 1995). These findings holds true for Latino samples as well. For example, Dutra, Miller, and Forehand (1999) examined aspects of parent-adolescent sexual communication (i.e., process and content) and the relationship between communication and adolescent sexual risk-taking behaviors. The sample consisted of 332 (57% female) Black and Latino adolescents ages 14-16. The researchers found that Black and Latina teens reported open and receptive communication with their mothers, thus facilitating discussion of sexual topics, and correlating with low numbers of adolescent sexual risk-taking behaviors. In addition, self-disclosure by Latina mothers (e.g., talking to daughter about her own past experiences, talking about her life even if
she feels embarrassed, telling her daughter what life was like for her at her daughter’s age) has been found to strengthen trust and increase teens’ perception of parental expertise. A stronger parent-adolescent bond has, in turn, been linked to teens’ reduced intentions to engage in sexual intercourse and other high-risk behaviors (e.g., smoking cigarettes).

However, Latina mothers and daughters may be less likely than other ethnic minority groups to discuss sex directly (Meneses, Orrell-Valente, Guendelman, Oman, & Irwin, 2006) and research shows that a teen’s understanding of maternal approval or disapproval of intimate behaviors in teen dating relationships can influence intentions to have sex. For example, Bouris, Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Ballan, Lesesne, & Gonzalez (2012) examined maternal influences on teen intimate behavior in dating relationships. The sample consisted of 702 Latino/a mother-adolescent dyads (52% daughters) and all adolescents were recruited from the 8th grade across 10 middle schools. The researchers reported that many of the adolescent participants viewed their mothers as being more approving of teen engagement in sexually charged behaviors with their boyfriend or girlfriend, regardless of their mother’s actual beliefs. These findings are significant given that daughters’ beliefs about the messages mothers convey in relation to romantic relationships were also associated with the daughters’ intention to engage in sex in the future. This evidence underscores the importance of clear and direct parent-child communication about sensitive topics.

According to a guide published on parent-adolescent communication about sex (Guilamo-Ramos & Bouris, 2008) the following factors are important to the effectiveness of communication between mothers and their children: (a) content or what parents say, (b) context or how parents communicate, (c) timing or when parents communicate, and (d) frequency or how often parents talk about sex. One of the most effective ways of helping teens make healthy
choices is through conversations that focus on familial, social, and cultural disapproval of adolescent sexual behavior. For example, mothers who enforce a high level of compliance to the family’s rules on dating tend to have adolescents who delay engaging in sexual experiences (Hovell et al., 1994). The quality of the parent-child relationship and the exactness of communication are factors that may shape the choices teens make (Spoth, Neppl, Goldberg-Lillehoj, Jung, & Ramisetty-Mikler 2006).

**Barriers to Parent-Child Communication about Sexual Topics.** Despite the factors that support mother-daughter communication and the effectiveness of communication, barriers to communication and effectiveness also abound. For example, Eastman, Corona, Ryan, Warsofsky, and Schuster (2005) examined the responses of 31 parents and 41 adolescents engaged in separate focus groups on the development of a program (work-site based) to empower parents in promoting healthy adolescent sexual development. The researchers found that barriers to general parent-child communication included discomfort, resistance to talk, ineffective strategies, conflicting messages, or not feeling listened to or understood. In relation to communication about sex, commonly cited barriers by parents included fears about what to say or how much to say, lack of their own role models for discussions about sex, and adolescent avoidance of the issue. Adolescents reported feeling that their parents did not want to discuss sex, adolescents did not want to discuss sex with their parents, parents often held erroneous assumptions, or parental messages about sexual relations among teenagers were ineffective.

Latina adolescents are particularly at risk for factors that impeded effective mother-daughter communication. In particular, common barriers to Latino parent-adolescent communication include minimal conversations about sex, hesitation about the content of discussions, and cultural factors (e.g., family, religion, acculturation influences) (Hutchinson,
For example, findings suggest that, as compared to non-Latina peers, Latina adolescents are at risk for poor parent-adolescent communication, as they tend to report having less parent-adolescent sexual communication than other ethnic groups (Hutchinson, 2002; Menses, Orrell-Valente, Guendelman, Oman, & Irwin, 2006). In addition, Latina mothers and daughters are hesitant on what can be shared or should be shared with each other. For example, Guilamo-Ramos et al. (2006) examined the content and process of communication about sex between mother-adolescent dyads to better understand how to ease Latino family communication. The sample consisted of 63 dyads with relatively equal numbers male and female adolescents recruited from an urban borough in New York City. Adolescents ranged in age from 10 to 14 (average age of 12.8 years) and all participants were of Dominican (69.8%) or Puerto Rican (30.2%) decent. The findings suggest that Latina mothers are willing to discuss certain sex-related topics with a major focus on the consequences associated with sexual behavior (e.g., STDs, unplanned pregnancies). However, Latina mothers were hesitant in discussing topics directly related to the act of sexual intercourse and the use of birth control, as mothers felt torn between conveying important information and seemingly approving of sexual behavior. In addition, despite having a desire to talk to their mothers and feeling more comfortable talking to mothers rather than fathers, many Latina adolescents report that they avoid conversations about sexual topics with mothers out of fear of being accused of engaging in sexual activity and fear of being punished. These findings mimic other research findings that suggest mothers and female youth may want to avoid discomfort or embarrassment and are more likely to discuss certain topics in greater detail (e.g., STDs, AIDs) than sex or sexual behavior (Lefkowitz, Boone, Au, Sigman, 2003; Miller, Kotchick, Dorsey, Forehand, & Ham, 1998; O’Sullivan, Meyer-Bahlburg, & Watkins, 2001).
Latina mothers and daughters may also find that cultural factors influence whether or not they discuss sexual topics, their beliefs about romantic relationships, and the process of such conversations. Guilamo-Ramos et al. (2009) found that Latina mother-daughter communication and perspectives about sexual behavior are influenced by familismo (having a family-focused orientation). In particular, the more that a family embraces familismo, the more discouraging the messages are that Latina teens receive about romantic relationships. In addition, the researchers also found that Latinas, who report less acculturation, and therefore more familismo, are also less accepting of early dating practices and early romantic relationships. Cultural and traditional gender roles have been associated with the occurrence of violence against Latina women (Agoff, Herrera, & Castro, 2007) and may also influence mother-daughter communication by way of dating double standards. For example, Bouris, Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Ballan, Lesesne, & Gonzalez (2012) found that only 30-35% Latino mothers approved of their 13-year old daughters having a boyfriend while 40-50% approved of their 13-year old sons having a girlfriend. Similarly, Raffaelli (2005) found that Latina adolescents’, as compared to male Latino teens, reported having less freedom to explore dating before the age of 16 and experienced heavy restrictions on interactions w/romantic partners. For example, 40% of Latina adolescents report being allowed to have a romantic partner over to their house only when under the presence of another family member. Familial dating rules and traditional gender role directives from parents about Latina teens’ dating behaviors may partially explain why some Latina mothers and daughters experience tense and conflictual discussions about teen dating relationships (Raffaeelli & Ontai, 2001; Romo, Lefkowitz, Sigman, & Au, 2002; Romo, Nadeem, Au, & Sigman, 2004).

National samples confirm that sexual promiscuousness has been found to be a dating violence risk factor for most adolescents. In other words, teen dating violence risk increases with
increase in number of lifetime sexual partners (Eaton, Davis, Barrios, Brenner, & Noonan, 2007). Furthermore, Latina adolescents may be at heightened risk than their peers (Decker, Raj, & Silverman, 2007; Silverman, Decker, & Raj, 2007). Research findings on the nature of parent-adolescent communication in regards to sexual topics may bridge over to the parent-adolescent discussions on dating violence, with some exceptions. The choices adolescents make regarding sexual behaviors and dating violence are sensitive topics that can have long lasting impacts on adolescent well being, particularly for females. Thus, they are important topics for parents to navigate with their daughters effectively. Furthermore, the parent that daughters are likely to seek information from on sexuality or dating violence is the mother. What mothers tell their daughters about sexuality and dating violence is likely to be influenced by maternal knowledge and the quality of the mother-daughter relationship. We also know that discussions about sexual topics are aided by the effectiveness of communication, particularly for Latinas. However, we do not know the barriers and support that influence dating violence discussions between Latina mothers and Latina adolescent daughters. Knowing the perspective of both mothers and daughters is important as perceptions between parents and adolescents about sensitive topics may sometimes differ (Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Dittus, & Bouris, 2006).

Overall, the need for mothers to communicate with daughters is clear and there may be a “protective influence” wherein communication could be a simple link to buffering negative dating violence outcomes. Parents who do not communicate with their teens about sensitive issues (e.g., sexual topics) run the risk of having peer networks educating their teens, giving information and support, and consequently further influencing behaviors (Whitaker & Miller, 2000). Additionally, adolescents’ lack of knowledge about some sensitive topics (e.g., sex, dating violence) may be due to a lack of family communication or the use of alternative, and
misinformed, resources (Talashek, Peragallo, Norr, & Dancy, 2004). However, perceiving a close parent-child relationship may be important for healthy decision-making and this may be particularly true for Latina adolescents.

Findings in regards to sexual health decisions indicate that Latina teens are more likely to be impacted by parent-child communication when conversations are specific to sexual activity rather than general sexual topics. In other words, the parent-child communication must be context specific to help change behavior. These findings may generalize to dating violence wherein teens that perceive a positive parent-child relationship and have open parent-child communication about specific dating violence themes may be better able to make the healthy choices required to avoid dating violence or seek support if needed. Ultimately, we can explore these ideas by collecting and examining the themes Latina adolescents and their mothers provide in regards to their dyadic communication about dating violence.

**Current Study**

The occurrence of adolescent dating/relationship violence is a prevalent and disconcerting reality for many adolescents. For example, prevalence rates of dating violence among adolescents range from 23% to 76% (Bergman, 1992; James, West, Deters, & Armijo, 2000). Although researchers are attending more to this public health problem, what we know about adolescents’ beliefs and experiences of dating violence is relatively limited for Latino adolescents. Moreover, relatively little research exists regarding the health risk and protective factors associated with Latino adolescents’ experience of dating violence (Howard, Beck, Kerr, & Shattuck, 2005; Ingram, 2007). The current study aims to contribute to the growing literature on this topic by interviewing Latina adolescents and their mothers about problems in dating relationships, such as dating violence. Specifically, I was interested in identifying Latina
mothers’ and their adolescents’ beliefs about what constitutes dating violence or what dating violence means to them, the messages that adolescent Latinas receive about dating violence from their mothers and their friends, adolescents’ help seeking preferences and behaviors, and the reasons for and against talking with their parents and others about problems in dating relationships. Although parent-child communication is associated with positive health outcomes among youth, few studies have examined parent-child communication about dating violence. Moreover, few studies have examined help-seeking preferences among Latino youth. The current study used qualitative methods to obtain richer descriptions of these experiences than what is possible through survey methods. Based on prior literature, it is expected that Latina mothers and their adolescents will report few conversations about dating violence with one another, that youth will turn to friends for support and advice regarding problems in dating relationships, and that youth and mothers will describe barriers for communication such as fear of punishment and discomfort discussing sensitive topics.

**Method**

**Participants**

Data for this dissertation came from a larger, qualitative study examining strategies to improve healthy choices within the adolescent Latino community. The VCU IRB approved the study.

Participants included 18 Latina adolescents (14-17 years of age) and their mothers. Dyads were recruited from the same family. Latina adolescents were eligible to participate if they were 14 to 17 years old, had their mother’s permission to participate, and agreed to be interviewed. Mothers were eligible to participate if they had a daughter who was 14 to 17 years old, and agreed to be interviewed.
The average age of adolescent participants was 15.89 years, and 38.9% were in the 11th grade. The majority of adolescents, 61.2%, reported being born in the United States (includes 1st or 2nd generation born in US from immigrant parents and those born in Puerto Rico, a territory of the US.) Of immigrant adolescents, adolescents reported having lived in the United States (US) and having lived in the Richmond or Washington District of Columbia (DC) metro area for an average of 8.14 years. The majority of adolescents, 61.2%, reported being single or not involved in a dating relationship. Only three adolescent participants reported being currently sexually active; however, five participants noted their first age of sexual intercourse having occurred between the ages of 13 and 16. No adolescent participants reported ever having experienced a pregnancy.

The majority of mothers were the adolescents’ biological mothers and only one mother was a stepmother. Mothers’ average age was 41 years, and 77.9% reported being born outside of the US. Of immigrant mothers, mothers reported having lived in the US for an average of 16.08 years and having lived in the Richmond or Washington District of Columbia (DC) metro area for an average of 13.08 years. The majority of mothers, 72.2%, indicated they were currently married. See Table 1 for participant demographics.

**Procedure**

Participants were recruited from the greater Richmond, VA area (e.g., Richmond City, Henrico and Chesterfield counties) and the Washington DC metropolitan area (e.g., Alexandria, Prince William and Fairfax counties). A total of 13 mother-daughter dyads (72.2%) were from the Washington DC metro area and five (27.8%) were recruited from the Richmond metro area. Recruitment efforts included brief announcements and posted advertisements (e.g., flyers).
# Table 1

**Summary Demographics by Parent Group and Adolescent Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variables</th>
<th>Parent % (Frequency)</th>
<th>Adolescent % (Frequency)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study Participation Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey &amp; Interview - English</td>
<td>33.3 (6)</td>
<td><strong>88.9</strong> <strong>(16)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey &amp; Interview - Spanish</td>
<td><strong>66.7</strong> <strong>(12)</strong></td>
<td>11.1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Grade Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td></td>
<td>22.2 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td></td>
<td>27.8 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>38.9</strong> <strong>(7)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Highest Level of Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td><strong>27.8</strong> <strong>(5)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>16.7 (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>22.2 (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree</td>
<td><strong>27.8</strong> <strong>(5)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some graduate or graduate degree achieved</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth Country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States (Including Puerto Rico)</td>
<td>22.2 (4)</td>
<td><strong>61.2</strong> <strong>(11)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>16.7 (3)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td><strong>38.9</strong> <strong>(7)</strong></td>
<td>16.7 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>11.1 (2)</td>
<td>11.1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Heritage for US-born Participants&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td><strong>100</strong> <strong>(4)</strong></td>
<td><strong>36.4</strong> <strong>(4)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td></td>
<td>18.2 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>36.4</strong> <strong>(4)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acculturation Status&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low acculturation to American culture</td>
<td><strong>75.0</strong> <strong>(9)</strong></td>
<td>18.8 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High acculturation to American culture</td>
<td>25.0 (3)</td>
<td><strong>81.3</strong> <strong>(13)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Affiliation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant or other Christian&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td><strong>66.7</strong> <strong>(12)</strong></td>
<td><strong>66.7</strong> <strong>(12)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>33.6 (6)</td>
<td>33.3 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Attendance</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>11.1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Several times a year</td>
<td>11.1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Several times a month</td>
<td>22.2 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Several times a week</td>
<td>50.0 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Almost everyday</td>
<td>16.7 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Involvement(^d)</td>
<td>Involved in no church activities</td>
<td>29.4 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involved in 1-2 church activities</td>
<td>35.3 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involved in 3 or more church activities</td>
<td>35.3 (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adolescent Relationship Status</th>
<th>In a current relationship</th>
<th>38.9 (6)</th>
<th>38.9 (6)</th>
<th>38.9 (6)</th>
<th>38.9 (6)</th>
<th>38.9 (6)</th>
<th>38.9 (6)</th>
<th>38.9 (6)</th>
<th>38.9 (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not in a current relationship</td>
<td>61.2 (11)</td>
<td>61.2 (11)</td>
<td>61.2 (11)</td>
<td>61.2 (11)</td>
<td>61.2 (11)</td>
<td>61.2 (11)</td>
<td>61.2 (11)</td>
<td>61.2 (11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adolescent Sexual Activity Status</th>
<th>Currently sexually active - yes</th>
<th>16.7 (3)</th>
<th>16.7 (3)</th>
<th>16.7 (3)</th>
<th>16.7 (3)</th>
<th>16.7 (3)</th>
<th>16.7 (3)</th>
<th>16.7 (3)</th>
<th>16.7 (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Currently sexually active - no</td>
<td>83.3 (15)</td>
<td>83.3 (15)</td>
<td>83.3 (15)</td>
<td>83.3 (15)</td>
<td>83.3 (15)</td>
<td>83.3 (15)</td>
<td>83.3 (15)</td>
<td>83.3 (15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Relationship Status</th>
<th>Single, never married</th>
<th>5.6 (1)</th>
<th>5.6 (1)</th>
<th>5.6 (1)</th>
<th>5.6 (1)</th>
<th>5.6 (1)</th>
<th>5.6 (1)</th>
<th>5.6 (1)</th>
<th>5.6 (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>72.2 (13)</td>
<td>72.2 (13)</td>
<td>72.2 (13)</td>
<td>72.2 (13)</td>
<td>72.2 (13)</td>
<td>72.2 (13)</td>
<td>72.2 (13)</td>
<td>72.2 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Living as married, living with a domestic partner</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legally separated</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
<td>5.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>11.1 (2)</td>
<td>11.1 (2)</td>
<td>11.1 (2)</td>
<td>11.1 (2)</td>
<td>11.1 (2)</td>
<td>11.1 (2)</td>
<td>11.1 (2)</td>
<td>11.1 (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) \(n = 4\) for US-born mother participants. \(n = 11\) for US-born adolescent participants. Includes mothers and daughters who report being born in United States or Puerto Rico.

\(^b\) \(n = 12\) for mother’s acculturation status due to missing data for six parent participants. \(n = 16\) for daughter’s acculturation status due to missing data for two adolescent participants.

\(^c\) Within this sample, Protestant or other Christian includes participants who attend Baptist and Pentecostal religious ceremonies

\(^d\) \(n = 17\) for mother’s religious involvement due to missing data for one parent participant.
Advertisements were posted at local community organizations (e.g., Hispanic Liaison Office, Red Cross), apartment complexes with high-density Latino populations, Latino community events, and general public venues (e.g., Latino food markets, restaurants). However, the majority of participants were recruited through connections established with major gatekeepers in the community (e.g., church leaders) and through the Internet (e.g., Latino interest groups, email list-servs).

Interested participants were instructed to contact the study coordinator to get more information and to schedule an interview. Interviews were conducted in a location that was convenient for participants: 61.1% of interviews were conducted in the participant’s home and the remaining interviews were conducted in a community setting (e.g., church, university campus).

On the day of the interview, bilingual research staff described the study, reviewed the consent and assent forms with mothers and their daughters, and answered questions prior to having participant’s sign the consent or assent forms. Once the assent/consent forms were signed, participants were instructed to complete a short survey. Then, individual daughter and mother interviews were conducted separately with each interview lasting approximately 1-2 hours. Surveys and interviews were conducted in the language preferred by participants with 88.9% of adolescents opting for English-based surveys and interviews, and 66.7% of mothers requesting Spanish-based surveys and interviews. Mothers and daughters each received a $20 gift card for participating in the individual interviews and for completing the short survey.

Two bilingual interviewers, including the faculty-level principal investigator and the senior graduate student research coordinator, were responsible for conducting participant interviews. Interviewers were Latina females, (e.g., Mexican American, Puerto Rican), and possessed a
strong understanding of Latino and American culture and customs. Both interviewers were fluent in English and Spanish. Interviewers had prior experience with qualitative research methods and a strong background in clinical interviewing. Interviewers paid careful attention to interpersonal dynamics (e.g., body language, controlling expressions of personal opinion) to help control for potential bias. In addition, interviewers were trained with a semi-structured protocol to conduct the interviews and to guide follow-up prompts. Interviews were digitally recorded and digital recordings transcribed for data analysis purposes.

**Measures**

Study participants completed a short survey and participated in a semi-structured interview. See Appendix A and Appendix B for the full survey and semi-structured interview. Study measures were made available in English and in Spanish. In preparation for the current study and consistent with recommendations from work in cross-cultural research the study materials were translated from English into Spanish by a combination of two techniques, namely the translation by committee and the back-translation approaches (Brislin, 1970; Brislin 1976; Knight, Roosa, & Umaña-Taylor, 2009). The translation by committee approach included multiple steps beginning with an initial translator who translated English materials into Spanish; a second translator reviewed the Spanish translations; a third translator compared the English and Spanish versions and any discrepancies were addressed. The Spanish study materials were back-translated into English by an independent translator as a final check. Our community partner, the manager of a local government agency and liaison for the Latino community, reviewed the back-translations. The translation committee included a bilingual Latina (Puerto Rican) doctoral student in the clinical psychology program and a bilingual Latina (Colombian) community member. A bilingual faculty member supervised the committee. All committee members had
experience in document translation and back-translations. By having staff members who were heterogeneously representative of the Latino community, we were able to create Spanish-versions that were smoothly reflective of English versions while maintaining the idiosyncrasies of the Spanish language and culture (e.g., feminine/masculine forms of grammar, proper etiquette for addressing adults versus adolescents, linguistic differences among Latino subgroups).

The short survey obtained demographic information (e.g., age, education) and measures on acculturation (Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics, SASH; Marin, Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, & Perez-Stable, 1987). The SASH can be used to differentiate respondents who are low or high in acculturation. Participants’ responses were averaged across survey items and an average of 2.99 was used to differentiate acculturation levels (e.g., participants with an average score between 1 and 2.99 would fall into the less acculturated group, participants with an average score above 2.99 would fall into the high acculturated group) (Marin et al., 1987).

As noted earlier, this dissertation is based on data collected for a larger qualitative study. As a result, the semi-structured interview covered a variety of topics areas including (a) media influences on adolescent sexuality; (b) body image; (c) teen pregnancy; and (d) dating violence. Only responses for the dating violence section were analyzed in this study.

The creation of dating violence questions was guided by a review of questions used in dating violence research and dating violence intervention and prevention programs (Black & Weisz, 2004; Foshee & Langwick, 2004; Ocampo, Shelley, & Jaycox, 2007; Sears, Byers, Whelan, & Saint-Pierre, 2006; Sullivan, Erwin, Helms, Masho, & Farrell, 2010). For example, adolescents and their mothers were asked, “What does the word ‘dating’ mean to you?”, “When you hear the phrase ‘problems in dating situations’ what comes to mind”, “How would it feel
talking to your mom about problems in dating situations?”, “What would make it easier to talk to parents about problems in dating situations?”, and, “If your daughter experienced problems in a dating situation, like ones we just discussed, who could she talk to about the problems?”

Interview questions were open-ended and broad to allow for further probing of important content. Teens and mothers were asked similar questions with slight changes in wording. See table 2 for a full list of dating violence questions and probes.

**Data Analysis Plan**

The following steps were used in the analyses of the individual interview data.

**Step 1: Identifying themes.** Two levels of coding occurred during the theme identification process. During the first level of coding, one team member began by searching through the transcripts to identify individual themes, categories and larger domains. Themes are abstract (and often unclear) constructs that researchers identify before, during, and after data collection (Polkinghorne, 2005). Themes come from various sources such as literature reviews, researchers’ subjective experiences, and the text itself. To identify themes, a variety of techniques were used, including those from the analytic tradition of grounded theory.

This included reading a sample of transcripts to look for examples that suggested processes, actions, assumptions, and consequences. Coding also included metaphors, repetitions across informants, and shifts in content that indicated relevant themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Coding was facilitated by text management software, Nvivo7 (QSR Nvivo7, 2006), to review texts and mark instances where each theme occurred. Text segments often represented multiple themes therefore codes for specific text segments were not always mutually exclusive. The team member responsible for the first of level coding wrote memos about the coding to maintain transparency throughout the data analysis process and develop an audit trail.
Table 2

**Source of Emergent Codes: Categories, Interview Questions and Probes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Interview Question Coded (Source of Emergent Codes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Dating Behaviors</td>
<td>Parent and Adolescent: What does it mean to “date” someone? What does the word “dating” mean to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Messages about Dating</td>
<td>Adolescent: What does your mother say about dating?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What does your father say about dating?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent: What do you tell your daughter about dating?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What does your daughter’s father tell her about dating?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs and Descriptions of Dating Problems</td>
<td>Parent and Adolescent: When you hear the phrase “problems in dating situations” what comes to mind? Images? Thoughts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are some other examples of problems that teens face in dating situations? (e.g., what are behaviors people use in dating situations to hurt or harm their partner?) Use the following probes (a, b, and/or c) to probe for additional types of dating abuse if participant is not giving examples of all 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Probe for physical/sexual abuse: What about things like physically hitting or shoving? Or things like date rape or touching another person in a sexual way without their consent? What other behaviors may be physically or sexually harmful in a dating situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Probe for emotional/psychological abuse: What about things like threats or spreading rumors? What other behaviors may be emotionally or psychologically harmful in a dating situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Probe for technology and social media: What are ways that technology (cell phones, email, internet) or social networking sites (e.g., MySpace, Facebook) can be used to harm a dating partner?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about Dating Problems</td>
<td>Adolescent: What have your parents told you about problems in dating situations? If participant has trouble answering this question or reports that parents have not said anything ask, What do you think other parents tell their daughters about problems in dating situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What would you tell a friend if she or he experienced problems in a dating situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What would your friends say about problems in dating situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent: What have you told your daughter about problems in dating situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Seeking Help</td>
<td>Adolescent: If you experienced problems in a dating situation, like the ones we just discussed, who could you talk to about the problems? Where could you go for help?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How would you feel talking to your mother about problems in dating situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How would you feel talking to your father about problems in dating situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What might make it difficult to talk to parents about problems in dating situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How would you feel talking to your friends about problems in dating situations?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who else could you talk to about problems in dating situations? *Probing for community members such as teachers, religious leaders, etc.* How would you or another teenager feel talking to this *(insert community member)* about problems in dating situations?

**Parent:**
If your daughter experienced problems in a dating situation, like the ones we just discussed, who could she talk to about the problems? Where could she go for help? *Probing for family members as well as community members.* How would you feel talking to your daughter about problems in dating situations? What might make it difficult to talk to your daughter about problems in dating situations? If your daughter experienced problems in a dating situation, like the ones we just discussed, who could she talk to about the problems? Where could she go for help? *Probing for family members as well as community members.*

### Supports to Seeking Help

**Adolescent:**
If you experienced problems in a dating situation, like the ones we just discussed, who could you talk to about the problems? Where could you go for help? How would you feel talking to your mother about problems in dating situations? How would you feel talking to your father about problems in dating situations? What might make it easier to talk to parents about problems in dating situations? How would you feel talking to your friends about problems in dating situations? Who else could you talk to about problems in dating situations? *Probing for community members such as teachers, religious leaders, etc.* How would you or another teenager feel talking to this *(insert community member)* about problems in dating situations?

**Parent:**
If your daughter experienced problems in a dating situation, like the ones we just discussed, who could she talk to about the problems? Where could she go for help? *Probing for family members as well as community members.* How would you feel talking to your daughter about problems in dating situations? What might make it easier to talk to your daughter about problems in dating situations? If your daughter experienced problems in a dating situation, like the ones we just discussed, who could she talk to about the problems? Where could she go for help? *Probing for family members as well as community members.*
After reviewing and marking portions of the transcripts, two team members (i.e., the first level coder and the principal investigator) met to examine the themes generated from the first level of coding. The second level of coding was an iterative process during which first-level codes were re-examined to clearly differentiate separate themes or merge similar themes. This resulted in a final set of 20 themes, within 6 categories, and across 3 domains.

**Step 2: Building and applying a codebook.** Next a codebook was developed using standard procedures to increase inter-coder reliability and the validity of the findings. Qualitative codebooks, similar to quantitative codebooks, list each theme and subtheme accompanied by a detailed description, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and exemplars (i.e., typical text examples). Once the codebook was complete the study coordinator and the principal investigator met to review the standardized procedures for marking chunks of text that pertain to each theme. Upon completion, the initial codebook was used in the first-level coding of the interview text. The iterative process of qualitative coding resulted in a funneling down of codes from the first codebook to a second codebook and was then implemented for the second-level coding phase.

**Step 3: Describing themes and identifying patterns.** Once coding was complete, Nvivo7 was used to retrieve all instances of each theme. These instances were reviewed by the study coordinator and the PI and described the theme by presenting segments of text—paraphrases of cases and verbatim quotes from informants—as typical and atypical examples of concepts. The distribution of the theme across all groups was also examined.

There were three types of patterns that were explored: (1) “within-group” thematic similarities and differences (all interviewed teens compared to each other, all interviewed mothers compared to each other); (2) “cross-group” thematic similarities and differences
(mothers compared to daughters, immigrants compared to US-born participants); and (3) relationships among themes.

**Maintaining Integrity of Qualitative Methodology**

Various procedures were used throughout the different phases of the current study to ensure the integrity of qualitative methodology and establish credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2010). For example, the current study relied on establishing partnerships with gatekeepers who were already connected with the Latino community. In addition, data was collected over the course of 10 months and the presence of research staff was prominent over two months at one particular site. The consistent presence of research staff resulted in prolonged engagement with the community and prolonged data collection. Furthermore, care was taken to elicit participants’ beliefs and experiences by treating participants as the experts. These procedures helped to increase trust and engagement from participants.

Some procedures were specific to the logistics of carrying out the current study, descriptions of the current study, and the presentation of data to increase the integrity of the interpretations of the results. For example, an audit trail was established through the use of a reflexive journal and methodological journal. More specifically, a reflexive journal was used to track field notes and researcher biases and to reduce external influences on the interpersonal dynamics of the interview process. In addition, methodological journaling was also created through memos linked to the transcriptions during the emergent coding process. In addition, transparency of the study materials and procedures were maintained throughout descriptions of methods, data collection, data analysis plan, and detailed description of the research team members. Furthermore, triangulation of the data was also facilitated through the use of different data sources (e.g., perspectives of adolescents and mothers). Finally, the use of thick and rich
descriptions of the beliefs and experiences (e.g., direct quotes in English and Spanish) of adolescent Latinas and their mothers further enriches the interpretations and the directions for future studies.

**Results**

**Short Survey Overview**

**Acculturation.** The short survey provided an indicator of participants’ acculturation status to American culture (e.g., low versus high acculturation) and of participants’ perceived ability to communicate within the family (e.g., regarding communication in general and about sexual topics). As shown in Table 1, the majority or 81.3% of daughters, who provided responses on the acculturation measure, endorsed items reflecting a high acculturation to American culture status (e.g., preferring to read and speak in English rather than Spanish, having close friends who are more non-Hispanic than Hispanic). Conversely, the majority or 75% of mothers, who provided responses on the acculturation measure, endorsed items reflecting a low acculturation to American culture status (e.g., preferring to speak to their daughters in Spanish rather than English or preferring to watch or listen to movies, TV, or radio programs in Spanish better than English). Acculturation status was also included in cross-group and within group analysis that is presented later in this discussion.

**Interview Overview**

The interview questions focused on addressing the major aims of the study by targeting the areas of Dating Behaviors, Dating Problems, and Help Seeking, also referred as domains within this study. Themes and categories emerged from these domains.

Within each major domain, there were six categories: Definitions of Dating Behavior; Parental Messages about Dating; Beliefs and Descriptions of Dating Problems; Messages about
Dating Problems; Barriers to Seeking Help; and Supports to Seeking Help. A total of 20 themes emerged within the categories and domains. Each theme was identified by at least 13% of parents or adolescents, with a range of five to 24 sources per theme. All participants were given equal opportunity to provide responses within each domain with the exception of messages shared between friends, which were only asked of adolescent girls. See Table 3 for detailed information about the themes including the number of total number of participants who mentioned each theme (i.e., sources).

The following section presents a brief overview of absent or limited messages from the narratives and then presents the themes as they occur within each major category and across domain. Themes are generally described in order of largest (i.e., themes that were reported by 11 or more sources and at a high frequency) to smallest (i.e., themes that were reported by 5-10 sources and low frequency). Each theme is highlighted by a sample of the thick and rich narratives provided by adolescent daughters and their mothers. To protect confidentiality and for ease of reading the narratives, the mothers and daughters were assigned aliases. See Table 4 for the listing of aliases of mothers and daughters.

**Summary of Absent or Limited Communication.** Narratives revealed that 33% (6) of daughters and 22% (4) of mothers reported absent or limited parental messages about dating and dating problems. Absent messages were evident at times when adolescents reported receiving no information from a parent about dating. For example, Erica noted not knowing what her mother or father would say about dating because, “I don’t ask,” and endorsed never having spoken about dating or boyfriends, or ever having heard a parent talk about the topic. Some adolescents noted having a vague sense of their parent’s views that were often discouraging of dating.
### Table 3

**General Cross-Group Analysis by Parent versus Adolescent Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Total Number of Sources per Theme</th>
<th>Number of Sources per Theme per Parent Report</th>
<th>Number of Sources per Theme per Adolescent Report</th>
<th>Number of References per Theme per Parent Report</th>
<th>Number of References per Theme per Adolescent Report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definitions of Dating Behaviors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities and Behaviors to Get to Know One Another</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Relationship</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parental Messages about Dating</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Expectations</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Warnings</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beliefs and Descriptions of Dating Problems</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Aggression and Social Media</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure to Give In</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling Less Than Worthy</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with Trust and Jealousy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causing Physical Harm</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Relationship Problems</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Messages about Dating Problems from Parents and Shared Between Friends</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to Work it Out or Get Out of the Relationship</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to Someone</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barriers to Seeking Help from Parents and Others</strong></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry about Parental Response</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacking Closeness or Trust</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Topic is Uncomfortable or We Don’t Know How to Talk About It</strong></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported By Seeking Help from Parents and Others</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close and Trusting Relationship</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established Pattern of Communication</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being More Informed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced and Able to Relate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 36.*

*Motors were not asked to reflect on messages between friends.*
Table 4

Faux Participant Names Across Parent-Adolescent Dyads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Number</th>
<th>Faux Parent Name</th>
<th>Faux Adolescent Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Santiaga</td>
<td>Claudia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Alejandra</td>
<td>Isabella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>Camila</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Marilyn</td>
<td>Valentina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Jenni</td>
<td>Valeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Martina</td>
<td>Mariana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Luciana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Antonella</td>
<td>Daniela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Fernanda</td>
<td>Erica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Augustina</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Regina</td>
<td>Miranda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Paola</td>
<td>Alma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Manuela</td>
<td>Carolina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Salma</td>
<td>Rosario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Rita</td>
<td>Demi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Penelope</td>
<td>Beatriz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Selena</td>
<td>Raquel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Celia</td>
<td>Eva</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For example, Valentina and Luciana independently reported that paternal messages they have received from their fathers include, “he doesn’t like it”, and Eva reported, “He doesn’t tell me anything… just like, don’t have a boyfriend,” with no further conversations reported. Victoria also shared that her parents have told her “nothing” about problems in dating situations. When prompted to speculate on what she believed other parents would say she noted, “That it’s okay to be scared and that there are bad people out there and they’re going to hurt you and you just gotta be strong and dust yourself off.” In addition, Valentina noted, “Yeah, my mom tells me about that [abuse in dating situations] because she was abused so I’m well aware of that…and we don’t really talk about it that much because I’m not dumb.”

Mothers also noted that messages are limited at times between parents and daughters. At times these difficulties arise due to the daughter shutting down conversation. For example, Jenni described, “La verdad, casi no tocamos el tema porque, cuando yo trato de hablar con ella, ella como no le gusta…o hace gestos así como quien dice ‘uh uh’ (laughs).” [“Truth is, we hardly touch the subject because when I try to talk to her she, she doesn’t seem to like it…or she makes gestures like ‘uh uh’ (laughs).”] At other times, parents’ may play the key role in limiting the conversation. For example, Jasmine described the limited conversations between her daughter and her daughter’s father. She said, “He totally think[s] she’s too young, she’s ridiculous. He doesn’t like [boys she dates]…there’s a lot of issues there. They don’t really talk about it, as much as they should.” The mother’s “assigned” role to speak with teens about sensitive topics may also limit the role of fathers. For example, when asked what her daughter’s father says to her daughter about dating, Paola replied, “Nada…Yo soy la que digo…en cuanto los hijos entonces el es, ‘lo que tu digas, es lo que tu digas’ (laughs).” [“Nothing… I am the one who says... in relation to the children he is like, ‘it’s what you say, it’s what you say (laughs).”]
Parents also attributed the causes for absent or limited parental messages about dating problems to the daughter’s age and perceived appropriateness of the conversation. For example, Fernanda attributed infrequent or content-limited messages to her daughter’s age. She reported, “A la edad de ella, casi no le ha dicho mucho…porque ella no es, como te digo, no todavía no…ahora la de 18 pues ya…tiene edad donde ella, ya es lógico.” [“At her age, I have barely told her much…because she is, how do I say, no not yet…now with the 18-year-old, yes…she has the age where she, it is logical.”] Another mother reflected a reluctance to discuss problems in dating relationships when the adolescent daughter was not yet allowed to date and a reliance on external resources to provide dating problem messages with direct parental messages seen as a supplement. For example, Alejandra noted, “She does have, um, physical education…and they do touch on those points…so we’ve talked a little bit about it…we haven’t touched a lot about dating problems since…she’s not allowed to date yet but, um, we have discussed…what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.” Another cause for infrequent or low-content messages was attributed to perceived immunity to certain types of dating problems. For example, Paola indicated, “No, en realidad no ha pensado en abuso físico porque ella es bien determinada y fuerte, y yo se que no va permitir que eso llegue a ese punto.” [No, in reality I haven’t thought about physical abuse because she is very determined and strong, and I know she won’t allow it to get to that point.”]

**Dating Behaviors: Definitions of Dating Behaviors**

Two themes emerged when participants were asked about their perceptions of dating: (a) Activities and Behaviors to Get to Know One Another; and (b) Type of Relationship.

**Activities and Behaviors to Get to Know One Another.** This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ descriptions of adolescent dating as defined by activities and
behaviors that signal a dating relationship and as a time for teens to get to know each other and test their compatibility. The responses of 11 adolescents and 11 mothers reflected this process as a dating behavior theme.

Adolescents described a range of casual to intimate dating activities and behaviors. For example, Claudia defined dating as “going out to eat” or to the “movies.” Mariana said, “acting boyfriendish, girlfriendish.” Demi’s response included more intimate dating behaviors such as, “Cuando salen se besan y todo eso...se acarician.” [“When they go out, they kiss and all of that...they cuddle.”] At times, adolescents provided responses that appeared to be more ambiguous behaviors such as Camila’s description of “hanging out and stuff.” Further prompting sometimes elicited a more specific description that suggested “stuff” could represent more intimacy than initially disclosed. For example, Miranda reported that dating partners “text and stuff” and with prompting said, “like kissing and stuff.”

Some adolescents also went beyond mere descriptions of activities and behaviors to also include the intent of these actions as facilitators of getting to know the dating partner. For example, Valentina said, “It means just like, having interest in somebody and them having an interest in you and you guys just go on dates and it’s not like that serious, but you go on dates and see if the person fits you.” Alma also noted, “It's not like an official relationship but you guys can hang out together. Just kind of getting to know each other.” One adolescent described selecting a partner based on more specific factors and then getting to know them. For example, Eva reported, “You pick somebody by their personality, and their looks and the way they treat you. And, you get to know, you get to know the person better.”

Parents also described a range of activities and behaviors when asked about dating. Similar to adolescent responses, some parents reported dating occurs when spending time with a
friend or in social activities. For example, Paola noted dating is, “Eh, salir con un amigo y pasarse tiempos solos.” [“It’s, to go out with a friend and spend time alone.”] Jasmine added, “He likes her, he walks her around school. They take pictures. Everybody knows they're together on Facebook.”

Some parents acknowledged that dating could also include intimacy. For example, Marilyn reported dating behaviors include, “Them spending time and holding hands, um, kissing.” In addition, parents acknowledged that dating and intimate behaviors could eventually lead to sexual behaviors. At times, the concern about sexual behaviors was framed within the context of a naïve acceptance of sexual intimacy in their daughter’s generation. For example, Penelope stated, “En los tiempos de los adolescentes de ahora es algo que es inevitable ya que ellos experimentan el sexo aun sin consultar todavía con los padres.” [“In the time of today’s youth it is something inevitable that they experiment with sex without even consulting their parents.”] Other parents made statements reflecting the awareness of sexual temptations for adolescents but also paired their responses with their opinions on the limits of appropriate dating behaviors. For instance, Santiaga utilized the metaphor that adolescent couples should be of “sweaty hands” to describe the limits of appropriate dating behaviors. She noted, “Novios es novio de ‘manita sudada,’ como lo llaman y ya. Eso es para mi…Bueno, que no tiene relaciones sexuales. Solamente, este tomaditos de la mano.” [“Couples are couples of ‘sweaty hands,’ as they call it and that’s it. That is it for me…Well, that they do not have sexual relations. Only that they are holding hands.”]

Parents also reported dating as a “stage” for teens to explore and get to know more about their dating partner. One mother indicated that getting to know someone through dating facilitated the transition from friends to official boyfriend or girlfriend status. For example,
Antonella described this transition as, “Es salir a conocer a alguien. De conocerse antes de empezar de ser novios.” [“It’s going out to get to know someone. To get to know someone before they become a couple.”] Maternal descriptions of dating from the perspective of getting to know someone also focused on limits and boundaries of appropriate dating scenarios or dating behaviors. For example, Jenni noted that dating is, “Conocerse y no ir más ala de eso, simplemente pasar momentos alegres.” [“Getting to know each other and to not go past that, simply spend happy moments together.”] Salma indicated that getting to know someone did not mean, “Que ya tiene derecho a hacer cosas que no tienen que hacer,” [“That they have the right to do things that they should not be doing,”] and Augustina added, “Dating is just simply knowing each other. Spending time to know each other and that's about it (laughs).”

**Type of Relationship.** This theme emerged out of adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ descriptions of the types of relationships that would define a dating couple. Nine adolescents and two mothers defined dating in terms of relationship types.

Adolescents reported that dating relationships are rooted in strong friendships such as reported by Carolina who said that dating is a “special bond between two people,” or Erica who said, “Not a friend but best friend, like you tell everything to…the person that will be there for you and like you for who you are.” Adolescents’ responses also indicated that dating relationships were qualitatively different from typical friendships. For example, Victoria also mentioned that dating is where, “I spend time with him the way I don’t spend time with other friends.” Daniela noted that dating is being with, “Someone that you know is always going to be there for you, like not just like a friend but you know someone, like you’re looking for someone, like a partner.”
While this theme was less common among mothers, mothers did touch on dating as a relationship between a boyfriend and girlfriend. Rita indicated that dating for her was, “empezar una relación de novios…para mi significa eso.” [“start a relationship of boyfriend and girlfriend…it means that to me.”] Regina provided more context for her definition of dating and expressed her understanding of dating as a carefree, social relationship within which her daughter should focus on having fun without commitments. She noted:

Que esta entrando en la edad de la adolescencia. En la edad de que ellos todos los quieren experimentar…Le digo, usted puede tener novio pero…un novio es un novio…no es que con el que usted se va casar. No es para que usted se vuelva loca. Novio es una relación…social se puede decir…para divertirse, nada más…No para comprometerse en nada serio. [That they’re entering the age of adolescence. In the age that they want to experiment with everything…I say, you can have a boyfriend but…A boyfriend is a relationship…a social one you can say…to have fun, nothing else…It’s not to commit to anything serious.]

**Dating Behaviors: Parental Messages about Dating**

Two themes emerged when participants were asked about parental messages regarding dating: (a) Parental Expectations and (b) Parental Warnings.

**Parental Expectations.** This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ descriptions of messages that provide adolescents with an understanding of parental rules about the type of dating partner they are expected to have and traits or behaviors they want to see in a dating partner. This theme also includes an understanding of parental expectations and desires
for teens to postpone dating experiences. This theme emerged from the responses of 8 adolescents and 9 mothers.

Adolescents and parents provided responses that reflected parental expectations for daughters to date someone that is a good fit and to, as Manuela said, “Conocerlo.” [“Get to know him.”] Getting to know a dating partner could manifest through the partner meeting the daughter’s family and engaging in family activities or getting to know the partner’s parents and learning what he may be like from viewing his behaviors with his family. For example, Mariana said, “She makes a lot of jokes about it but she does say, if you want to go that you have to present him to us. He has to come have dinner with us. We have to probably meet the parents.” Miranda noted her mother says, “He has to be a good boy that’s good with his family.” One adolescent acknowledged the importance of dating partners exhibiting good manners and compliance with parental expectations. For example, Carolina reported her understanding of good manners included, a dating partner “greet[ing] my mom and dad when they come here”, and compliance with parental household rules in regards to their behaviors with dating partners, so that “even if they’re dating, they can’t be in a room by themselves. They have to be up in the living room.” One adolescent noted that her parents include expectations about age and religion in their messages about appropriate dating partners. For example, Mariana identified a dating partner being of similar age to her as a factor her parents would include in message about dating. She noted, “If he’s older than me then it’s a huge no…if he’s my age then it’s a maybe, if he’s younger probably no also (laughs).” She also noted that having dating partner of a similar religious background was also relevant to her parent’s beliefs about dating. She said, “We’re very religious so if he’s religious it's a big plus…if he’s Christian.”
Adolescents also provided responses that reflected a wide range of expectations from parental messages about postponing dating experiences. For example, one adolescent relayed a message that suggested her parents want her to wait to enter a dating relationship until she is able to prove herself as mature enough to handle dating. For instance, Isabella noted, “She [referring to her mother] says that first I need to be more responsible because I have a dog at home and I love him but I could be more responsible…She says I need to be more generally responsible before I can get a boyfriend”. Other parental messages focused on postponing dating so as to avoid distractions and serious consequences that could have life-long implications such as pregnancy. For instance, Adolescents indicated that one of their parents’ top requests was to postpone dating so that school and academic performance could remain a priority. For example, Isabella described how her father says, “that I need to study first because that's what’s most important.” Valeria also stated that her father “wants me to focus more on my studies than going around with some guy.” In addition, Eva reported her mother tells her, “to wait cause I’ll get pregnant.” One adolescent relayed messages expressed by both parents wanting her to wait to be older and more mature in age to engage in intimate dating behaviors, make the right choices, and handle the ups and downs of dating. For example, Victoria reported that on the one hand her mother “says we should wait until we are at least 18…to explore…that we should enjoy being a kid now. That we shouldn’t have to worry about the stress of a relationship cause, relationships are stressful.” On the other hand, Victoria noted that her father tells her “just no” about dating, “Not until you’re married (laughs).”

Adolescents’ reactions to their parents’ messages to postpone dating were varied. For example, Victoria expressed frustration with her parent’s request to wait stating, “Sometimes parents just don’t understand.” Rosario reported that she understood the request to wait as
protective strategy from her parents who wanted her to have “something that’s like good, treats me well, respects me.” For one adolescent, the parental messages she has received have turned out to be too ambiguous and confusing for her. For instance, Valeria noted that her mother, “just tells me to wait, basically…no, I don’t know [how long to wait].”

Parents also expressed their expectations of teen dating relationships. One mother reflected messages that teens should exhibit a respect for their house rules, such as curfews. For example, Manuela reported that she and her husband dislike, “Que estén de no mas viniendo a levantarla a cualquier hora de la noche o el día.” [“That they just come by to pick her up at any time of night or day.”] Another mother emphasized her expectation that her daughter find a partner with a compatible spiritual and religious faith. For example, Marilyn noted that having an incompatible spiritual faith or religion was not something she would tolerate in her daughter’s dating relationship and described this process as “mission dating.” Marilyn said:

“We tell her she has to choose the right person and she cannot go on mission dating…that’s when you date outside of your faith…and, um, you just think you’re going to convince them to become…whatever you believe in…you know like missionaries, they go on missions…so we told her that she can’t go on mission dating.”

In relation to parents’ expectations for daughters to postpone dating relationships, parents’ reported messages focused on wanting daughters to slow down, not be in a “big hurry”, and wait until the perceived right age. Some parental reports stressed the importance of school and academics over dating relationships. One mother indicated wanting her daughter to maintain focus on school and academics rather than dating relationships to prove she is ready for dating. For example, Alejandra reported, “Um, there’s certain, um, things that need to happen before she is allowed to date…Well, for instance she needs to, um, do better in school…um, make sure her
focus is in the right place.” Another mother expressed a general desire for her daughter to wait until she is 18 years old. For example, Rosa noted:

\[\text{No a la verdad nunca le he dado permiso que venga novio así, que van a salir...yo le digo que ya de los 18 pa' adelante...pero mientras que tenga 15 anos o 16 anos, no lo veo bien yo.} \]\[The truth is that I have not given permission for boyfriends to come by like that, that they should go out…I tell her that at 18 and beyond…but while she is 15 years old or 16 years old, I do not agree.\]

Regina also focused on age and connected it to the end of high school as the important goal. She said, “\text{Digo va llegar a su dad...los 18 por lo menos...17 por lo menos...Cuando ya usted ya ha salido de high school, que eso de amorrarse no le atrasen en los estudios.}” [“I say that she will get to her age…at least 18…at least 17…Once you have left high school, so that falling in love does not hold you back in your studies.” A few parents revealed their motivation for wanting to delay their adolescents’ dating experiences stemmed from fear and concern about sexual relationships that they believed their daughters were not yet prepared to handle. For example, Marilyn reported she and her husband (i.e., daughter’s step-father) want their daughter to, “Wait until marriage for…sexual intercourse…and she’ll have plenty of time when she gets older…to date.”

In addition, Rita stated:

\[\text{En primer lugar, que todavía no esta en edad de hacerlo. En Segundo lugar, que ya cuando ella este en una relación de novios, que tenga mucho cuidado que el momento de tener sexo va ser algo inevitable pero que sepa tomar ella sus precauciones.} \][In the first place, that she is not yet of age to do it. In the second place, that once she is in a dating... ]
relationship, that she should be very careful because the moment to have sex will be something inevitable but that she should know to take her precautions.]

**Parental Warnings.** This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ descriptions of parental warnings about dating that include advice on who to remain safe. The responses of five adolescents and 11 mothers reflected these types of safety-based messages.

Messages included how adolescents could be protected in dating relationships by maintaining limits on their dating behaviors, exhibiting modesty, and having self-respect. Some teens reported their parents have warned them about how to be careful and remain safe. For instance, Alma reported parental messages she has received include, “Be careful with what I do…no sex…know your limits, like be careful.” Beatriz noted she has been instructed that, “If a guy asks me if he can touch me somewhere, I am supposed to say no”. In addition, Raquel described how messages she has received include, “Don’t let them influence you to have sex…don’t keep going with it no matter how much you like them.” Knowing how to set limits was associated with having a “strong character” and being able to maintain a good reputation showing that, as Claudia noted, “[I] respect myself.” Poor boundaries were associated with negative results for which the adolescent would be held responsible. For example, Alma indicated her parents have warmed up to her about having a boyfriend at her age because they, “know the type of character I have…like I’m strong enough to know what I should and shouldn’t do” but her parents have also told her, “just know your consequences if you decide to do that [referring to engaging in sexual relationships].”

Parents’ descriptions of warnings focused on adolescent males as being likely to take advantage, tell a “lie to get what they want”, and to bypass innocent intimate behaviors for sex. For example, Fernanda reported, “Aquí los novios no son de solo manita, abrazos, sino que
ahora quieren tener relación de tener sexo…no tener un respeto de la casa, de decir conocer a tu mama.” [“Here boyfriends are not only of holding hands, hugging, instead they now want to have relationships with sex…no respect for the home, to say they want to meet your mother.”]

However, adolescent males were also seen as “only going as far as you’ll let them”. Therefore, within this theme, most parents endorsed seeing their daughters as responsible for establishing safety and limit setting to maintain self-respect and to maintain a respectable image or reputation. For example, Marilyn said, “Just don’t like, put yourself in a situation where you’re not going to be strong enough. Like you can’t be all French kissing…like with tongue and all this…Just keep in line, basically. Just be modest…respect yourself.” Martina also noted that, “the most important thing is that you feel respect and that no one will ask you to do anything you don’t want to do.” In addition, Santiaga described this theme, as a function of being a female, that may not just be limited to the adolescent years. For example, she noted, “Que nosotras las mujeres tenemos que tener pudor con nuestro cuerpo no dejar que cualquiera lo mire o lo toque.” [“We women need to be modest with our bodies, to not let just anyone look at it or touch it.”] Another mother described how the consequences of poor limits and poor boundaries could influence her daughter’s reputation within her social circles and could extend into further dating relationships. Selena said:

“You have to be really, really, really, extremely careful, you know, especially in high school…these kids are evil…if you date too many people these people will know and they will put you out there…if someone gets upset at someone and they know something they’ll just start saying it and put it all over the internet.”

Antonella, another mother, employed a powerful metaphor of a television on display in a store to describe how she and her husband explicitly relayed the limits they expect their daughter
to maintain. Antontella’s commentary also supplements Selena’s descriptions of how poor choices in one dating relationship can influence future relationships.

“Nosotros vemos el televisor que esta de display, everybody touched it, everybody pushed it all the buttons, everybody touch it...and it becomes alright, everything is amazing.

Pero, guess what? Nosotros no compramos ese televisor que todo el mundo lo toca. Con el que todo el mundo juega...nosotros compramos un televisor nuevo...viene sellado, y que nadie lo ha tocado. Eso es lo mismo con una niña que se hace respetar...que el que vaya comprarlo...lo admira, y se siente orgulloso de que saco un televisor nuevo. [We see the television that is on display, everybody touched it, everybody pushed it all the buttons, everybody touch it…and it becomes alright, everything is amazing but, guess what? We do not buy the television that everyone in the world has touched. The one everyone has played with…we buy the new television…the one that comes sealed and no one has touched. That is the same as with a girl who demands respect…so that the one who goes to buy it, admires it, and feels proud that he received a new television.]

**Dating Problems: Beliefs and Descriptions of Dating Problems**

Six themes emerged when participants were asked about their beliefs and descriptions of problems in dating situations: (a) Relational Aggression and Social Media; (b) Pressure to Give In; (c) Causing Physical Harm; (d) Feeling Less Than Worthy; (e) Problems with Trust and Jealousy; and (f) General Relationship Problems. Themes within this domain of dating problems are presented first by themes that represent types of behaviors that would be seen as problems (e.g., relational aggression, pressure to give in, causing physical harm, general relationship problems) and then by themes that represent descriptions of why behaviors or actions were seen as problems (e.g., feeling less than worthy; problems with trust and jealousy).
Relational Aggression and Social Media. This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ descriptions of dating problems that could occur within social relationships to lower a person’s social standing either through in-person aggression or through technology and social media outlets. The responses of 13 adolescents and 11 mothers fit this theme.

Responses identified under this theme ranged from rumors to invasion of privacy, typically occurring through some form of technology (e.g., cell phone, internet, video chat). The unifying characteristics were social shaming strategies or behaviors that were harmful due to their potential to downgrade a person’s social standing or social reputation. Descriptions from adolescents of relational aggression focused on behaviors such as spreading rumors or lies about a dating partner, distributing explicit pictures, videos, or messages of the other partner, hacking into private emails or social networking sites and misrepresenting the owner of these forms of media. Rumors as a form of aggression was a common sub-theme. Adolescents provided responses that reflected rumors or lies made about a dating partner as being particularly easy to perform given the easy access to a large audiences through social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) and having a widespread and long-lasting impact on the victim. For example, rumors could be started as name calling, “like somebody says somebody is a whore” or “saying embarrassing stuff” that was initially shared in private during the course of the relationship. One adolescent also noted that rumors and lies are spread during the break up phase of a relationship. For example, Eva noted, “Like if a guy wants to have sex with a girlfriend and she says no and he breaks up with her and goes around telling everyone that they did have sex.” In addition, Victoria described her own experience as the perpetrator of relational aggression against a dating partner after they broke up over his unfaithfulness:

I went on Facebook and I told everyone that he had an STD and I called his mom
and told him, told her I was pregnant. I wasn’t even having sex with him. Like, I’ve used it personally and I know other people have used it…especially girls…stuff doesn’t really go down unless it’s everybody’s business…when Facebook came out…that was the number one way to hurt somebody, was to put their personal business all over the internet.

The intent of rumors was noted as something to make the victim feel ashamed and lower social perceptions about the victim. For example, Mariana noted, rumors were intended to make the victim, “feel bad and make everybody look at them wrong or kind of make them the bad person into the whole relationship.” Valeria indicated rumors had the capacity to, “ruin what people will think about them…even if it’s a lie or it’s true,” and Luciana noted how the target of the rumor could suffer long-lasting psychological implications such as feeling “depressed” and like “you don’t want to have friends.” Even rumors perpetrated by a third party (i.e., someone outside of the dating relationship, like a peer) were also identified as being hurtful to the individual and having the potential to trigger other problems. For example, Alma indicated, “Like somebody spread a rumor about me…like me and my boyfriend were having sex and that I was pregnant,” and that this type of rumor could have caused her significant problems if it were to be heard by others. These types of rumors have the potential to harm a dating relationship and cause further harm to adolescents who are dependent on their dating partner. For example, as Raquel noted, “Cause most girls that I know need a relationship because they don’t feel loved.”

The use of technology as an avenue to facilitate relational aggression was also salient among the responses given by adolescents. Adolescents described potential scenarios of explicit pictures or videos being shared through social networking sites where, as Isabella stated, “They can be flagged but I’ve seen them and security isn’t so good.” Mariana noted that even
“embarrassing stuff they had told each other in…confidence”, through private emails or “sexting” (i.e., texts of a sexual nature) could also be posted. Valeria added, “They could also like edit them to make them say something else.” Some adolescents indicated that it is common for girls to “send dirty pictures to their boyfriends” or “videos to a guy or something” and the potential for that to be shared outside of the dating relationship is quite high.

Parents’ descriptions of relational aggression such as rumors and exposing private content also tended to occur within the context of using technology. For instance, Jasmine described her daughter’s experience with relational aggression that occurred at the end of a dating relationship. She said, “[He] started posting stuff on Twitter…and it destroyed her…he wasn’t putting her name but…everybody knew who he was talking about…and that’s how her next boyfriend found out because they’re all Twitter friends.” Another mother described relational aggression though the sharing of pictures or videos through cell phones or social networking sites. For example, Santiaga indicated problems could occur, “Si la niña le enseña su cuerpo desnudo por medio del chat el otro lo tiene grabando y así lo difunde…” [“If the girl shows her naked body through a [video] chat and the other one is recording it and that's how he distributes it…”] Some parents acknowledged the damage that can come from relational aggression including the girl feeling “heartbroken”. Alejandra indicated damage could also come from a lowering of “the girl’s self-esteem,” and even more concerning is that the true extent of harm is unknown because “once you’ve sent something like that you can’t get it back…they can…do anything they want with that because it’s there.” Martina noted technology as a “knife of two sharp sides” [double-edged sword] because there is the opportunity to start a relationship and communicate but also an easy avenue for relational aggression, “bullying and control,” and “it all depends on how healthy are the kids.”
Pressure to Give In. This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ responses that reflected problems in dating that occur as a result of pressure for one person to succumb to the desires or demands of the other person. The responses of nine adolescents and 13 mothers fit this theme.

Adolescents mentioned partner pressure that occurred in relation to pressure to allow intimate touching or engage in sexual behaviors. For example, Valeria noted pressure occurs when one partner is, “touching them when they don’t want to be touched.” Mariana added, pressure could also include, “I guess the sex situation, kind of like, one wants to have sex and the other one probably doesn’t.” Although male dating partners were typically reported as the ones like to pressure the female partners, the pressure to have sex was noted as possible from either partner. For example, Camila stated, “If two people are sexually active I doubt there’s going to be like sexual problems, to be honest…Unless it’s like somebody trying to save themselves for something. Then that can be a problem. The guy trying to force it or the girl trying to force it.” Although responses providing solutions to the problem of partner pressure were limited, Alma reported teens need “to break up or one of them is going to end up giving in to the other one.”

Two teens described an overlap of pressure to engage in sexual behaviors with other kinds of harmful dating behaviors and the influence of substances. For example, Victoria described her experience with an ex-boyfriend that included various forms of aggression and described her coming to terms with the realization that she “put up with” more than she should have. She said:

I was in a relationship with a guy…I was really excited, you know…He showed interest in me...and, um, every single time I didn’t want to do something sexual with him, he would call me a “dumb bimbo,” he would smack me around…At the time, I was so
infatuated with the fact that he was an [athlete] interested in a [musician] that I didn’t even care…looking back at it and then looking at my relationship now [new boyfriend], I know that I shouldn’t have put up with it for as long as I did…Like it was awful. It was physical, it was emotional, it was verbal.

In addition, Raquel described accounts of her friends experiencing other harmful dating behaviors that occur as a result of the combination of pressure to have sex and the use of substances. She said:

They would sneak out…they would go in cars with their boyfriends and their [boyfriend’s] friends, and their boyfriends would be smoking [marijuana]…Most of my friends do smoke but they don’t smoke with their boyfriends because they don’t want anything stupid to happen…They would get second-hand smoke…They would end up getting high and they’d end up getting hit…They’re coming to school with huge bruises on the side of their face because they didn’t want to have sex with their boyfriend.

Parents also provided concerned responses about partner and peer pressure toward adolescents to engage in sexual or high-risk behaviors and partner pressure to control or manipulate the dating relationship. For example, Jenni worried that a dating partner “Le tenga presionada tal vez hacer algo que ella no quiera. Que el muchacho vaya hacer, no vaya ser una persona correcta y la va introducir a cosas que ella no este acostumbrada hacer.” [“Could have her pressured to do something she doesn’t want to do. That the boy will do, will not be a correct person and will introduce her to things she isn’t used to doing.”]

Peer pressure was a term that was used by parents in their responses and referred to concerns about adolescents being taken advantage of by friends or pressured by friends to engage in sexual relationships. For example, Jasmine expressed her worries about her daughter’s risk of
falling to peer pressure because of her male peer group and her daughter’s physical appearance. She reported:

I worry because my daughter has a lot of guy friends. I think about her going with the guy friends. Gang rape. You know… I do get worried about those things because she is very pretty… sometimes the way they want to dress… she has a curvy body… but yeah, dating problems to me, it’s probably the peer pressure to have sex… even just being in a bad influence, you know, a bad situation.

Santiaga also explained her perspective on sex as something with positive potential unless pressured into it by friends. She said:

Que un día va tener relaciones sexuales pero yo le digo a ella que cuando tenga relaciones sexuales no importa si este casado o no este casada, que lo haga con la persona que ella ama y que el ama a ella. Eso va ser maravilloso… Porque si lo hace solo porque las amiguitas le dicen que lo tiene que hacer porque ya tiene 17 anos, para ella no va ser bonito. [That one day she will have sex. But I tell her that when she does have sex it does not matter if she is married or not, that she should do it with the person she loves and that he loves her. That will be marvelous… because if she does it because her friends tell her she has to do it because she is now 17 years old, that will not be nice for her.]

Other mothers expressed concerns about future consequences that could negatively impact their daughters’ life as a result pressure to have sex. For example, Marilyn expressed concerns of her daughter, “getting pregnant… having sex… getting an STD” and Fernanda also stated fears of “un embarazo” [“a pregnancy.”]
Parents also provided responses that reflected partner pressure could occur within the context of “controllers” who want “posesión” [“possession”] over their dating partner and seek control by “manipulating the relationship.” For example, Celia noted this could occur when, “No permiten que tenga amiga, amigos.” [“They don't allow the individual to have female or male friends.”] Controlling behaviors also included engaging in “stalking” or keeping tabs on their dating partner, as Martina stated, to “make girls feel guilty…do whatever they want to…feel that they have control on them…to denigrate…to humiliate them.” The overlap between forms of partner pressure intended to create and maintain an imbalance of power and other forms of harmful dating behaviors was also evident. For example, Regina reported partners might resort to, “Pegarles…mandarles y hacer caso que ellos manden sobre ellas.” [“Hitting them, ordering them, and making it so that they [males] can order over them [females].”] Another mother noted how partner pressure to control another partner could overlap with substance use to create situations where the dating partner is not aware of what may be going on. For example, Manuela said:

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\text{Muchas veces los jóvenes utilizan las palabras, “y si no vas a demostrar que me quiere,”...“si me quiere vas hacer lo que yo diga,” y esto y lo otro...Muchas veces pueden meter drogas, bebidas con cosas para hacer lo que ellos quieren...Digamos que los papa les dicen, “O que tienes que estar a las 10 de la noche.” Muchas veces los jóvenes les dicen, “No, pues, y este quedándote un poco mas, ya vas teniendo 18 anos.” Y de esa manera es que los jóvenes ya empiezan problemas en las casas...Muchas veces los jóvenes no son muchachos, son mayores que ellas y le van lavando el pobre celebrito de ellas. Desafortunadamente, eso pasa. [Many times teenage boys use the words, “and if you won't show that you love me,” “and if you love me you’ll do what I say,” and this}.
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and that…Many times they can put in drugs, drinks with things to do what they want…Lets say the parents say, “Oh, you have to be home by 10 at night.” Many times the teenage boys will say, “No, well, and stay out a little longer, you are almost 18 years old.” And, in this way is that the boys already start problems in the homes…Many times the boys aren’t young, they are older than the girls and they go about brainwashing their poor brains. Unfortunately, that happens.]

While many examples focused on male on female partner pressure, one mother acknowledged that this pattern could also play out by female perpetrators. Selena noted that both male and female dating partners could exhibit controlling behaviors resulting in a feeling of being trapped by the other partner. She said:

Problems in dating situations? When the guy is, when the guy is so controlling…and it’s manipulating the relationship…and the girl feels like they don’t have a way out…or vice versa…There are times when there are girls like that and the poor guy, I’m like, “oh my gosh.”

**Causing Physical Harm.** This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ descriptions of problems in dating relationships that arise from the threat of physical harm or the perpetration of physical harm towards a dating partner. Seven adolescents and nine mothers reported behaviors that were indicative of physical harm.

Adolescents noted specific words such as “hitting”, and “pushing”, and more broadly, “physical abuse”. For example, Beatriz described signs that someone was being physically harmed by a dating partner could include, “scars, marks…blood.” In addition, Raquel described physical harm could include “being grabbed by the arm” or “bruises”. The perpetration of physical harm was not isolated to one partner but could also occur in the context of “hitting each
other” where perpetration and self-defense was not clearly delineated. For example, Alma described the fine line between horseplay and intentional aggression or harm. She said, “Definitely, just like shoving. Whether it’s like play…cause’ play shoving…and play fighting can…turn into…somebody actually getting upset about it.”

Parents provided responses that reflected physical harm or “physical abuse” as a behavior that could cause harm in a dating relationship. Parents acknowledged behaviors that could be considered physically harmful such as, “guys…beating on their girlfriends” or, as Jenni stated, “Que le pueda golpear.” [“That they can hit them.”] Despite acknowledging that physical harm does occur in dating relationships, one mother also expressed disbelief when she first learned or heard about this happening in the dating stages of a relationship. For example, Alejandra noted, “I’ve heard a lot about…violence in couples that are dating…I couldn’t think that would happen with couples that date but apparently it does.” Another mother also directly expressed her intolerance of physical harm within her daughters’ dating relationship. For instance, Regina stated, “Y eso si no me gustaría a mi…la violencia ya domestica en una relación así que ellos anden de novios, jamás.” [“And that, I would not like…domestic violence even within a relationship while they are dating, never.”] While many parents tended to focus on the male partner as the perpetrator, one mother described her knowledge of a girl as a perpetrator of physical aggression towards a dating partner. For example, Selena indicated, “I’ve seen this one girl where…she beats up the guy…like actual hit, with her fists…or slap him.”

**General Relationship Problems.** This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ responses that described problems in dating relationships that arise from wide array of general dating factors. Examples include a poor fit, incompatibility between dating partners, and
faulty communication patterns, as well as a general sense of hostility. 10 adolescents and three mothers described dating problems that fit this theme.

The range of incongruence between dating partners included differences in personalities, differences in lifestyles, poor communication, and miscommunications. Key phrases used were, “Not meant to be”, and, “No son correspondidos.” [“They do not correspond with each other.”]

For example, Claudia reported that lifestyle differences such as “not being able to see each other as often as they want” could create difficulties. Mariana also noted that competing priorities such as, “One person…probably has more school activities…one is in sports after school…and the other one isn’t…they want to see each other more often, but they can’t,” could also influence problems in dating situations. Faulty communication, such as through poor communication or misunderstandings, was also identified as being indicative of partners that were not an appropriate fit for each other. One adolescent described poor communication that may occur in her dating relationship due to her reluctance to confront her dating partner when an issue may arise. For example, Daniela reported, “I’m not very open, so like if I can’t, if like he knows something’s wrong with me but I won’t tell him, he’ll get mad at me…so I won’t be able to like communicate with him how I feel sometimes.” Another adolescent described “bad communication” that may occur with the overreliance on technology. For instance, Demi noted that problems of poor fit and poor communication occur arise when, “they probably don’t talk much…face to face…but they feel more comfortable when they’re talking over the phone or…don’t see each other’s reactions and emotions”.

Adolescent responses also described a generally hostile environment. For example, descriptors such as those used by adolescents included Claudia’s report of teen couples “not getting along,” Luciana’s statement of “problems…fight…not really physical, just words”,

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Carolina’s verbalization of, “arguing”, and Alma’s statement of, “I guess just disagreements in general.”

Parents focused on descriptions about adolescent dating partners that know very little about each other, their values, and their personalities. Some mothers attributed this to the trend for adolescents to meet each other through the Internet where they cannot easily confirm the truth about the other person. In addition, one mother described that a difference in backgrounds and values related to religious beliefs could bring difficulties her daughter. For example, Salma noted:

*El problema es que si mi hija algún día tenga un novio y se casaría con uno que no sea Cristiano o de la misma de nosotros. Para nosotros sería problema porque para eso hay diferencia...Bueno, hay personas que, que cuando están de novios solo vienen a acostar la muchacha y después no deja que busque de Dios y todas esas cosas. Le evita muchas cosas. Hacer cosas que no agrada a Dios.* [The problem would be if my daughter were to one day have a boyfriend and marry someone who was not Christian or of the same [faith] as us. For us that would be a problem because there are differences there. Well, there are people who, when they are in a dating relationship only want to take the girl to bed and they do not let her seek God and all of those things. They prevent her from many things. They do things that are not agreeable to God.]

One parent also identified a similar sense of general hostility that could be a warning sign of an unhealthy relationship. For example, Salma noted that general hostility is sometimes even apparent in the early stages of dating, *“Cuando se están conociendo...allí ya es abuso.”* [“When they are just getting to know each other...already it can be abuse.”]
Feeling Less than Worthy. This theme emerged from adolescents girls’ and their mothers’ descriptions of problems in dating relationships that focus on causing a dating partner to feel less than worthy within the relationship. Five adolescents and 13 mothers described dating problems that belittled a dating partner.

Although adolescents gave fewer responses than their mothers that were coded into this theme, adolescents provided responses that generated examples of when a dating partner wanted to put another partner down or for the other partner to feel less than worthy of the relationship. Many of the adolescents’ responses focused on different versions of verbal or psychological aggression. For example, Valentina noted forms of psychological harm could include, “…them telling you you’re ugly or something…hurting your feelings.” Erica also shared, “I guess guys say mean things to girls…I mean, it’s not physically hurting but it’s…like mentally…Like, ‘You’re ugly”, “You’re fat”…or something…I don't know why would somebody be with someone like that.” Daniela described her experience with an ex-boyfriend and reported:

He used to call me a “gold digger”, and um, I don’t even know if this is appropriate to say, “a whore”…Stuff like that…I broke up with him over that and so he would really get mad at me and stuff. So, he told all his family that but eventually we fixed it and now we’re like we’re actually friends, kind of.

In addition, one adolescent noted that hearing these comments from a dating partner would be particularly hard. For example, Alma noted, “like stuff that they tell you, you really take to heart…I’m sure that somebody, like your boyfriend, telling you something [like that] can really have…a bad impact on you.”

Parents provided responses that reflected words used by dating partners could be harmful, certain words could indicate a lack of respect, and that downgrading a dating partner could be
used to maintain control in the dating relationship. For example, Celia indicated, “Siempre puede ver maltrato...Agresión verbal...Gritos. Palabras no adecuada o sea, como decimos, ‘palabras brutal.’” [“There can always be maltreatment…Verbal aggression…Screaming. Inappropriate words or, like we say, ‘brutal words.’”] One noted verbal aggression though the expression of put downs as a form of disrespect. Selena said, “They’re downgrading them…have so much control over that person and they’re downgrading them. Disrespecting them…Bullying them. Insulting them. You know? Putting them down.” Other mothers, like Augustina and Marilyn, also discussed the process of putting a partner down as a tactic to decrease self-esteem and maintain an imbalance of power. Augustina stated, “Like the talking bad… putting the person’s self-esteem down…Telling her, ‘You’re no good,’ ‘You ain’t going to be no nothing when you can’t be without me.’ In addition, Marilyn reported:

Yeah, it’s just, you know, making her feel like she not worth anything. Like, uh, you know, she’s trash or that she’s, uh, not good enough for him…Just putting her down…I experienced that myself...Just making yourself feel bad about yourself and think that they are better than you and that, you know…I guess, making you feel like, like it’s an honor to be with them. Like, you know, you’re so down the line that being with them is like, “Wow!” You know? Just making, um…saying that you’re inferior…to them.

Similar to Marilyn, another mother commented on her past experience with a partner who was verbally aggressive and demeaning. Her response reflected a hope for her daughter to be more aware of unhealthy relationships as a result of her daughter’s exposure to these behaviors in the home. For example, Fernanda said:

Yo soy de las mujeres que ha venido de eso y yo creo que ella lo ha vivido…De que te insulten, de que te hagan de menos lo que tu hables o lo que tu opines…Ella mas bien lo
ha vivido con mí. Yo creo que ellas estarían siempre a la defensiva de...todo eso...de lo que la pareja le quiere hacer a ella. [I am one of those women who has come from this and I believe she has lived it...That they insult you, that they make less of what you say or what you think...She has lived it with me. I think that they [both daughters] will always be defensive of...all of that...of what the partner might want to do to her.]

Although not frequently mentioned, one mother also touched on a major difficulty of verbal aggression, particularly when it’s expressed through in-direct means (e.g., through cell phone and text messaging), to go unnoticed by others but still cause harm. Regina stated:

*Siendo abusados verbal...nosotros lo vivimos con ella...Hace varios años...y nosotros no sabíamos y nos dimo cuenta por un texto de alguien mayor que ella...y nos costo sacarla de eso pero por eso es que llegamos a la iglesia...era abuso ya sexuales y a mí me mortio el corazón porque ella pensaba que ella era fea...Y, si tu la vas a ver que ella es preciosa, bien linda...Si nos dolió eso. Nos dolió bastante.* [Being verbally abused...we lived it with her...Many years ago...and we didn’t know and we found out through a text from someone older than her...and it cost us to get her out of that but because of that we found the church...it was sexual abuse [referring to sexual content of texts] and it broke my heart because she thought she was ugly...And, you’ll see her, she is precious, very pretty...Yes, that hurt us. It hurt us very much.]

**Problems with Trust and Jealousy.** This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ descriptions of dating problems that result from poor trust within the relationship and associated difficulties that result from lack of trust or create an environment of mistrust such as lies within the dating relationship, flirting with others, jealousy, and cheating. The responses of 13 adolescents and four mothers fit this theme.
Some adolescents noted the words “jealous”, “cheating”, or phrases such as “jealous boyfriends” and liking “other girls better” as indicative of problems and factors that, as Carolina stated, could “make things hard for the couple to get along.” While the confirmed occurrence of cheating was clearly a factor in creating dating problems, suspicions of flirting, cheating, and infidelity were enough to trigger arguments within dating relationships. Suspicions could arise from in-person behaviors or based on behavior observed on-line. For example, Valentina noted, “They see that you are talking to somebody else on that site or maybe like flirting with them over the Internet”, as triggers for problems in dating situations. In addition, dating partners were also described as having the potential to instigate jealousy in the other person. For example, Alma indicated, “Like a guy on Facebook can comment on some other girl’s picture when he already has a girlfriend…that makes the girl mad a lot, just cause she can see the comment and they’ll do it on purpose, just to make the girlfriend mad.” Despite the focus on the male partner as the jealous partner within this theme, both male and female dating partners were identified as having the potential to be jealous and mistrustful or to create jealousy or mistrust that could negatively influence the relationship.

Although mother’s had fewer quotes in this theme, mothers described instances of mistrust, jealousy, and unfaithfulness that could create hostility in a dating relationship and was associated with dating problems. For example, Paola reported jealousy and “infidelidad” [“infidelity”] as “una forma de agresión a la persona que le pueda afectar.” [“a form of aggression against the person that can affect them.”] Selena described having observed adolescent dating couples exhibit these behaviors and the conflicting responses girls may have in knowing how to maneuver these types of problems in a dating relationship. She reported:
They both go to the same school. And, he’ll flirt with other girls right in front of her. Disrespect her like that but yet, she still stays with him because she goes and apologize…I try to tell her…there is no reason you should stay in that kind of relationship…be disrespected like that…but, for some reason, a lot of these girls feel like they have to stay in there.

**Dating Problems: Messages about Dating Problems from Parents and Others**

Three themes emerged when participants were asked regarding messages about dating problems: (a) Try to Work it Out or Get Out of the Relationship; (b) Talk to Someone; and (c) Be Safe. Two of these themes (i.e., try to work it out or get out of the relationship, talk to someone) emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ responses describing messages received from parents and adolescent girls’ descriptions of messages shared between friends. One of these themes (i.e., be safe) was specific to adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ responses describing messages received from parents.

**Try to Work It Out or Get Out of The Relationship.** This theme emerged from participants’ descriptions of messages about problems in dating relationships where the focus of the messages is to work on the problem or end the relationship. This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ descriptions of messages received from parents and adolescent girls’ descriptions of messages shared between friends. The theme emerged from the responses of 14 adolescents and two mothers.

In relation to parental messages, this theme included messages to break up with the dating partner, get out of the relationship, and stay away at the first sign of dating problems. Suggestions also included trying to work out problems before breaking off the relationship. One adolescent provided a response that reflected she might hear both of these messages from her
parents. For example, Mariana indicated, “One [parental response] would be to get out of it…it’s not worth it…and another one [parent] would be kind of like, you know it happens…so talk to the person you’re in the relationship with…see what he says…see if it works.” Unlike Mariana, for some adolescents, parental messages were more clearly representative of one option over the other. This occurred when parental responses reflected adolescents’ understanding that the recommended option when faced with the earliest indication of a dating problem (e.g., general hostility, physical aggression) is to leave the relationship and distance oneself from the dating partner without looking back. In addition, leaving the relationship was also recommended. For example, Miranda noted, “They said…whenever at least one thing happens, break up with him right there.” In addition, Valentina reported, her parents would say, “If somebody even beats you or something that you need to stay away from them.” Raquel also noted having heard, “Any kind of situation like that [hitting], get away from it as soon as possible.” At times, it may be that the decision to leave a relationship or work it out may be based on the severity of the problem and, although parents give the advice, the responsibility of consequences would rest with the adolescent. For example, Camila stated:

My mom always told me to that if a guy doesn’t respect me then it’s not going to work out, like you have to leave him…like cheating and all that stuff, she thinks that I shouldn’t be with the person. If I forgave the person then she’d be like, “ok, then that’s on you”…well, not the hitting part but cheating. She’d be like, “that’s on you if you get hurt”. You know? But, the hitting thing, no, there’s no good in it.

Two mothers provided responses that reflected the content of this theme in relation to
parental messages. One mother expressed her sense of problems in dating relationships being inevitable and how she has instilled in her daughter the choices she would like to see her make to prevent or respond to these types of problems. Salma said:

“Que nosotros no le podemos evitar eso pero que ella tiene que chequear bien de que familia viene, toda esas cosas...Bueno si es abuso, uno tiene que tomar las cosas seria...y que evite mejor esa relación porque no vale la pena.” [“That we cannot prevent that for her but she has to check well what family he comes from, all of those things…If it is abuse, one needs to take things seriously…and better to avoid that relationship because it’s not worth it.”]

Another mother, Selena, shared the advice she gave her daughter when she felt her daughter had a decision to make about a relationship that was starting to show signs of unhealthy behaviors. She said:

Well, she had this one relationship, um, and I told her, I said, ‘Listen, you guys are arguing all the time. You can’t be on the phone without talking peacefully…It’s not healthy for you guys. It’s not healthy for you. It’s not healthy for him. There’s no need. If you can’t be in a relationship with someone and just get along with the person without having to argue, then it, it’s not a healthy one.

In response to messages shared between friends, some adolescents reported they’d tell friends to break off the relationship. For example, Erica noted she would advise a friend to, “you need to get, like, over him, like move on, you shouldn’t be with someone like that, you deserve better.” Victoria would tell her friend to “run as fast as you can.” Problematic dating behaviors that could be sufficient for a break up to occur could be behaviors such as those identified by Raquel who said:
Constant fighting for no reason…because it’s going get worse…if you guys are already fighting in the beginning…I would be like, “if you’re getting hit and they’re like making you do something you do not want to do, they don’t love you…I don’t care what you say to tell me that they do love you. They obviously don’t. So, there’s not point in you wasting your time with a guy that’s just using you,” and, I would say, like I said before, “Just dump him.” They’re going to get mad though, of course, because guys never like getting dumped.

Another adolescent noted how she would provide her own real-life examples to help connect with her friend and guide her towards making a healthy choice. For example, Daniela said:

Like if that person did the same thing [as with] my first boyfriend…I would share my story…tell them how I overcame it and give them advice on how to do things…we started arguing and that’s when he got, like, aggressive. So, that’s when I kind of realized that it needed to be over…I was like, I need to get out of this.

Adolescents noted that they might “try talking it out with their friends” and give advice to work out their problems before breaking up. One adolescent’s suggestions reflected a process to problem solving, where her friend may try to work through her problems various times before calling it quits. For example, Eva noted she would tell her friend to, “talk to her boyfriend and then try, keep, try and if it doesn’t work out then, it’s not meant to be.” Advice to work through problems can be helpful in some cases, in other cases, friends may inadvertently engage in victim blaming as a means toward problem solving. For example, Valeria noted her approach would be, “if it’s not like, that big of a deal…I would] try talking it out with them…find out what they [the friend] did wrong.”
Advice focused solely on working out the problem was not typically provided without a caveat of breaking off the relationship if the first attempt to problem-solve did not work. Therefore, some adolescents’ responses reflected a distinction in the kind of advice they would give depending on the problem with more emotional problems suggesting the possibility of working out the problem and more physically invasive problems being suggestive of getting out of the relationship. For example, Demi indicated, “Si la golpea o algo así, le diría que lo dejara…y si fuera la primera vez que hace algo psicológico…le diría que le diera otra oportunidad.” [“If he were to hit her or something like that, I’d tell her to leave him…and if it were the first time he did something psychological…I’d tell her to give him another chance.”] Alma also reported, “I’d probably try to figure out like why it happened and see if there’s like any way to fix it…if it was something…bad and they shouldn’t have been there, I’d definitely, like, encourage them…break up with that person that they’re dating.” One adolescent initially indicated her advice to a friend would vary but upon further prompting ultimately reported that breaking up was the more appropriate choice regardless of the type of problem or abuse (e.g., physical or emotional). For example, Valentina indicated, “It depends on what the problem was…[if physical abuse] I’d tell my friend to like stop seeing them right then an there…cause that’s dangerous…[when prompted about emotional types of abuse] um, also that, because emotional is just as bad as physical…probably even worse…your wounds can heal, but stuff in your head you think of forever.”

As this theme also included messages adolescents believed they would hear from friends, some adolescents reported friends would suggest they “try to talk it out” with the partner before breaking up the relationship. At times, attempts to work problems out could be reflected in suggestions to avoid repeating actions or behaviors that were thought to initially cause the
problem. On the one hand these strategies could be healthy and adaptive suggestions as was the case for Alma who received advice to, “stop texting and stop using my phone”, as a way to alleviate problems with her boyfriend when her phone usage was becoming a source of upset within their relationship. On the other hand, these strategies could be unhealthy and maladaptive forms of submission and reinforce the imbalance of power within dating relationships that could lead to more problems. For example, Raquel described how she believes her friends are not mature enough to give her healthy advice and instead would offer her advice to give in. She said:

I really don’t talk to them because like I said, they’re all younger than me…So, they say really immature stuff which is like, “Oh, just give him what he wants,” and I’m like, “No, that’s not what you’re supposed to do but…” Yeah, no thanks (laughs)...Cause’ they think the man is like, since you’re the woman you gotta [sic] follow everything a man says.

Adolescents reported that advice to break off the relationship would be seen as suggestions to “dump him” or as Demi noted, “Que lo dejara.” [“That I should leave him.”] Adolescents also indicated their friends would be motivated because they care. For example, Valentia reported, “Um, they give me good advice, like if somebody did something wrong, they would probably say like, ‘No, no, no’, you know? ‘Stay away from them.’ Because friends actually want to help you...Yeah, at least mine do.” Daniela also stated, “He [referring to a male friend] told me that I deserve better and that I need to move on...and to break up with him.” One adolescent reported her friends’ advice to work out the problems or leave the relationship could vary with the severity of the problem. For example, Valeria noted her friend would say, “Like think about what you guys...go through and think if you guys have any problems, huge problems...and if it gets really bad, just like break up with him.” Another adolescent noted that
her friends’ advice would vary by severity and also by her friends’ character values. For example, Alma described how she believed she would receive differing opinions based on whether her friends were “church friends” or “school friends” with school friends being more likely to encourage ending the relationship and church friends being able to suggest she break up with her partner but also more likely to suggest another option:

Like my friends from school that don’t go to church…they have very different morals than my friends from church…because of what we believe in…forgiving and stuff…they’d be like, alright well…if something bad happened they’d also tell me to break up with him. But, they’d also be like, okay well you know he was going through something, something happened, forgive him…my friends from school would just be like, you’re crazy, just break up with him.

Adolescents also reflected that despite the advice to get out of the relationship, it would be difficult to separate from a dating partner even if there were problems, such as cheating. For example, Camila reported:

If it’s like cheating or something…they’re always like, leave him, but it’s not that easy. It’s always the solution of everybody…you’ll be fine, you’ll find somebody else but…if you guys have been committed for a while it’s going to be hard to leave. I feel like we need to work it out.

Two adolescents noted that their friends would suggest advice and possibly intervene. For example, Claudia noted if she experienced a problem like being hit or shoved in a dating relationship, her friends would say, “to not be with him…probably that they’ll go beat them (laughs).” In addition, Camila stated:
What would my friends say? Oh no. They would be mad. I think they would get involved (laughs) and talk to the person. Yeah, they would not, yeah, I think they would personally (laughs) talk to the person and be like, “You need to stop.” (laughs)

**Talk to Someone.** This theme emerged from participants’ responses about messages to dating problems that suggested adolescents should seek help or speak with someone as a part of the adolescents’ response to a dating problem. This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ descriptions of messages received from parents and adolescent girls’ descriptions of messages shared between friends. The theme emerged from the responses of 11 adolescents and three mothers.

Adolescent participants acknowledged that parents would want them to seek help from the parent. For example, Rosario stated she believes parents tell their adolescents, “If it’s [abuse] happening to them to come to them,” and Raquel stated, “my mom has told me that if a guy has ever hit you to always come to her.” Although most adolescents did not describe what their parents would do once they sought help from their mother or father, Isabella noted, “My dad says if anything happens to come to him and he will deal with it,” implying she could expect parental intervention. Another adolescent also reflected on the general parental message to seek help and to speak with someone even if she did not feel comfortable speaking with her mother. For example, Alma stated:

First they tell me to come talk to them…my mom like understands that of course like there’s times that I probably won’t want to talk to her. So, she’s like, “if you don’t want to talk to me then at least just talk to somebody and get somebody else to know”…just make sure I don’t, like, keep it to myself and then let something else bad happen.
Parents’ responses reflected parental messages that directed adolescents to immediately tell someone about the problem, with particular encouragement to come to parents first. However, parental messages also appeared to acknowledge that barriers may exist for adolescents to seek help from parents and also suggested other resources. For example, such as Salma mentioned she would encourage her daughter to go to “las autoridades,” and Marilyn mentioned she would suggest her “[daughter’s] counselor at school or church.” Jasmine indicated she has encouraged her daughter to come to her when problems arise and also acknowledged struggling between offering advice and intervening when faced with the dilemma of how best to help her daughter problem-solve difficult situations.

I was like “what do you want me to do?”…You know, the first time, she was like, “no mom don’t, let me handle it but what should we do?” but by the time that I saw that it was going on Twitter…I did confront him and I told her, “…I will go to his mother next’’…She knows she can just, “mom, I gotta tell you what happened”…and then, I kind of let her tell me how she wants me to handle it…sometimes you gotta let them fight their own battles.

In relation to messages between friends, this theme was developed from adolescents’ responses that reflected the idea that participants would encourage friends to seek help and talk to someone else (other than the participant), like a “family member” or “an adult”. Some adolescents indicated family, particularly parents, as the first line of defense. For example, Isabella noted, “first, I’d ask if she already talked to her parents, because they are the first who should know”. Beatriz also indicated, “I’d tell her she needs to feel comfortable enough to talk to her parents about it.” Other adolescents also cited parents and other adults as being good people to talk to about problems in dating situations. For example, Valeria described, “depending on
how big the problem would be, I’d tell them to either talk to their parents…about it or somebody they trust.” Carolina added, “I would suggest them going to see, um…an adult that’s really close to them that they could feel open to…the guidance counselor at school if they go to school with me.” One adolescent, Claudia reported she would also direct her friend to speak to an “older sibling.” She said, “I would tell them that there’s more people out there for them but that, that’s not how it’s supposed to be…To try to talk about it and tell somebody about it…an older sibling.”

Adolescents described instances when friend-based messages would suggest they seek help or speak with someone in the event of problems within dating situations. For example, Erica noted her friend would tell her, “You need to tell somebody…be strong…I don’t know.” Beatriz shared that her friend would tell her to, “Talk to my parents,” and Rosario noted her friend would tell her to, “Tell an adult or something.” There may also be times when friends may intervene on behalf of their victimized friend to ensure help is there. For example, one adolescent noted a friend might be likely to give an ultimatum so that non-help seeking might require a third-party intervention. Mariana reported:

I guess depending on the problem, um, they would probably, I guess line up on my side and probably beat up the poor dude…Probably something that, I guess, in the lines of like the whole touching…and trying to and getting into something. Um, and I’ve said “No,” and I’ve, you know, told them. They would just be like, you know, “Tell someone, if not, I’ll beat the crap out of him.”

**Be Safe.** This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers descriptions of parental messages about dating problems that focus on safety measures. Participants reflected
messages to be safe only when describing parental messages. Four adolescents and six mothers described safety as a component of paternal messages regarding dating problems.

Adolescents reported receiving the parental message that dating problems could be avoided or prevented from escalating. Some adolescents reported general avoidance advice and others reported more helpful and specific strategies on how to stay safe and, as Luciana stated, “be careful with what I do.” For example, Valeria reported hearing from her parents, “If you want to avoid problems with dating, just basically avoid dating.” However, she also reported being aware of other parents that suggest, “To avoid…problems with a guy…basically get to know the person really well first…know them for a couple of months. And if she has feelings for them…end up…dating.” In addition to being careful by selecting the right partner, other adolescents also noted parental advice to be safe by being aware of what adolescents should and should not tolerate from a dating partner. For example, Erica noted having heard, “You should always be with someone who respects you. Not someone who puts their hands on you.” Alma also recalls hearing, “If it [abuse in a dating situation] happens you need to do something about it and not let yourself be like…stepped all over.”

Parents’ reports of parental safety messages also varied from general avoidance of dating to specific advice on how to set limits, remain in control, maintain respect, and maintain a sound reputation. For example, Rosa expressed her advice towards her daughter to not date by suggesting she remain at home, where she is always safe and there is no risk of problems. She stated, “Lo mejor es que no salga…porque yo les digo a ella estando en la casa, nada pasa…ya el que sale de la casa para afuera algo puede pasar…mi consejo es que no salga.” [“The best is that she not go out…because I tell her, being in the house, nothing happens…now for the one who leaves the house, something can happen…my advice is to not go out.”] Marilyn noted she
expresses to her daughter to prevent problems by telling her, “Never do anything that you don’t want to do.” Augustina indicated that she encourages her daughter to stay safe by telling her to not let, “herself get brainwashed…by [them saying] ‘you’re the only one for me’…and before you know it…these girls are having babies.” Other mothers also focused on providing daughters with specific strategies for increasing safety in dating relationships by avoiding risks for sexual behaviors and use of alcohol. For example, Paola described telling her daughter, “Le digo que tiene que limitar el tiempo estar con el…evitar…tener relaciones sexuales y eso únicamente se hace saliendo acompañados y estando en sitios públicos.” [“I tell her that she has to limit her time with him…avoid…having sexual relationships and that it’s only done by going out accompanied by others and being in public settings.”] Penelope also noted:

   Yo le digo…tu puedes salir con tu novio y hiendo conociendo su familia…puede ir al cine…a lugares así sano…pero ya cuando se mescal una salida donde hay alcohol…el hombre ya después de borracho…te puede traer problemas. [I tell her…you can go out with your boyfriend and start getting to know his family…you can go to the movies…to safe places like that…but once a date is mixed with alcohol…the man, after getting drunk…can bring you problems.”]

Across all responses, parents appeared to reflect a sense of having done their part in instilling in their adolescent daughters the problem-solving skills required to maintain safety. Now, they felt they had to let their adolescents make the right choices in the real world. For example, Antonella described her feelings on the balance between educating her daughter and giving her daughter the space to make the right decisions:

   Le digo que ella tiene valores y principios creados en esta casa. Cuales son nuestros pensamientos. Y que es su única exclusivamente decisión…de ella…no de
Help-Seeking

To help assess dating violence help-seeking beliefs and behaviors, daughters and mothers were asked to identify potential non-parent help-givers (e.g., extended family, friends, community figures) and to express their beliefs regarding how comfortable or uncomfortable an adolescent would actually feel seeking help from that person. In addition, daughters were asked to describe messages they believe they would be shared between friends if one friend was seeking help for a problem in a dating relationship. Finally, daughters and mothers were asked to reflect on what they perceived to be barriers and supports to parent/adolescent communication, and to adolescent/non-parent communication about problems in dating relationships. The results are presented by: (a) summary of daughters’ and mothers’ identified help-givers; and (b) daughters’ and mothers’ descriptions of themes of barriers and supports to communication. A total of 13 types of non-parent help-givers were identified, two major themes of messages between friends emerged, and 13 themes of barriers and supports to help-seeking emerged.

**Summary of Daughters’ and Mothers’ Identified Help-Givers.** Latina adolescents identified 12 of the potential help-givers that were mentioned by adolescents and mothers during the interviews. Within the top three, 15 Latina adolescents reported they would feel most comfortable talking to a best friend about problems in a dating situation. In addition, six adolescents reported they would feel comfortable talking to an older brother or sister. Five Latina
adolescents reported they would feel comfortable speaking with a church pastor or pastor’s wife, a female youth leader or a female religious education instructor within the church. Adolescents also described discomfort with three of the potential help-givers. Within the top three, 10 Latina adolescents reported they would feel uncomfortable seeking help from a teacher, school counselor, or school psychologist; seven identified feeling uncomfortable speaking with a church representative; and two adolescents reported feeling uncomfortable speaking with a friend.

Mothers identified nine of the potential help-givers that were mentioned by adolescents and mothers throughout the interviews. Within the top three, seven mothers reported they believe adolescents should feel comfortable seeking help from law enforcement officials, such as the police. In addition, five mothers reported adolescents would feel comfortable speaking with a maternal aunt and five mothers reported adolescents would feel comfortable speaking with a therapist or someone trained to work with relationship problems. Only one mother mentioned a help giver that she believed an adolescent would feel uncomfortable speaking with and she noted that she believed her daughter would feel uncomfortable speaking with a church representative. See Table 5 for a frequency tally of the 13 types of non-parents identified by participants and the detailed frequency of statements regard comfort versus discomfort of seeking help from each potential help-giver.

**Barriers To Seeking Help**

Three themes emerged to represent what Latina teens and mothers saw as barriers to communicating about dating problems. The themes include (a) Worry about Parental Response; (b) Lacking Closeness or Trust; and (c) The Topic is Uncomfortable or We Don’t Know How to Talk About It. Two of these themes (i.e., worry about parental response, topic is uncomfortable or we don’t know how to talk about it) were specific to barriers to seeking help from parents.
Table 5

*Mothers’ and Daughters’ Perceptions of Teens’ Comfort and Discomfort Seeking Help from a Non-Parent for a Dating Problem*

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<tr>
<td>Mental Health Professional (counselor, therapist, mental health agency)</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement (Police)</td>
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One of these themes (i.e., Lacking Closeness or Trust) emerged in response to barriers to seeking help from parents and barriers to seeking help from others.

**Worry about Parental Response.** This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ descriptions barriers, such as fears and worries, about how parents may respond to discussions related to problems in dating situations. This theme emerged from the responses of 16 adolescents.

In general, adolescents’ descriptions of barriers that would prevent them from talking to parents or make it harder for them to talk to parents included concerns about causing their parent disappointment, that their parent will not understand or cannot relate, or that their parent will react with extreme emotions or interventions and that parents will simply shut down the conversations. For example, Claudia noted that she would not feel comfortable speaking with her parents about problems in dating situations because:

I feel like I’m going to be letting her down [referring to her mother]…because I feel like she wouldn’t understand…They’ll [both parents] will just start judging us and saying that we’re doing bad…To just be scared to tell them…Cause’ you’ll get in trouble or you’ll let them down and then they wouldn’t think of you as they used to.

Another adolescent also worried that one disappointment could result in less trust and more worry from her parents during her future dating relationships. Valeria stated, “I guess if I were to end up dating somebody and we had problems, like, they would feel like, they would kind of have trust issues with other people. Like if I were to date a guy…Yeah, with other people.” Alma noted concerns about her mother seeing her in pain as a barrier. She reported, “I wouldn’t want her to know that I’m like, hurt emotionally…just because she doesn’t want me to be hurt.”
Adolescents also described parent responses that could act as barriers to communications could be when the adolescent feels misunderstood or like their parent cannot relate to their experience. Some adolescents expressed parents “wouldn’t understand” and attributed their parents’ inability to understand to the adolescents’ perception that their parent would not be able to relate to their experience. For example, Daniela said, “she lets me date but…she didn’t date at my age…so, she doesn't really know…how to like face some of the problems that, like, we face now.” In addition, Eva noted, “they don’t understand the way I feel…back then it wasn’t the same as it is right now.” However, while parents may not always be perceived as being able to relate to their teenager’s experience, this barrier may act as something that makes conversations difficult but not entirely impossible. For example, Demi noted, “No sentiría que ella me entiende. Pero ella siempre le seguiré diciendo porque ella me daría un consejo.” [“I wouldn’t feel like she understands me. But, I’ll always still tell her because I know she will give me advice.”]

Adolescents reported not knowing what a parent “may say back to me” or the possible range of negative emotional and physical responses could deter them from talking to their parent, sometimes about certain topics more than others. For example, Claudia stated, “Like, I feel like he would get too overprotective or just get mad and just start screaming and yelling.” Luciana noted, “They…might get mad at you,” as a barrier to speaking with parents. In addition, Camila described how this would play out in regards to her father:

Cheating, I would talk to him about. He would tell me to leave him though, real quick.

Hitting, heck no. My dad’s temper is not, you know. I don’t even think my mom would tell him. She would just deal with it herself if I told them. My dad, no. He’s not the best.
An emotionally heightened parental response and the possibility for an intervention could also be a concern as a barrier could that could influence how much information an adolescent would divulge. For example, Camila described how this would play out with her mother:

Cheating and stuff, I don't mind. Um, I’ve never dealt with hitting. Honestly, I think I’d be scared to. It depends on, like, if I really want to be with the guy, even though he’s hitting me. I don’t think I would tell my mom because my mom would instantly do something. She would like call him, like go to his house, do something. Like immediately. My mom does not play.

The possibility of uncomfortable emotional responses and reprimands were concerns for some respondents. For example, Demi indicated, “*Qué mucho les regañan. Porque cuando les regañan, ellas se sienten con miedo que sus mamás les van a regañar por lo que le están diciendo.*” [“How much they reprimand them. Because when they [females] are reprimanded they fear that their moms will reprimand them for what they are saying.”] Other forms of reprimands could include lengthy lectures and expressions of opinions that would not be in line with what adolescents would want to hear, such as “I’m not supposed to have a boyfriend at this age” and “just break up”. For example, Alma described:

My Dad would probably just be, “You shouldn’t have been in that relationship in the first place,” and then I’d just end up getting more upset. Like, yeah, at first he’d be like, “Oh, it’s ok, you’re going to be fine and stuff.” But, he’s not very like, not emotional but like, not encouraging of crying or anything like that. So, if I ever cry, he’ll be like, “Stop crying. There’s no need to cry.” So, I wouldn’t go to him for that…You don’t want to get that, “I told you so.” You don’t want your parents to be worried all the time…Some parents will just like, get mad at them for like having problems and just tell them like,
one of my friends. Whenever she has a problem with her boyfriend, the first person she goes to is her mom but all her mom does is tell her it’s her fault and stuff. So, I’m like, “I don't know why you do that, she’s going to tell you that every time.”

**Lacking Closeness or Trust.** This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ descriptions of barriers to communication between parents and adolescents and between adolescents and others resulting from deficits in closeness or trust within the relationship. The responses of 12 adolescents and three mothers fit this theme.

In relation to communication with parents, adolescents reported the lack of a close bond or trusting relationship could hinder conversations. For example, Raquel said, “If you never trusted them…that would be a huge problem because if I didn’t trust my mom about something I would not, I would never come to her for anything.” Carolina shared her experience to explain the discomfort she would feel talking to her mother about more personal issues:

Like, we can talk to each other but we don’t really talk about, like, I don’t know. Like…we can’t talk about close topics, I guess. I guess we can’t really talk about dating stuff…it’s like personal stuff…I don’t really feel comfortable talking to her about it…probably that we’ve never had before, or at least about dating stuff.

Mothers also cited a lack of trust as a barrier. For example, Paola noted factors that would make conversations with daughters harder would be, “Que no tengan confianza...Que la hija no tenga confianza en la mama. Eso es un gran problema.” [“That they have no trust…That the daughter does not trust in the mom. That is a big problem.”] Another mother indicated parental availability could negatively influence perceptions of trust and closeness, and therefore result as a barrier to communication. For example, Penelope stated, “El 90% de las madres hoy en día se dedican mucho tiempo al trabajo...Y no pueden llegar, a veces ni siquiera lo que esta...
pasando en la mente de los hijos.” [“About 90% of mothers today dedicate their time to work…and they cannot even get to sometimes even to what is going through the minds of their children.”]

In relation to communication with others, a lack of trust with others was conceptualized in many ways, from breaches of confidentiality, perceived inability to relate or understand the adolescent, and personal tendencies to internalize difficulties. Adolescents indicated they worried about confidentiality when talking to someone other than a parent. For instance, Isabella reported, “friends, if you get in a fight, can tell everyone your personal stuff.” Alma also worried, “I wouldn’t just go to any, like, administrator or anything like that…I feel like the first thing they’d want to do is contact your parents and that would make it a big deal”. One adolescent also felt unease with the potential of being misunderstood or judged by someone in the community. For example, Luciana said, “I just don’t feel good talking to other people…because sometimes they judge you…in my church.” Adolescents also worried about the ability of non-parental figures to relate to their experience. For example, Carolina described how a friend with limited dating experience may not be considered a reliable source, “She’s only been in one relationship and she’s still with it right now…I could see her saying good stuff but at the same time, I’m not sure she would.” In addition, Erica also expressed hesitation with going to school personnel. She noted, “teachers do listen but it’s not like they’re, like they’ve seen the situation.”

In many ways, adolescents perceived barriers to communication with others because of the limited role that some non-parental figures (e.g., friends, teachers, church representatives) played in their lives. One adolescent expressed a barrier in speaking to friends. For example, Valeria noted, “I wouldn’t really go to them [referring to friends] cause’…I don't know. I’d have
to be really, really close to them to, to discuss things with them…Right now I don’t have a friend like that.” Most adolescents’ responses within this theme focused on barriers to speaking with school personnel. For example, Valeria indicated, “I guess kind of awkward [talking to a teacher]…because they’re just the person who teaches you things.” Camila also differentiated the relationship she has with her teachers as, “Not that cool, I guess, not personally.” Beatriz described, “Teachers…it’s just you see them for a couple of years and then you’re not going to see them again.” In addition, Daniela noted, “I have a teacher that, she would always help me if I ever had a problem…but…I really wouldn’t talk to her about my relationships because…I look at my teachers as, like, a professional…so I don't feel comfortable talking to them about like, my personal life.” Additionally, two adolescents also considered communication with church representatives to be hindered. For example, Erica indicated behind held back by not feeling “really close to many people in church…might not know them enough to tell them exactly my problem.” In addition, Valentina indicated a barrier to seeking help from someone at church would include, “Because if I don’t know the person it’s kind of weird…and I don’t think they really care about my life.”

The Topic is Uncomfortable or We Don’t Know How to Talk About It. This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ reports of barriers in parent-adolescent communication about problems in dating situations as a result of discomfort with the sensitive nature of the topic and feeling generally unprepared to discuss the topic. This theme included the responses of five adolescents and six mothers.

Adolescent descriptions of this theme included “discomfort”, “awkwardness” and “embarrassment” coming from just the parent or both parent and adolescent. For example, Isabella stated, “discomfort or depends on the problem but may feel embarrassed.” Valeria noted,
“I guess, awkwardness…[from] my parents.” Daniela explained, “Just the fact that they’re my parents and it’s like, uncomfortable talking to them about stuff like that.” In addition, one adolescent indicated a barrier caused by her perception that her father would not be reliable. For example, Carolina mentioned, “I don't think he would know how to sit, how to explain that stuff anyway.”

Parents also noted the discomfort of sensitive topics, particularly related to sex, that could become a barrier in communication. For example, Augustina stated, “some parents, they get embarrassed and they don’t want to talk to their kids about the sex part”. In addition, Manuela stated how parents might worry talking about sex-related topics because talking could create opportunities for their fears to be realized. She said, “Los papas no queremos decirle, o mira, tiene que hospedarte con anticonceptivo”…le estas abriendo así la puerta para que se cuiden de un embarazo pero no se cuiden de las enfermedades.” [“We as parents don't want to tell them, look, you have to prepare yourself with contraceptives…because you are then opening the door so that they can prevent a pregnancy but they don’t prevent diseases.”] For some parents, a lack of open communication in their upbringing could seep into their role now as parents and into their communication with daughters about problems in dating situations. For example, Marilyn noted, “My mom never talked to me…about dating or anything…they don't tell you anything. Not even about your period…you don’t know anything until it happens to you…so I have a hard time sometimes…talking to her about sex and stuff.”

Supports To Seeking Help

Four themes emerged to represent what Latina teens and mothers saw as supports to communicating about dating problems. The themes include (a) Close and Trusting Relationship; (b) Established Pattern of Communication; (c) Becoming more Informed; and (d) Experienced
and Able to Relate. Two of these themes (i.e., close and trusting relationship, established pattern of communication) emerged in response to participants’ descriptions of supports to communication between parents and adolescents and supports to communication between adolescents and others. One of these themes (i.e., becoming more informed) was specific to participants’ descriptions of supports to communication between parents and adolescents. The remaining theme, (i.e., experienced and able to relate) was specific to participants’ descriptions of supports to communication between adolescents and others.

**Close and Trusting Relationship.** This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ descriptions of feeling a close and trusting relationship as a support to communication about dating problems between parents and adolescent and between adolescents and others. The responses of 13 adolescents and 11 mothers fit this theme.

In relation to communication with parents, some factors related to ensuring a close and trusting relationship between parents and adolescents, and therefore increasing communication, were related to the mother’s ability to balance her role as a mother versus a friend, predictable and mild parental reactions, and a desire to be open with each other. Some adolescents noted being able to perceive trust and comfort in a parent when they felt the parent could relate or “see like everything…that I haven’t seen”. For instance, as described by Isabella, “…even if he [father] is not a teen, he is a guy. He knows what guys do. He says he did them when he was young. I trust him.” Claudia also described feeling encouraged if her mother were to start “talking to me about how, it’s supposed to be, how her relationships were…explaining all the problems she had when she was in relationships, when she was my age.” A mother’s ability, particularly a younger mother’s ability, to balance being a mother and friend was noted to be supportive of adolescent perceptions of a parent as able to relate and increase trust. Carolina
noted, “I have a friend that has a pretty young mom…they can talk about more personal stuff like dating and what not…it’s kind of like if the person is younger…they seem like an older sister.”

Adolescents also reflected on the need for confidentiality and mild parental reactions to increase closeness and trust. For example, one adolescent noted that having confidentiality would be important for her. For instance, Luciana noted she would feel encouraged to speak more openly with her parents about problems in dating situations if, “tell your parents to don’t talk to nobody about it…what we told them.” A few adolescents noted that trusting their parent to control “temperamental” reactions would encourage them to talk to parents more and trust could be increased based on mild parental reactions. For example, Miranda noted she would feel better talking to her parents if “they won’t get mad at you.” Raquel also noted, “if they don’t try to judge you…there is trust…and, they don’t yell at your for something that you’re asking.” In addition, Camila stated, “Well, maybe their tempers. I mean, they’re Hispanics, they’re hot heads (laughs)…Like honestly…Maybe the way they take things.” Some adolescents also noted a responsibility to impart and display trust towards their parents as a means of facilitating conversations. For example, Valeria indicated that it would help her talk to their parents by, “Um, telling them the complete truth. Not leaving out a single detail.” Mariana also stated she would be supported in talking to her mother by being, “Completely honest…I don’t see anything, there’s like, I don't see any point in hiding anything anyways.”

Parents also reflected on the delicate balance between being a mother and a friend, and maintaining trust. Parents described being “in-tune” with daughters when they could think back to what they were like at their daughter’s age and relate to the experience. For example, Regina reported:
I’m very in-tune with her feelings about things…like I try to do that too, talk to her about how it feels, about dating…sometimes, I can turn into a friend…we don’t have such a big age difference…I can go back to that high school feeling…sometimes I regroup and say, “when I was her age, what was I thinking?” I always try to come down to the friend level…but at the same time always remembering “you’re her mom”.

In addition, Augustina also described the fine balance between being a mom and a friend:

The confidence that they have in you. Like, sometimes you just can’t act like a parent. You better bring yourself a little bit down to their level. Cause that’s the way they open up to you…if they see you as a parent they’re not going to want to talk to you…I mean they come to me…some things I’m like “Oh God, she’s not saying that” but then I breathe and I’m like, “ok”…I try not to see her as my daughter. And that’s worked…It’s better she comes to me…than she goes out to a stranger.”

In relation to communication with others, having a trusting and close relationship was found to be relevant to seeking help from non-parental family members such as “older brothers”, “older sisters”, and “aunts.” For example, Raquel noted, “I would talk to him [20-year-old brother] about the guy situation…cause I did talk to him about sex…he’s very serious when it comes to stuff like that…I usually don’t come to him for stuff…so, if I do, he would be very serious about it.” Relatives and friends were mentioned as possible help-givers within this theme, as alternative when hesitation set in about speaking with parents. For example, Alma mentioned, “I could go to my mom, I don’t know if I would…I would probably go to one of my friends first.” In addition, Beatriz added, “A best friend, not all…or somebody close, like an aunt.” One adolescent identified school personnel when there is trust. For example, Valeria reported feeling
that a support to communication would be, “Like if you have trust in, like, the psychologist at school…or the teacher, if you have trust in them.”

Parents acknowledged that adolescents might feel more secure speaking with someone they feel close to and trust. This can include an older sibling, an extended family member, a friend, or someone within the community. For example, Santiaga noted her daughter would be feel more comfortable speaking with, “Su hermana mayor, platica mucho con su hermana mayor…de hecho le tiene mucho mas confianza en ella que a mi…va cumplir 22 anos…ellas son excelentes amigas aparte de hermanas.” [“Her older sister, she speaks a lot with her older sister…actually, she has more trust in her than in me…she is going to turn 22 years old…they are excellent friends apart from being sisters.”] Alejandra added, “She trusts my sisters, she has them…I think she would be more likely to come to family…she has a close bond, she’s closer…she knows that…with any problem, she can come to any one of us.” Martina noted “she sometimes has this thing that she doesn’t want to make us [her parents] feel bad for anything. So, I’m not sure if she’s going to come to me…maybe a better friend, her best friend…she has a very good relationship with a couple of teachers and her youth pastor leader and his wife.”

**Established Pattern of Communication.** This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ descriptions of communication that has been built upon over time as supports to communication about dating problems between parents and adolescent and between adolescents and others. The responses of nine adolescents and 10 mothers fit this theme.

In relation to communication with parents, participants noted the ease of established communication between parents and adolescents was influenced by past conversations about sensitive topics, the initiator of conversations, and the quality of the communication. Adolescents indicated that repeated communication, not only focused on sensitive topics, could be beneficial
towards encouraging them to talk to parents when the topic of dating problems arises. For instance, Isabella noted repeated reminders that “it’s okay to talk to them, they are always there for me” could encourage more open and frequent communication. In addition, Valeria described feeling comfortable speaking to her father because conversations were varied, “we talk about a bunch of things…he’s basically like my best friend…we enjoy the same music…I haven’t really brought up the subject [dating] with my mom but, my dad talks to me a lot about it.” She also noted talking about problems in dating relationships would be easier when teenagers “have talked to [their] parents, like before, like having conversations about dating and stuff, and relationships.” One adolescent indicated that she may be supported by the process of communication, such as the initiation of conversation and the transition from light-hearted conversations to more personal topics. For example, Erica described communication with her mother could be facilitated by, “maybe tell her, ’Hey, I want to talk to you,’ or first laugh and then for the serious stuff”. In addition, her mother could facilitate more communication by asking about the dating relationship. Erica said it would help for her to mom to ask, “if I have a boyfriend, how I’ve been with him…I guess just parents ask their kids about stuff.”

Parents also expressed feeling supported by established communication as a support for speaking with adolescents about problems in dating situations. One mother reported being able to fall back on past patterns of effective communication and conversations with her adolescent. For example, Santiago stated, “Ningún tema para mi es problema. Yo les digo las cosas como siempre lo hecho.” [“No topic is a problem for me. I will tell them things like I always have.”] Another mother also indicated she would be encouraged to speak with her daughter when she knew her daughter was engaged in the conversation. For example, Jenni identified she would know her daughter would be engaged because, “Ella me miraría y me hiciera preguntas. Me
contestaría,” [“She would look at me and ask me questions. She would give me responses.”] and this would encourage her to speak with her daughter. In addition, one mother noted that her daughter’s initiation of conversations could be helpful in facilitating communication, particularly, when conversations emerged organically. For example, Fernanda described how this process occurs in conversations with her daughter. She noted, “A veces se pone de buen humor y se pone de hablar con migo y salimos hablando de que si quieren o no quieren tener novio, y allí se ya dando la platica para que ya no se siente mal”. [“Sometimes she is in a good mood and she starts talking to me, and we come out talking about whether she wants to have a boyfriend or not and that way we start having the conversation and she doesn’t feel bad.”]

In relation to an established pattern of communication with others, adolescents’ responses touched on communication as established by someone who seems reliable because the help-giver listens and is perceived as someone who can help solve problems. Both Carolina and Mariana identified a member of their church within this theme. For example, Carolina reported, “[I’d go to] someone from my church…she works there, I’ve known her for a while and I know that she usually helps with teenagers.” In addition, Mariana reported, “My youth pastor’s wife…she is someone who would definitely listen to you and let everything get off your chest and then just be like, kind of go back into it and tell you what’s right and what’s wrong and what you should and shouldn’t do into the whole situation. Like she is very straightforward.” Being honest and straightforward was also important for Raquel who identified a police officer as someone she would be comfortable speaking with and noted, “Officer [officer’s name]…he’s so cool about it and I could already tell he’d be like completely honest. Just like my brother.” Camila identified that talking to her male friends would be easier than talking to female friends because of the importance of simply feeling heard. She stated, “I feel like I can get carried away and they
[female friends] may get annoyed, because I talk about it so much…I have guy friends that give me their opinion since they are a guy…guys are more cool about listening than girls.”

One mother also noted the importance of a help-giver’s reputation for being a good listener and giving good advice. For example, Rita stated, “Es bueno hablar con personas mayores que uno, pues tiene tal vez un buen record...que han sido personas que sean guiados bien en la vida le puede dar buen consejo.” [“It’s good to speak with adults that, well maybe have a good record…people who have guided well in life, they can give good advice.”]

**Becoming More Informed.** This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ descriptions of supports they would like to see or that they currently use with each other to continue to talk despite the discomfort they may feel in doing. This theme emerged from the responses of five adolescents and seven mothers.

Adolescents acknowledged that conversations could be challenging and sensitive, especially for parents. However, they noted that they would feel supported by parent’s having more “realistic” views. For example, Alma reported that she would be encouraged to speak to her mother if her mother, “Understood that [dating] it’s going to happen regardless if she tells me not to do it or not.” Victoria also added that her parents could be, “More understanding, like people make mistakes. I wasn’t born with a halo,” to encourage her to speak to them if she were to experience a problem in a dating relationship.

Adolescents’ responses also focused on wanting their parents to become more informed about their dating relationships and their dating partners. For example, Valentina indicated she would feel more supported to discuss problems in dating situations if her parents, “Let me hang out with the person…bring them over…be accepting and nice to the person…not say bad things about me or the person…just like help me, not judge me, because I like a boy.” Erica also
emphasized wanting parents to show an interest in her dating relationships and noted she would feel more encouraged to speak to her mother if her mother were to, “Ask me…about...if I have a boyfriend, how I’ve been with him.”

For parents, mothers acknowledged having difficulty talking about sensitive topics and feeling discomfort when discussing problems in dating relationships. Some mothers may have a hard time watching their adolescent go through a hardship. However, knowing that they are providing their daughter’s with valuable information and problem-solving skills far outweighs the emotional discomforts and feels right for them. For example, Rita stated she would feel, “Triste de verla en una situación difícil con su pareja...[también] cómoda por el hecho que habría confianza...de que ella me cuente que, cual es la situación.” [“Sad to see her in a difficult situation with her partner...[also] comfortable because there is trust...that she would tell me about the situation.”] In addition, Jenni noted, “Yo me sentiría bien porque yo creo que...porque yo quisiera que ella fuera como yo fui.” [“I would feel comfortable because I believe...that because I’d want her to be like I was [referring to mother’s youth]”.

While adolescents focused more on parents becoming more informed about dating partners, parents focused on becoming more informed about parenting strategies. Two mothers noted the potential for external resources (e.g., parenting books, spiritual parenting devotionals, public service announcements, websites) that could help provide parents with useful tools and strategies towards more effective communication. For example, Mariyln indicated:

I’ve been reading parenting books…I get a devotional everyday…a parenting devotional that tells you...like the message for the day...you know, [the devotional says] if you want your child to do this well you should model it first…that’s encouraged me a lot. Has given me more ideas as far as how to approach certain topics, like sex, drugs.
External resources may be particularly relevant for the Latino community. For example, Antonella indicated:

*Venimos de una cultura donde eso, el sexo, la relaciones es un mito. Eso es un pecado...que te beses con un hombre...entonces por muchos anos a nosotros no nos hablamos de eso...ahora los niños nacen sabiendo mas que uno.* [We come from a culture where that, sex, and relationships are taboo. That it’s a sin...that you kiss a man...so for many years we weren’t spoken to about that...now the kids are born knowing more than we do].

**Experienced and Able to Relate.** This theme emerged from adolescent girls’ and their mothers’ responses that described supports to communication with others (i.e., non-parental figures) as stemming from perceptions of the help-givers experience in the problem area or ability to relate and understand the adolescents’ perspective. The responses of six adolescents and one mother reflected this theme.

Adolescents felt encouraged to speak to non-parental figures when the help-giver was perceived as having had the same or similar experiences and when adolescents could speak to the help-giver without feeling misunderstood or judged. For example, Daniela explained, “I feel real comfortable [speaking with friends about dating problems]...I know most people date now a days...what I go through, my friend goes through...so we both try to figure it out.” For some adolescents the age of the help-giver could influence how experienced adolescents perceived the help-giver to be. For example, Valentina indicated she could speak with, “…maybe cousins…that are my age because they go through the same things too”. Mariana also noted, “I would feel comfortable with it actually [speaking with friends about dating problems]...I mean they are kind of older than me, I’m the youngest listening to the whole thing...so it’s kind of like
they’re experienced in a way.” For some adolescents, knowing that they would not be judged and knowing that someone understands their perspective can go a long way. For example, Valentina noted her friends were also a support because, “they don’t, like, judge you.” Valeria also touched on wanting to feel understood by community help-givers. She identified a school psychologist as a resource because, “they have kind of like a more background idea of the things the teenagers go through”.

One mother also noted age as a factor for adolescents to feel increased support in speaking to someone other than a parent about problems in dating situations. Selena identified her younger sister (i.e., her daughter’s aunt) as someone her daughter would probably talk to because, “She’s the young, crazy...hip one”, implying that her sister could relate to the daughter in a different way than she could.

**Within-Group and Cross-Group Analysis**

The distribution of emergent themes was also analyzed within groups based on birth country status and acculturation status (e.g., US-born parent vs. parent born outside of the US; adolescent scoring high on acculturation vs. adolescent scoring low on acculturation). Results are summarized based on themes that were most reflected by participants, first by within group findings and then second by cross-group findings for each category of emergent themes. See Table 6 for the detailed within group and cross-group information on birth country status and see Table 7 for the detailed within group and cross-group information on acculturation status.

**Overall Birth Status and Acculturation Status.** Within the adolescent group (n = 18), 11 adolescents were US-born and seven were born outside of the US. In addition, 13 adolescents endorsed high acculturation, three adolescents endorsed low acculturation, and two adolescents did not provide sufficient responses to assess their acculturation status.
Table 6

**Within Group and Cross Group Analysis by Birth Country Status**

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### Beliefs and Descriptions about Dating Problems

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### Barriers to Seeking Help from Parents and Others

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### Otological Notes

- Participant acculturation status is unknown due to missing data on acculturation measure. $n = 2$ for missing data for adolescent acculturation. $n = 6$ for missing data for parent acculturation. Data in parenthesis indicates breakdown of number of parents/number of adolescents missing acculturation data for each theme.
Within the parent group (n = 18), only four mothers were US born, whereas 14 were born outside of the US. In addition, three mothers endorsed high acculturation, nine endorsed low acculturation, and six mothers did not provide sufficient responses to assess their acculturation status. Within groups, adolescent participants who were US born and those scoring high in acculturation outnumbered adolescent girls born outside of the US and those scoring low in acculturation. In addition, parent participants born outside of the US and those scoring low in acculturation outnumbered mothers born in the US and those scoring high in acculturation. Across groups, more Latina adolescents, than mothers, were US born and endorsed items that reflected a high acculturation to American culture. Mothers were more likely than adolescents to have been born outside of the US and to endorse low acculturation.

**Adolescent Within Group Analysis by Birth Country Status.** All of the 20 themes were reflected in the responses of at least four of the 11 US born adolescent girls and the seven adolescent girls born outside of the US. The top themes that were most reflected by the responses of US born adolescent girls, reflected in responses of nine adolescents per theme, included messages about dating problems from parents and friends to try to work it out or get out of the relationship and worry about parental response as a barrier to seeking help from parents. The top theme that was most reflected by responses of all seven adolescent girls born outside of the US included worry about parental response as a barrier to seeking help from parents.

The theme that was least reflected by US born adolescent girls included messages about dating problems from parents to be safe which was reflected in the response of one US born adolescent girl. In addition, the themes that were least reflected by adolescent girls born outside of the US, reflected in the response of one adolescent per theme, included parental messages
about dating focused on parental expectations and feeling that the topic is uncomfortable and they do not know how to talk about it as a barrier to seeking help from parents.

**Adolescent Within Group Analysis by Acculturation Status.** All 20 themes were reflected in the responses of the 13 adolescent girls who endorsed high acculturation status; however, there were five themes that were not reflected by any responses from the three adolescent girls who scored low on acculturation. The top theme that was most reflected by the responses of adolescent girls who scored high on acculturation to American culture included worry about parental response as a barrier to seeking help from parents which was reflected in the responses of 11 highly acculturated adolescents. The top themes that were most reflected by the responses of girls who scored low on acculturation to American culture, reflected in the responses of three adolescents per theme, included problems with trust and jealousy as a belief or description about dating problems, messages about dating problems from parents and shared between friends to work it out or get out of the relationship, and worry about parental response as a barrier to seeking help from parents.

Finally, the least reflected theme by adolescent girls scoring high in acculturation included be safe as a message about dating problems from parents which was reflected in the responses of two highly acculturated adolescent girls. The five themes that were not reflected by responses from adolescent girls scoring low on acculturation included parental warnings as parental messages about dating, pressure to give in as beliefs and descriptions about dating problems, messages about dating problems from parents and shared between friends to talk to someone, messages about dating problems from parents to be safe, and having an established pattern of communication as a support to seeking help from parents and others.
**Parent Within Group Analysis by Birth Country Status.** Within the parent group, mothers were given the opportunity to provide responses reflective of 20 of the 19 themes. The exception was for the one theme within the category of messages about dating problems that were shared between friends as only adolescent girls were prompted for those responses. Of the 19 themes, 15 were reflected by the responses of the four US born mothers whereas 18 themes were reflected by the responses of the 14 mothers born outside of the US. The top themes that were most reflected by all four US born mothers, per theme, included parental warnings as messages about dating and having a close and trusting relationship as a support for adolescents seeking help from parents and others. The top themes that were reflected the most by the responses of mothers born outside of the US, reflected by the responses of ten mothers born outside of the US per theme, included pressure to give in and feeling less than worthy as beliefs and descriptions about dating problems. were also the top three reflected themes of beliefs or descriptions about dating problems.

The themes that were not reflected by any US born mothers, included type of relationship as a definition of dating, general relationship problems as beliefs and descriptions about dating problems, worry about parental response and lacking closeness and trust as barriers to seeking help from parents and others, and being more informed as support to seeking help from parents. In addition, the themes that were not reflected by any mothers born outside of the US included worry about parental response as a barrier for adolescents seeking help from parents and being experienced and able to relate as a support for adolescents seeking help from others.

**Parent Within Group Analysis of Acculturation Status.** Of the 19 themes, 15 themes were reflected by the responses of the three mothers who scored high in acculturation and 15 themes were reflected by the responses of the nine mothers who scored low in acculturation. The top
themes reflected by the responses of all three mothers who scored high in acculturation included parental messages about dating focused on parental expectations and parental warnings, and beliefs and descriptions about dating problems of relational aggression and social media, pressure to give in, and feeling less than worthy. The top theme reflected by the responses of mothers scoring low in acculturation included pressure to give in as a belief and description about dating problems which was reflected by the responses of eight low acculturated mothers.

The themes that were not reflected by any mothers scoring high in acculturation included type of relationship as a definition of dating, general relationship problems as a belief and description about dating problems, worry about parental response as a barrier to seeking help from parents, lacking closeness or trust as a barrier to seeking help from parents or others, and having an established pattern of communication as a support to seeking help from parents or others. The themes that were not reflected by any mothers scoring low in acculturation included problems with trust and jealousy as a belief and description of dating problems, messages about dating problems from parents and others focused on trying to work it out or getting out of the relationship, and talk to someone, worry about parental response as a barrier to seeking help from parents, and being experienced or able to relate as a support to seeking help from others.

**Cross Group Analysis by Birth Country Status and Acculturation.** Comparisons between the two participant groups, adolescents and parents, revealed that all adolescents, regardless of birth country status and acculturation status, reflected worry about parental response as a barrier to seeking help from parents while no mothers reflected this theme.

**Discussion**

**Summary and Discussion of Findings**

Problems in teen dating relationships, such as abuse and violence, are a major public
health concern due to high prevalence rates and the risk for experiencing future dating abuse or dating violence as adults (Tschann et al., 2009; Wolfe et al., 2004). Relatively few studies have examined the beliefs and experiences of dating problems among Latina adolescents or the factors that promote or discourage help-seeking and communication about problems in dating relationships (Howard, Beck, Kerr, & Shattuck, 2005; Ingram, 2007). Yet, Latina adolescents are at high risk of experiencing problems in dating relationships (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012).

The current qualitative study addressed this gap in the literature through the use of semi-structured interviews with Latina mothers and their daughters. Overall, 20 themes emerged across the dating, dating problems, and help-seeking domains that reflected the aims of the current study. These domains also reflected the influence of Latina adolescents’ and their mothers’ beliefs regarding dating problems and help-seeking behaviors. In addition, beliefs and behaviors included the messages adolescents receive about dating problems, and barriers and supports to communication. The findings from this study highlight areas for future research and provide useful information for prevention programmers.

Within group analysis of adolescents identified the majority of adolescent girls as US born and measuring high on acculturation whereas within group analysis of parents identified the majority of mothers as being born outside of the US and measuring low on acculturation. These findings are notable given that they reflect the pattern that many Latina mothers and adolescent girl face living in the US. More specifically, mothers and adolescent girls may see themselves at odds at times as they find the right balance between a culture with which they identify and a culture where they must adjust.
What does dating and dating violence mean to Latina adolescents and their mothers?

Conceptualizations and Descriptions of Traditional Forms of Dating Violence. One aim of the study was to obtain an understanding of Latina adolescents’ and their mothers’ thoughts and perceptions about dating and dating violence. English-speaking and Spanish-speaking participants were asked to reflect on what the terms “dating” and “dating violence” or “problems in dating situations” meant to them. Adolescents’ and parents’ responses did not tend to reflect differences in terminology. Instead, participants provided actual descriptions of beliefs or behaviors about the terms. Past research has suggested that teens may tend to use different words among themselves to describe dating. For example, Fredland, Ricardo, Campbell, Sharps, Kub, and Yonas (2005) found that, in addition to descriptions of typical dating behaviors, a sample of 54 (59.3% female) 11-13 year old middle school students also used different phrases such as “hanging out,” “chillin,” “hooking up,” and “talking,” as slang terms to describe their dating relationships. In addition, the word “dating” was more often reflective of the dating relationships of older teens. It could be that given the current study’s sample’s older age range (i.e., 14-17 years old), the participants were already more familiar with “dating” as a term and were able to readily discuss more complex aspects of dating and problems in dating relationships. Other researchers have found that the use of slang terms that are sometimes thought to be representative of dating abuse or dating violence (e.g., “drama,” “disrespect”) are not consistently agreed upon by adolescents as having the same meaning and slang terms cannot be assumed to have a standard definition (Martin, Houston, Mmar, & Decker, 2001). These findings suggest that research efforts aimed toward understanding adolescents’ meaning of dating violence should take care in considering the terms used to operationalize key variables such as dating violence. This is important as adolescents’ perception of terms may vary by age
and researchers must find the right balance between picking a term that is still relevant to adolescents while being neither too mature nor too young.

The responses of adolescent girls and mothers within this study reflected problems in dating relationships across a wide range of dating problem conceptualizations. Such conceptualizations, consistent with research on abuse and violence in dating relationships, included relational aggression, coercion to succumb to sexual demands, being belittled or manipulated, and being cheated on or inducing jealousy (Ellis, Crooks, & Wolfe, 2008; Halpern, et al., 2001; Holt & Espelage, 2007; Bergman, 1992; Ackard, et al., 2007; Wolitzky-Taylor, et al., 2008). Some descriptions of problem behaviors varied in severity and some were not mutually exclusive or were representative of a variety of behaviors that often co-occurred within the context of multiple forms of dating problems. In other words, participants’ descriptions of problem dating behaviors were consistent with literature suggesting that teens may define dating violence in different ways (Barter, 2009; Gover, 2004; Zeitler et al., 2006). These findings also support research that suggests defining abusive dating behaviors might be better understood across continuums as behaviors may often fall between categories or across multiple categories and range in severity or frequency (Draucker, et al., 2012).

The range of dating behaviors, dating problem themes, and the richness of descriptions that emerged throughout the interviews highlight that Latina adolescents and their mothers are quite knowledgeable about adolescent dating and the problems that may exist in dating teen relationships. Parents’ responses complimented adolescents’ descriptions of dating to describe dating as a normal aspect of adolescence, that includes engaging in non-intimate activities and behaviors (e.g., going to the movies, spending time together) to more intimate cuddling and touching (e.g., kissing, holding hands) and getting to know one another. Within their
descriptions, mothers tended to express expectations and family rules, such as limits and boundaries around behaviors that would depict what they perceived to be appropriate teenage dating relationships. More specifically, mothers clarified clear limits on intimate and sexual behaviors as not desirable for adolescent dating relationships. Previous research has found that while the enforcement of dating rules, in addition to traditional gender roles, may lead to increased parent-adolescent conflict (Rafaelli & Ontai, 2001; Romo, et al., 2002; Romo, et al., 2004), the enforcement of clear family rules by mothers can also influence adolescent daughters to make healthier choices in their dating relationships, such as by delaying sexual intimacy (Hovell et al., 1994). Future research in the area of adolescent dating violence should explore the kinds of family rules that are most relevant towards empowering adolescent girls to handle problems in dating situations and to encourage adolescent girls to seek help. These findings are also important towards helping prevention and intervention efforts aimed at informing and empowering parents as they guide adolescents in making the right choices.

The current findings stand in contrast to past research that suggests parents may not be aware of teen dating violence or that they may dismiss teen dating violence as a problem (Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2004; Liz Claiborne, Inc., 2000). Despite one mother’s reflection of a sense of her daughter being immune to experiencing physical dating abuse, over half or more of mothers and daughters provided responses that were reflective of at least three themes of problems in dating situations, which included emotional, sexual, and physical forms of dating abuse or dating violence.

**Focus on Cyber Abuse.** The current results suggest Latina adolescents and their mothers are also aware of more current trends in abuse or violence in dating relationships. For example, Latina teens and mothers commonly described the pervasiveness of aggression in dating
relationships through social media and technology (e.g., cell phones, video chat, social networking sites). Other forms of dating problems (e.g., making a partner feel less than worthy) also overlapped with the use of technology by one partner against another. Latina teens described behaviors such as spreading rumors through social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), distributing explicit pictures or videos, and hacking into private emails or social networking sites as forms of dating problems that can occur through technology. Mothers also reflected similar messages as their daughters and noted the use of technology to harass, bully, and control a dating partner. The findings of the current study are consistent with the emerging literature on the misuse of technology to facilitate abusive or controlling dating behaviors (Draucker & Martsolf, 2010). Recent work by Zweig, Dank, Yahner, & Lachman (2013) examined the extent of “cyber dating abuse” and it’s relationship to other forms of teen dating violence (e.g., psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual coercion). The researchers found that in a sample of 3,745 middle- and high-school age students (52% female), 26% of teens reported having been victims of cyber dating abuse within the past year. Female adolescents were more likely than male adolescents to experience being victims of cyber dating abuse, psychological dating abuse, and sexual coercion but they were also noted to perpetrate these forms of abuse. In addition, the forms of cyber abuse noted included sexual cyber abuse (e.g., pressuring partners to send sexual or naked photos of themselves or pressuring partners to view indecent pictures of the perpetrating partner, sending sexual innuendos through text or email) and non-sexual cyber abuse (e.g., sending threats through text messages, using partner’s social media accounts without permission, distributing images of the partner to others, and creating an atmosphere of hostility through cell phone, text messages, or social networking sites).
The findings from the present study are consistent with other sexual and non-sexual descriptions of cyber abuse. In addition, these findings demonstrate that Latina teens and mothers are not only aware of dating problems but are also aware of the evolving nature of problems that can occur as a result of fast-paced technology. Furthermore, given the frequency with which cyber abuse was reflected within this study, these findings highlight the urgent need to include cyber dating abuse components in prevention and intervention work.

**Focus on Partner and Peer Pressure.** Another theme that emerged from Latina teens’ and mother’s descriptions of types of dating problems included pressure to give in. Within this theme, Latina adolescents and mothers described dating problems that result from partners or peers who attempt to control or pressure teenage girls to give in to their desires or demands. The identification of behaviors to control dating partners has also been noted in other studies with Latino populations (Lopez, Chesney-Lind, & Foley, 2012) as a sign of dating violence is supported by current research and is particularly worrisome for Latina youth. For example, past research suggests that Latina adolescents (15-18 years old) are among those with the highest risk for dating someone who would exhibit controlling behaviors and therefore at increased risk for experiencing dating violence (Catallozi, Simon, Davidson, Breitbart, & Rickert, 2011).

Many adolescent descriptions focused on pressure to engage in unwanted sexual touching or sexual intercourse; however, this theme also tended to reflect the co-occurrence of multiple forms of abuse (e.g., verbal, physical, sexual) as a result of not giving in to the demands of the other person. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting a correlation between sexual risk and dating violence and previous research suggesting that Latina adolescents are likely to focus on pressure to have sex as a problem in dating relationships (Adams & Williams, 2011; Howard & Wang, 2003a; Howard & Wang 2003b). Mothers also noted concerns
about high-risk consequences of sexual activity such as STDs and pregnancy that have also been previously noted as correlates of dating violence victimization (Adams & Williams, 2011; Decker, Silverman, Raj, 2005). In addition, Latina adolescents and their mothers implicated the potential for drug use as a pressure point, in addition to sexual behavior. These findings are particularly concerning as previous work has identified that adolescent victims of dating violence, particularly Latina teens, are at risk for poor health outcomes and high-risk behaviors, such as alcohol and drug use (Allyne-Greene, Coleman-Cowger, & Henry, 2012; Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001). These findings support the idea that it may not only be that dating violence results in risk for substance use but that exposure to peers or dating partners who engage in substances may present opportunities for adolescents be encouraged to experiment with drugs or alcohol and subsequently turn to those substances on a more regular basis. These findings highlight the need for research to continue to explore the links between dating violence risk and other high-risk behaviors and to further inform practitioners and communities on the elevated risk that teens run when they engage in such behaviors.

Interestingly, while adolescents only noted partner pressure as a concern, two mothers also included peer pressure as concerns. These findings may suggest that when mothers think about problems such as sexual coercion, they may generalize their fears to any relationship that their daughters may have with another adolescent male, not just dating partners. Future studies addressing parental concerns about dating violence and the role of sexual coercion, in particular, should explore and differentiate whether parents’ worries are restricted only to the dating relationship or if they generalize to peer relationships as well. It is possible that despite mothers’ fears that their daughters are at risk for harm even when they are out with male friends, daughters
may not share their mothers’ concerns about peer pressure and these differences may influence parent-child communication or conflict.

**Reciprocal Aggression within Dating Relationships.** While many of the forms of dating problems (e.g., relational aggression, pressure to give in, lack or breakdown of trust, physical harm, poor fit) were typically noted by Latina teens and their mothers as behaviors that male partners would perpetrate onto female victims, some responses described females as being able to perpetrate dating abuse as well. These findings are consistent with the growing literature of reciprocally aggressive or violent relationships (Foshee, 1996; Foshee, Reyes, & Ennett, 2010; Gray & Foshee, 1997; Mulford & Giordano, 2008; Williams, Ghandour, & Kub, 2008; Wolfe et al., 2003) One adolescent noted having engaged in cyber dating abuse to seek revenge on an unfaithful dating partner but most descriptions of female perpetration did not clarify if females initialized the abuse or were acting in self-defense or retaliation. In addition, the study was not created to clarify the severity of female perpetrated dating abuse behaviors. However, factors such as abuse initiation vs. self-defense and the context in which dating abuse occurs have been identified as being increasingly more important to understanding the nature of female-enacted abuse (Black & Weisz, 2004; Cohall, Cohall, Bannister, & Northridge, 1999; O’Keefe, 1997; Sears, Byers, Whelan, Saint-Pierre, The Dating Violence Research Team, 2006; Simon, Miller, Gorman-Smith, Orpinas, & Sullivan, 2010; Smith, Winokur, & Palenski, 2005; Zweig, Dank, Yahner, & Lachman, 2013). These findings support the transition of focus from one-directional dating abuse to examining reciprocal dating abuse. Future studies should continue to tease apart the nuances of abusive dating behaviors that are perpetrated by females as compared to males.
What are barriers and supports to adolescents’ communication with their mothers about problems in dating relationships?

The findings from the current study supported the view of using past research on parent-adolescent communication about sensitive topics, such as sex, to guide our thinking about parent-adolescent communication about problems in dating relationships. For example, adolescents’ perceptions of parents’ ability to give adequate advice, remain supportive, and control emotions were important factors that emerged from barriers and support within the current study. Adolescents noted that feelings of discomfort or awkwardness coming from the parent or the teen could impede communication depending on the topic. Teens may feel like they do not know what to say or how to approach their parent to discuss the problem and they may also perceive their parent as not skilled enough help them solve their problem. For example, some Latina adolescents’ responses reflected a process by which adolescents may differentiate the types of problems they may disclose to parents (e.g., cheating) and the types of problems they would not disclose to parents (e.g., physical abuse). Similar patterns of negotiating disclosure or secrecy have also been noted for adolescent Latina’s in relation to communication about sexual topics with their mothers where they may choose to remain silent or shy away from discussing sensitive and personal topics so as to avoid discomfort, embarrassment, shame, or punishment (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2006; Lefkowitz, Boone, Au, Sigman, 2003; Miller, Kotchick, Dorsey, Forehand, & Ham, 1998; O’Sullivan, Meyer-Bahlburg, & Watkins, 2001; Richardson, 2004).

Parent Discomfort. Parents within the present study also noted discomfort particularly in response to sensitive topics, such as sex. Some of the discomfort could be attributed to parent’s own experiences talking (or not talking) about sex within their family of origin. This finding is
consistent with past research related to parent-adolescent conversations about sex (Eastman, Corona, Ryan, Warsofsky, & Schuster, 2005).

**Adolescent Concern over Parental Response.** An important theme that emerged as a barrier for adolescent girls in seeking help from parents included the worry about parental response. Latina adolescents described fearing angry reactions (e.g., emotions such as yelling or screaming) and punishments from parents in response to talking about problems in dating relationships. Some adolescents were concerned that parents would blame them, look down upon them, judge them, or lose trust in them for having experienced dating abuse or dating violence. Other teens also worried about how the disclosure of having experienced an abusive or violent dating problem could hurt their parents or make their parents feel bad. This theme was reflected in the responses of all but three adolescent participants and appeared as a top theme from the within group analyses regardless of birth country status or acculturation status. Therefore, consistent with previous research, the concerns that adolescents have regarding parents’ reactions appeared to be salient to their beliefs about barriers to seeking help from parents (Black, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, & Weisz, 2008; Gallopin & Leigh, 2009; Weisz, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, & Black, 2006; Ocampo, Shelley, & Jaycox, 2007; Wolf, Ly, Hobart & Kernic, 2003; Zwicker, 2002).

Interestingly, only Latina adolescents’ responses were reflective of the theme of worry about parental response as a barrier to seeking help from parents. The fact that mothers’ responses were not reflective of this theme may suggest that they saw other barriers as being more relevant to their conversations with their daughters (e.g., feel uncomfortable or not knowing how to talk about it). However, adolescents may be at even higher risk of experiencing dating violence as a result of these kinds of barriers to speaking with parents and there is a need
for parents to help break the barriers down. For instance, two links to adolescents’ worries about parental responses may include wanting to avoid feelings of shame (e.g., feeling like they are letting their parent down) or the fear of punishment. Past research suggests that adolescents’ perceive shame to be a barrier to communication within family relationships and adolescents who experiences feelings of letting their parents down or parental rejection are at higher risk of being in a dating relationships characterized by reciprocal dating violence (Chiodo et al, 2012; Martin, Houston, Mmari, & Decker, 2011). In addition, from the literature on parent-adolescent communication about sex, we know that Latina teens are particularly at risk for factors that discourage effective mother-daughter communication about sexual topics (e.g., fear of being accused of sexual misconduct, shame, and punishment) (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2006; Hutchinson, 2002; Menses, Orrell-Valente, Guendelman, Oman, & Irwin, 2006). These barriers place adolescent Latinas at increased risk for making unhealthy relationship decisions some of which (e.g., being sexually promiscuous) are linked to increased risk for experiencing dating violence (Decker, Raj, & Silverman, 2007; Eaton, Davis, Barrios, Brenner, & Noonan, 2007; Silverman, Decker, & Raj, 2007). Taken together, the results from the present study are consistent with previous literature related to parent-adolescent communication about sex, where the emphasis is not just on what parents say but how they say it and how skilled parents are at negotiating the problems that teenagers present to them (Whitaker, Miller, May, & Levin, 1999). In addition, the results highlight the importance of understanding from parents’ perspectives the factors that they see as barriers to communicating with their adolescents so as to promote change from all angles.

The current study reflected mothers’ desires for their daughters to seek help if they experienced a problem in a dating situation and a preference for daughters to come to a parent
first. However, the current study’s results in regards to barriers to communication suggests that parents who do not regulate their emotions effectively or are not aware of how their expressions of emotions act as a barrier, may be missing out on opportunities to engage in communication with their daughters about problems in dating relationships. In addition, research suggests that modeling of effective emotion regulation by parents can play an instrumental role on their children’s ability to regulate their emotions and further influence their socioemotional functioning (e.g., how they handle problem solving within relationships outside of the home). Furthermore, the ability to manage and regulate one’s emotions, particularly within social relationships, can help reduce risk or the inability to organize emotional responses can potentially increase risk for victimization and/or perpetration of aggression or dating violence (Farrell, et al., 2008; Luecken, Roubinov, & Tanaka, 2013; Pepler, 2012; Sullivan et al., 2012; Wolfe & Foshee, 2003). These findings also suggest that there is great value in prevention and intervention programs that focus on preparing both parents and adolescents for initiating and tolerating uncomfortable conversations (e.g., guidance or tips on how to bring up the topic, emotion regulation techniques). Such strategies may remove some of the barriers that hinder parent-adolescent communication about dating violence and promote more open and trusting communication.

**Closeness and Trust within the Parent-Adolescent Relationship.** In relation to supports to parent-adolescent communication about problems in dating relationships, the current study’s findings suggest that adolescents feel encouraged to speak with parents when they feel close to their parent and that they can trust their parent. A second emergent support theme that was commonly represented by the responses of Latina adolescents and their mothers was having an established pattern of communication. Given some of the barriers of concerns with discussing
sensitive topics (e.g., discomfort, awkwardness, fear of parental reactions) this theme is particularly encouraging for parent-adolescent communication. More specifically, the theme of having an established pattern of communication was not only reflective of conversations about dating violence but rather covered a wide range of different topics (e.g., conversations about dating, problems in dating relationships, and other sensitive topics). Adolescents even noted that having had conversations with a parent about seemingly innocuous topics and sharing similar interests (e.g., starting out laughing, sharing interest in music) could encourage them to seek help from parents when problems arise. These findings are important because they suggest that adolescents and parents can start having conversations with topics with which they feel comfortable and confident addressing and build from there. Past research has documented how important it is to get parents and adolescents talking about sensitive topics as established and repeated parent-child communication about sensitive topics, such as sex, can influence the relationship decisions that adolescents make (Baumeister, Flores, & Marin, 1995; Corona, Lefkowitz, Sigman, & Romo, 2005). In addition, the current results suggest that having had past conversations was important for adolescents to feel comfortable speaking with parents. Therefore, gaining momentum by just having general conversations can be the stepping stones to more intimate and effective communication. Previous studies have linked early parent-child communication, openness, and a history of communication as predictive of future conversations and a support for moving conversations from neutral to more sensitive topics (Beckett et al., 2010; Hutchinson, Jemmott, Jemmott, Braverman, & Fong, 2003; Karofsky, Zeng, & Kosorok, 2001; Wilson, Dalberth, Koo, & Gard, 2010).

The Influence of Culture and Acculturation on Barriers and Supports. Latina adolescents’ and their mothers’ responses typically focused on mother-adolescent relationships
and rarely referenced father-adolescent relationships in regards to communication about dating and dating problems, a finding that is consistent with past research (Angera, Brookins-Fisher, & Inungu, 2008; Daddis & Randolph, 2010; Raffaelli & Green, 2003; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1999). This occurrence may be reflective of traditional Latino cultural values where women are assigned the role of managing children and the household. In addition, there may be general discomfort felt by adolescents in seeking help from their fathers for sensitive topics. However, a few adolescent daughters made mention of feeling comfortable speaking with their father. These findings coupled with the findings that adolescents will feel more comfortable talking about more sensitive topics once communication is established, suggest that father-adolescent relationships could also benefit from such supports. For example, adolescent girls could become more comfortable speaking with their fathers once fathers show increased interest, support, and reliability. These findings are reflective of previous research that has shown that parents (including fathers) who are open, skilled in the topic of conversation, and comfortable speaking with their daughters about sexual topics in general may increase opportunities for their daughters to speak to them about more private sexual matters (Beckett et al., 2010; Wilson, et al., 2010). In addition, the current study’s sample of adolescents rated higher on acculturation than not. These findings may be indicative of slightly less traditional views on aspects, such as communication with fathers, and may make it easier for fathers and daughters to connect. More work is needed in this area to identify fathers’ beliefs and perceptions about problems in dating and the barriers and supports to communication between Latina adolescents and their fathers.

**What messages do Latina mothers give their daughters about dating and dating problems?**

A unique feature of the current study was the focus on the messages about dating and dating violence that Latina mothers share with their adolescent daughters. To fully address this
study aim, it was important to address themes of messages about the broader topic of dating and more specifically about problems in dating relationships. Relatively few studies have described the message about dating violence that Latina adolescents receive from their parents.

**Spirituality and Gender Roles.** Although not expressly reported, messages about dating and dating problems between parents and adolescents within this sample revealed influences that were reflective of several Latino cultural values. For instance, factors such as spirituality, a focus on family (i.e., *familismo*), and Latino gender roles (i.e., *marianismo*) emerged throughout themes of parental warnings, just wait, and parental expectations. One the one hand, these factors have been linked to endorsing traditional gender role dating dynamics (e.g., role of submissive female), experiencing dating violence, and experiencing difficulties in communicating with mothers about dating (Adames & Campbell, 2005; Agoff, Herrera, & Castro, 2007; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2008; Lopez, Chesney-Lind, & Foley, 2012; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001; Romo, et al., 2002; Romo, et al., 2004; Ulloa, et al., 2004; Ulloa, et al., 2008). On the other hand, Latino cultural values, such as religiosity, can be protective factors. For example, participants described parental expectations that teens find dating partners of similar spiritual beliefs or religious backgrounds, and that straying from this expectation would be difficult for the teen and the family. Participants were also likely to attend religious services and were active in the church. In addition, research shows that Latina adolescents who endorse religiosity (e.g., are involved in religious activities, and hold traditional dating attitudes) are more likely than Latina girls who do not maintain religious values, to have less sexual experiences and partners and to postpone initial sexual interactions (Edwards, Fehring, Jarrett, & Haglund, 2008; Lefkowitz, Gillen, Shearer, & Boone, 2004; Rostosky, Wilcox, Wright, & Randall, 2004). In return, having less sexual partners and less sexual interactions may buffer the risk for dating violence that was previously noted in
relation to number of sexual partners. These findings are suggestive of future directions for research that build on our current knowledge of barriers and supports by identifying limits or instances when variables might shift to be less adaptive and other strategies should be emphasized in the previous variables place.

**Limits and Boundaries.** One standout feature of many themes related to parental messages focused on maintaining limits and exhibiting modesty, specifically in relation to sexual behaviors. On the one hand, these messages encouraged adolescents to be safe, have self-respect, and appeared as a protective effort by parents to safeguard their daughters. In fact, the tendency for Latino families to demonstrate protectiveness over Latina family members (e.g. particularly young girls and teenage girls) is often tied to cultural gender role beliefs of *marianismo*, maintaining chastity and purity (Edwards et al., 2008; Villarruel, 2007). On the other hand, *marianismo* also encourages Latina females to be obedient, self-sacrificing virgins (Edwards et al., 2008) and past research has linked endorsement of traditional gender roles, like *marianismo*, to increased risk for chronic dating violence (Foshee, et al., 2004; Lichter & McCloskey, 2004). The results of the present study suggested that adolescents who do not comply with family expectations and bring shame upon themselves or on their family may risk family rejection or be deterred from seeking help. This is consistent with research suggesting that adolescents’ worries about being blamed by family and friends or being viewed as responsible for problems that occur in their dating relationships might hinder their decisions to seek help and disclose instances of abuse (Ahrens, Campbell, Ternier-Thames, Wasco, & Sefl, 2007; Davis & Brickman, 1996). The results of Latina adolescent acculturation status across these themes were unexpected given that most adolescent girls rated high on acculturation and one would expect them to reflect responses of looser gender roles, going against parental expectations. However, Latina adolescents also
appeared to reflect these responses that were more indicative of traditional gender roles. It may be that Latina adolescents were also being quite accurate in their recall of messages they have heard as mothers tended to score low on acculturation, and therefore would be expected to hold stronger traditional gender roles and to relay those messages on to their daughters. These findings are important because they reflect the balancing of cultures (including beliefs and messages) that Latina adolescents must negotiate when making decisions about dating relationships.

**What are adolescents’ help-seeking preferences and behaviors with people outside of the parent-adolescent relationship?**

**Help-Seeking Preferences Outside of the Parent-Adolescent Relationship.** The top three help-givers most commonly cited by Latina adolescents as someone they would feel comfortable speaking with included best friends, older brother or sister, and someone within their church. These findings are consistent with past research documenting the help-seeking preferences of Latino youth. For example, previous research has identified the trend for Latina adolescents to seek guidance and help from siblings as a Latino cultural value rooted in *familismo*, given the typical paternal roles of older siblings, particularly brothers as the “men of the house”, within the household (Black & Weisz, 2004). In addition, past research has also noted that adolescents report feeling most comfortable seeking help from family (e.g., older siblings) and friends rather than through formal services (Ashley & Foshee, 2005; Carlson, 1999; Black, Tolman, & Callahan, 2006; Gallopin & Leigh, 2009; Ocampo, Shelly, & Jaycox, 2007).

In contrast to adolescents, the top three help-givers most commonly cited by mothers as someone their daughters should feel comfortable speaking with included the police, maternal aunts, and a therapist or a mental health professional. Given the suggestions and mental health professionals,
help-givers noted by parents were predominantly members of the community. These findings are encouraging as community supports has been found to be increasingly important for teens where, along with parental support, community support may be helpful in buffering the association between victimization and negative outcomes and increase positive outcomes for adolescents (Banyard & Cross, 2008; Eaton, Davis, Barrios, Brenner, & Noonan, 2007; Wingwood, DiClemente, Lang, & Harrington, 2004).

The results from the current study also denote a discrepancy between adolescent and parent perceptions of where a teen should go for help. For example, while adolescents mentioned feeling comfortable seeking help from a friend, only one parent noted her daughter’s friends as a comfortable resource. Conversely, while seven parents identified law enforcement as a resource an adolescent could contact for help, only one adolescent mentioned feeling comfortable seeking help from a police officer and it was based on having an established relationship with the law enforcement official. These findings are consistent with previous research that suggests adolescents are deterred from seeking help from adults or authorities because of unwanted repercussions like getting parents involved or make matters worse (Gallopin & Leigh, 2009; Wolf, Ly, Hobart & Kernic, 2003; Weisz, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, & Black, 2006; Zwicker, 2002). Such discrepancies between parent and adolescent preferences for help-givers may result in adolescents increased avoidance of seeking help from those help-givers that parents prefer because they may not be associated with the supports that teens are looking for (e.g., confidentiality, trust) or teens may be further deterred from seeking help from parents if parents will dissuade them from seeking help from friends. These findings implicate the need for research and prevention programs to help parents and adolescents discuss help-seeking issues
(i.e., where a teen could go for help) prior to needing the resource so that parents and teens have the ability to troubleshoot concerns before a crisis.

Neither mothers nor adolescents identified school personnel within their top three sources of help-givers. One the one hand, this finding is troublesome given that adolescents spend a majority of their weekdays within the school setting. In addition, dating violence can occur within many settings, including the school environment. Having a connection to a help-giver within the academic setting may promote increased safety and promote healthy relationship decisions. On the other hand, recent research has highlighted many deficiencies that school personnel identify in being able to confidently address problems in dating situations (Khubchandani, Price, Thompson, Dake, Wiblishauser, & Telljohann, 2012). These findings suggest that while school personnel may be an option for help-seeking, the quality of help-giving may not yet be adequate as schools are just beginning to identify the barriers they face in addressing topics of teen dating violence. In addition, these findings suggest that school-based dating violence prevention programs are needed in more school settings to address students' needs. Furthermore, dating violence prevention programs also need to increase the ability of school personnel to respond effectively by educating school staff on the warnings signs of unhealthy dating relationships, strategies to increase the trust of students to seek help from them, and problem solving steps to effectively assist students that seek help from them.

**Messages Shared Between Friends.** In relation to friends, Latina adolescents reflected responses that messages between friends regarding problems in dating relationship would focus on advice to attempt to work out the problems in a relationship before breaking up or simply to break up with the dating partner and leave the relationship. Latina adolescents noted they would offer this advice to friends even when general hostility was an issue in a relationship and that
adolescents may even engage personal examples of how they worked through a dating problem to guide a friend. Research suggests that adolescents can benefit from listening to others (e.g., such as peers) to help them guide decision-making around troublesome dating relationship (e.g., decisions whether to ignore problems, fix them, or break up with their partner) (Martsof, Draucker, Bednarz, & Lea, 2011). Similarly, Latina adolescents reflected responses that messages between friends would also include messages to talk to someone about the problem. The responses of Latina adolescents also reflected that in addition to advising friends to speak with someone, a show of support between friends could include acts of peaceful-intention interventions (e.g., speaking directly to the friend’s dating partner) or aggressively motivated interventions (e.g., “beat up the poor dude”) as possible peer responses. These findings are consistent with past research showing that while peers are in unique positions to assist their friends when dating problems arise (e.g., being able to relate, being able to identify other sources of support) peers may also be limited in their capacity to help based on limited life experience and the possibility of escalating problems (Adelman & Kil, 2007; Black, Tolman, Callahan, Saunders, & Weisz, 2008; Ocampo, Shelley, & Jaycox, 2007; Rayburn et al., 2007; Ulloa, Jaycox, Marshall, & Collins, 2004).

Past research has also suggested that the role of peers can influence the types of relationship choices that adolescents make and the types of outcomes that can be expected based on whether peers are supportive or instigate and escalate problems (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; Foshee et al., 2004; Schnurr & Lohman, 2008; Sullivan et al., 2012; Swart, Stevens, & Ricardo, 2002; Zwicker, 2002). Despite good intentions, adolescents’ responses within the present study reflected the potential to engage in actions that could hurt a friend or her dating relations (e.g., victim blaming, asking a friend what she did wrong, or being told by a friend to given in) or
where a friend could give adolescents bad advice (e.g., giving in and thereby maintaining a power imbalance). Future studies should continue to assess the influences that peers have in relation to adolescents’ decision-making about dating and troublesome dating relationships as a means of helping to develop programs that can educate adolescents to be better help-givers.

The need for future studies to address the issues related to help-seeking from peers is particularly important as consistent with other research (Howard & Wang, 2005; Rickert et al., 2001) Latina teens may hesitate in talking to their parents about problems in dating if they fear negative parental reactions or they do not sense that parents can effectively facilitate the conversations. Given that many victims of dating violence do not tend to disclose their dating problems or seek help, our results highlight the importance of informing parents and peers on how to respond when their daughter/friend experiences dating problems.

**Barriers and Supports to Help-Seeking from Others.** Finally, emergent themes of barriers and supports to speaking with non-parents were similar to those that were reflected for parent-adolescent communication. For example, responses were reflective of the importance of factors such as trust level, closeness, and perceptions of ability and competence to help. Past research has documented that teens would feel encouraged to seek help from a service (e.g., resource center) if they were assured there was confidentiality, they feel safe and they felt comfort in doing so (Martin, Houston, Mmari, & Decker, 2011). While adolescents may not approach non-parental help-givers based on separate concerns than those related to help-seeking from parents, the importance of help-givers in regulating their reactions (judgmental) is a common feature across both categories. Future work should target factors that assist help-givers in managing difficult emotions but also target helping adolescent help-seekers to continue seeking help (perhaps from another person) even if they are met with an initial negative reaction.
Summary of Directions for Future Studies

**Operationalizing Dating Violence.** As described throughout the previous section, the findings from the current study point toward several directions for future research. For example, some results suggest areas of focus for the way in which future research study dating aggression and dating violence. Results suggest that research efforts aimed toward understanding adolescents’ meaning of dating violence should take care in considering the terms used to operationalize key variables such as dating violence. In addition, these findings also support research that suggests defining abusive dating behaviors might be better understood across continuums as behaviors. The current findings also support the transition of research focus from one-directional dating abuse to examining reciprocal dating abuse. Future studies should continue to tease apart the nuances of abusive dating behaviors that are perpetrated by females as compared to males.

**Dating Violence, High Risk Behaviors, and Cyber Dating Abuse.** Some suggestions also focused on highlighting the need for research to continue to explore the links between dating violence risk and other high-risk behaviors. In addition, there is a continued need to inform practitioners and communities on the elevated risk for adolescents when they engage in such behaviors. Findings also highlight the urgent need to include cyber dating abuse components in prevention and intervention work as this area of dating aggression is quickly gaining pace and requires increased awareness.

**Interpersonal Behaviors and Family Dynamics.** Another focus of suggestions from the current results focus on interpersonal behaviors and family dynamics. For example, the current results promote the process of exploring the kinds of family rules that are most relevant towards empowering adolescent girls to handle problems in dating situations and to encourage adolescent
girls to seek help. Future studies addressing parental concerns about dating violence and the role of sexual coercion, in particular, should explore and differentiate whether parents’ worries are restricted only to the dating relationship or if they generalize to peer relationships as well. These findings also suggest that there is great value in prevention and intervention programs that focus on preparing both parents and adolescents for initiating and tolerating uncomfortable conversations (e.g., guidance or tips on how to bring up the topic, emotion regulation techniques). These findings implicate the need for research and prevention programs to help parents and adolescents discuss help-seeking issues (i.e., where a teen could go for help) prior to needing the resource so that parents and teens have the ability to troubleshoot concerns before a crisis. More work is also needed in the area of identifying fathers’ beliefs and perceptions about problems in dating and the barriers and supports to communication between Latina adolescents and their fathers.

**Parents and Others as Help-Givers.** Some suggestions also focus on empowering parents and others to assist teens looking for help for problems in their dating relationships. For example, given that many victims of dating violence do not tend to disclose their dating problems or seek help, our results highlight the importance of informing parents and peers on how to respond when their daughter/friend experiences dating problems. Furthermore, while adolescents may not approach non-parental help-givers based on separate concerns than those related to help-seeking from parents, the importance of help-givers in regulating their reactions (judgmental) is a common feature across both categories. Future work should target factors that assist help-givers in managing difficult emotions but also target helping adolescent help-seekers to continue seeking help (perhaps from another person) even if they are met with an initial negative reaction. Furthermore, dating violence prevention programs also need to increase the
ability of school personnel to respond effectively by educating school staff on the warnings signs of unhealthy dating relationships, increasing trust, and effective problem-solving strategies.

**Study Strengths and Limitations**

**Strengths.** Although parent-child communication is associated with positive health outcomes among youth, few studies have examined parent-child communication about dating violence within Latino samples. Moreover, few studies have examined help-seeking preferences among Latino youth. The current study used qualitative methods to obtain richer descriptions of these experiences than what is possible through survey methods. Four major strengths are evident.

First, this study was unique in the attempt to identify Latina mothers’ and daughters’ perceptions about dating and dating violence. Studies that include either parent-only or adolescent-only responses could be beneficial to our growing understanding of how we can help Latina adolescents make healthy relationship choices. Additionally, there is great value in having both perspectives represented within a single study. More specifically, being able to examine mother-daughter dyad responses allows us to assess the similarities and differences of factors that are important for parents and adolescents. This type of information provides additional supports to the creation of effective, culturally relevant, and culturally tailored prevention and intervention programs that target Latino families.

Second, this study also adds to the literature in the area of Latina adolescents’ help-seeking preferences. It is not enough to know whether adolescents will seek help or not for dating violence. The findings from this study suggest that there are many resources available and that there are circumstances under which adolescents may or may not seek help. However, even more important were the findings that reflect what Latina adolescents perceived as barriers and
supports to help-seeking from resources outside of the parent-adolescent relationship. We know that adolescents, in mainstream US-culture, tend to increase their individuation and separation from the family as they mature. Although this process may be different for some Latino families that encourage more traditional, family-based ties, it is still clear that adolescents may not always go directly to parents for support. Thus, being able to examine barriers and supports to help-seeking from resources other than parents is of real value to efforts aimed at promoting effective help-seeking and help-giving.

A third strength includes the study’s use of a qualitative approach. This approach was designed to identify the factors that were most relevant to Latina adolescents and their mothers. The current study represents a contribution to the qualitative literature and to the literature on adolescent dating violence as findings ranged from broad range themes to detailed information and covered a variety of themes that were important to mothers and daughters. In addition, the current study was also relatively diverse across Latino subgroups and representative of six Latin American regions. Despite some similarities, Latino subgroups can also have striking differences within traditions, foods, and customs. Diversity within the study was also reflected in the spread of education levels across parents and adolescents. The present study’s ability to capture the lived experience of participants in the language within which they felt most comfortable was a significant contribution to the qualitative literature on dating violence as it relates to Latina teens. In addition, the presentation of participant’s responses in English and Spanish, when appropriate, was a purposeful strategy to showcase the data in its most original form.

A final strength of this study was that great care was taken in the preparation and implementation of the study to maintain qualitative integrity and cultural sensitivity. For example, qualitative integrity was instilled from the beginning with the training of interviewers
to minimize biases or pulling of particular responses to the use of memos in creating an audit trail, and beyond. In addition, cultural sensitivity was also maintained through the rigorous process of developing the short survey and semi-structured interview (i.e., forward- and back-translations) to awareness of typical Latino customs when entering the interview situations.

**Limitations.** Although the present study provided rich descriptions of the lived experience for this sample of Latina adolescents and their mothers, several limitations should be considered. For example, although Latina adolescents (i.e., female teens) and their mothers provide an essential perspective on beliefs and behaviors of dating violence and help-seeking, it would also be informative to include Latino adolescents (i.e., male teens) and fathers. The perspective of male teens is important given our increased understanding of the prevalence of reciprocal dating violence. In addition, the perspectives of fathers would also be beneficial to separate barriers and supports that may differ between mothers and fathers in relation to communication with their teens. The current study did not differentiate the role of fathers as biological fathers or Stepfathers. It would be informative to differentiate the role of fathers as it relates to the messages that Latina adolescents receive and the barriers and supports to communication with fathers.

Adolescents and mothers also provided rich descriptions of factors related to communication with non-parents (e.g., siblings, friends, school personnel, church representatives). We know current trends show that most teens will not seek help for dating violence experiences and the few that do seek help will turn to non-parental sources (Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2004; Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). While some research has looked into help-seeking related to adolescents in general, few studies have focused just on help-seeking with Latino teens, and even fewer studies have looked at help-givers perceived ability to assist
Latino adolescents in response to problems in dating situations. Latino teens must often find a balance between two cultures, with a different emphasis on each (e.g., Latino culture with its reliance on immediate and extended family as support; American culture with its focus on individuation). It would be important for help-givers (e.g., school personnel, church leaders) to identify and assess their ability to provide culturally tailored help that does not create problems for the teens in other areas of adaptation to two cultures.

Although the sample was relatively diverse in many ways, there was some heterogeneity that could influence interpretations of the study’s findings. For example, Latina adolescents and their mothers were recruited from urban or suburban communities within two metropolitan areas. In addition, 16% of the sample was directly recruited from a church setting and half or more of the participants rated religious attendance from several times a week to almost everyday. Therefore, the majority of participants lived in similar geographic regions and endorsed frequent religious involvement. The frequency of themes that emerged within this sample may be different for Latina adolescents and mothers living in other regions (e.g., rural communities) or for Latino families who are less involved in religious gatherings. In addition, themes may be different for adolescents and parents of other racial/ethnic groups.

It is important to note that Latino subgroups were treated as distinct; however, Latina mothers and daughters who reported having been born in Puerto Rico were also considered to be US born within this study. Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States and is in some ways comparable to American culture. However, there can still be a difference between a Puerto Rican born on the island of Puerto Rico and a Puerto Rican born on the US mainland. Therefore, it is possible that separating those born on the island v. the mainland could reflect some differences in the themes reflected by responses (e.g., due to differences in acculturation status).
Latina adolescents and mothers reported general information on their current relationship status. Most Latina teens reported not being in a current dating relationship and not being sexually active. However, more detailed information regarding their past relationships and present relationships (for those currently dating) could have been useful. Past research has suggested that consideration of the number of dating partners an adolescent has had and the length of dating relationships is important as these factors may be related to beliefs about the acceptance or rejection of violence in dating relationships (Black & Weisz, 2004; Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001). In addition, most mothers reported being married and, thus, living with their husband. More information regarding household compositions could have been useful as descriptions may differ from those of mothers with other household arrangements (e.g., single parents, extended family members living in the home).

When participants were not able to generate examples for dating abuse on their own, probing questions used to facilitate the interviews. This semi-structured interview process allowed the interviewer to access more information from participants than would have been possible otherwise (e.g., without use of probing questions limited details could have been given). Although this method adds to the richness of the data, it may also have influenced the type of examples adolescent and parents gave and may have decreased reports of other types of behaviors that they would consider to be dating violence but did not report.

**Implications for Primary Prevention Programs**

There are many directions in which future research and primary prevention programs (i.e., programs that help to stop violence before it occurs) can go based on the findings from the current study. Most importantly, the findings of the current study expand the field of dating violence prevention, particularly for Latina girls, their families, and their friends. There is a great
need for such programs given the gap in the literature on prevention programs that are designed to address dating violence among Latino adolescents (Enriquez, Kelly, Cheng, Hunter, & Mendez, 2012).

The results of this study consistently reflected overlaps among different forms of abuse or violence in dating relationships so that rarely did a single form of abuse or violence occur without reference to some other form of abuse or violence (e.g., relational aggression overlapped with cyber abuse; pressure to give in overlapped with sexual coercion and controlling or manipulative behaviors). In addition, many forms of dating problems were reflective of various pathways or triggers for the problem (e.g., jealousy, cheating, revenge) or noted to be related to high-risk behaviors (e.g., drug use; sexual promiscuity). These links all point to the multisystemic ways in which dating abuse or dating violence can develop and be maintained. Therefore addressing prevention programs must target all the multiple systems in an adolescent’s daily life. Future work in dating violence prevention for Latino adolescents must address the individual, the family, the school, and the surrounding community or neighborhood. For Latino adolescents, the systems become a little more complicated as Latino adolescents balance having one toe in American culture and one toe in Latino culture. Therefore, Latino cultural variables are essential to include in a prevention program aimed at this population. In addition, given the rise and accessibility of technology and the implications that technology has for crossing barriers, the cyber social setting must also be considered as a target for prevention programmers.

Two dating violence prevention programs currently underway include Dating Matters (Tharp, Burton, Freire, Hall, Harrier, Latzman, et al., 2011) and Familias En Nuestra Escuelas [Families in our Schools] (Enriquez, Kelly, Cheng, Hunter, & Mendez, 2012). Dating Matters is a promising adolescent dating violence prevention program that takes a comprehensive public
health approach to prevention by implementing various aspects of the program into various aspects of teens’ ecology (e.g., evidence based student programs such as Safe Dates are implemented on the individual level, the social relationships level, and the organization level). In addition, Dating Matters takes prevention work to the parents, educators, communications, and policy makers. A unique strength of the Dating Matters program is that it aims to empower local public health departments to make improvements in lowering community and individual risks to dating violence.

Familias En Nuestra Escuelas is notable because it one of only a few programs specifically designed to address Latino interpersonal/dating violence. Components of the program include 14-intervention sessions, and work both in school and within the home. A unique strength of the Families in our Schools program is that incorporated into the interventions are strategies designed to promote positive change through increase of Latino cultural values of ethnic pride (i.e., respect for self, extended family, the community, and Hispanic culture), and other variables (e.g., self-efficacy for control, couple violence, change attitudes about gender).

The current study’s findings support these two kinds of prevention strategies. The results of the current study are reflective of a need for a comprehensive approach given the multisystemic aspects of dating problems and the various areas in which help-givers can exist. In addition, the current results also highlight Latino cultural values (e.g., religiosity) that should be included in culturally tailored prevention programming.

Focusing on Cyber Abuse and Culturally Tailored Programs. In addition, the current study could contribute to these two approaches and to other prevention programs because of its unique perspective on the pervasiveness of dating violence through technology and social networking. Within the present study, the misuse of technology was most relevant in regards to
acts of relational aggression (e.g., forms of bullying, rumors, disclosing private information with the intent of lowering someone’s social standing) that are typically seen as perpetrated by peers but within the current study were perpetrated by dating partners. Despite the prevalence of cyber abuse, components to address cyber abuse do not appear to be represented in current primary prevention programs. Thus, the results of this study suggest that primary prevention programs addressing empowering Latina adolescents to make healthy relationship choices may have to include a comprehensive approach that takes into account Latino cultural values and also goes beyond physical barriers to include interventions within cyber-space. In addition, the current study’s findings suggest that engagement with Latina mothers, and daughters, can be easily facilitated when they are able to express their thoughts in the language of their choice. Therefore, having a program that is culturally tailored may require bilingual staff to increase engagement of all available Latino participants.

Empowering Latina Adolescents and Improving Problem-Solving Skills. A few more specific strategies could be implemented in regards to adolescents, parents, and friends. First, on the individual level adolescent Latinas could benefit from individual and/or group-based workshops aimed at empowering Latina adolescents by normalizing the process of acculturation and helping them gain awareness as to how factors such as acculturation and the balancing of two cultural demands may influence the decisions they make. In addition, Latina adolescents may benefit from interventions aimed at positive affirmations and building self-respect, a factor that would be in line with familismo values. In addition, adolescents could benefit from education on all forms of problems in dating relationships (including physical harm, poor fit or incompatibility, and general hostility). Furthermore, adolescent Latinas could also benefit from increased education on how to problem-solve forms of abuse that can occur through cell phones,
text messages, emails, or social networking sites. Such interventions may require teens to practice through in-vivo strategies (e.g., responding on a mock social networking site to an incident regarding a rumor) so that they can practice the skills in the most realistic setting and be more prepared to act if the problem should arise in real life.

**Improving the Parent-Adolescent Relationship.** Second, specific strategies can also target parents alone, and the parent-adolescent relationship. Latina mothers could benefit from strategies that help them identify ways to help them tolerate discomfort and feel empowered to respond to any problem their adolescent could present. Interventions can engage the use of religiosity (e.g., spiritual devotionals) to increase comfort if values are in line with religious involvement. In addition, mothers could benefit from learning who the most effective help-givers around them may be so that they can refer daughters to speak to someone if daughters are not comfortable coming to them. This might even include an older sibling. Given Latina adolescents’ worries about parental responses, Latina mothers could also benefit from becoming aware of topics that may trigger more emotional responses. Then facilitators could guide conversations between Latina mothers and adolescents. These conversations could be short but frequent and should start out on neutral topics but slowly build into more meaningful dialogues. Perhaps, role plays between mothers and daughters could facilitate getting past the initial discomfort and set them down the road towards building the established communication patterns that will serve as supports to communication later on. Throughout the parent-adolescent component it could also be beneficial for participants to discuss aspects of their acculturation process with each other, to gain awareness and to gain a better perspective on conflict that may arise between parents and adolescents related to differing perspectives on culture. In addition, interventions between
parents and adolescents could incorporate values of *familismo* to promote family unity, strength, and trust.

**Improving Parental Monitoring.** Finally, interventions between mothers and daughters could also include a component related to helping mothers become more informed of their daughters’ cyber social networks. Although care must be taken so that adolescent girls do not shut down in response to feeling a breakdown of privacy, increased parental monitoring of adolescents’ cyber experiences can help mothers and daughters talk about problems that arise through that avenue.

**Educating Peers as Responders and Referral Sources.** Finally, interventions could also address adolescent girls and their friends. Given the fact that most adolescent girls do not seek help, and when they do they seek help from friends or non-parents, it is important to help prepare friends to address issues that may arise. Dating violence prevention programs can be effective by educating peers on how to recognize when dating problems are becoming abusive or violent. In addition, peers can also be educated on who to recommend an adolescent speak with or how to access a help-giver. In addition, teens and peers can benefit from learning skills related to address difficult social situations such as relational aggression that occurs through social networking sites or other forms of technology.
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Appendix A

Dating Violence Interview for Adolescents – English

Relationships and Problems in Dating Situations

We are interested in the types of problem situations that adolescents may deal with in the context of dating relationships. These problem situations may only occur only once or repeatedly over time. These situations are not unusual or unique to certain people, but are common things that many adolescents your age face and may have problems figuring out what to do in the situation.

1. What does it mean to “date” someone? What does the word “dating” mean to you?

2. Have you ever dated someone?

3. I want to know what your parents think about dating. Do your parents allow you to date yet?
   a. What does your mother say about dating?
   b. What does your father say about dating?

4. When you hear the phrase “problems in dating situations” what comes to mind? Images? Thoughts?

5. What are some other examples of problems that teens face in dating situations? (e.g., what are behaviors people use in dating situations to hurt or harm their partner?) Use the following probes (a, b, and/or c) to probe for additional types of dating abuse if participant is not giving examples of all 3.
   a. Probe for physical/sexual abuse: What about things like physically hitting or shoving? Or things like date rape or touching another person in a sexual way without their consent? What other behaviors may be physically or sexually harmful in a dating situation?
   b. Probe for emotional/psychological abuse: What about things like threats or spreading rumors? What other behaviors may be emotionally or psychologically harmful in a dating situation?
   c. Probe for technology and social media: What are ways that technology (cell phones, email, internet) or social networking sites (e.g., MySpace, Facebook) can be used to harm a dating partner?

6. If you experienced problems in a dating situation, like the ones we just discussed, who could you talk to about the problems? Where could you go for help?
a. How would you feel talking to your friends about problems in dating situations?
   i. What would your friends say about problems in dating situations?
   ii. What would you tell a friend if she or he experienced problems in a dating situation?

b. How would you feel talking to your mother about problems in dating situations?

c. How would you feel talking to your father about problems in dating situations?

d. What have your parents told you about problems in dating situations? *If participant has trouble answering this question or reports that parents have not said anything ask, What do you think other parents tell their daughters about problems in dating situations?*
   i. What might make it difficult to talk to parents about problems in dating situations?
   ii. What might make it easier to talk to parents about problems in dating situations?

e. Who else could you talk to about problems in dating situations? *Probing for community members such as teachers, religious leaders, etc. How would you or another teenager feel talking to this (insert community member) about problems in dating situations?*

7. I want you to think about times that you have seen adolescent girls experience a problem in a dating situation through TV, movies, music videos, or read about it on the Internet or in a magazine. Describe what you saw or read.
   a. What did you think about what you saw or read? Did it seem realistic – why or why not? 
   b. How might those images influence what Latina adolescents think about problems in dating situations?

We are also interested in how being a Latina girl affects problems in dating situations.

8. How does your cultural background, being a Latina, affect how you think about problems in dating relationships or how your parents think about problems in dating relationships?

Finally, we are also interested in the good things that you expect from dating relationships.

9. What types of qualities do you want someone you date to have?

10. What types of qualities do your parents want in someone you date to have?
Appendix B

Dating Violence Interview for Mothers – English

Relationships and Problems in Dating Situations

We are interested in the types of problem situations that adolescents may deal with in the context of dating relationships. These problem situations may only occur once or repeatedly over time. These situations are not unusual or unique to certain people, but are common things that many adolescents face and may have problems figuring out how to handle.

1. What does it mean to “date” someone? What does the word “dating” mean to you?

2. Has your daughter ever dated someone?

3. I want to know what you think about your daughter dating. Do you allow her to date yet?
   a. What do you tell your daughter about dating?
   b. What does your daughter’s father tell her about dating?

4. When you hear the phrase “problems in dating situations” what comes to mind? Images? Thoughts?

5. What are some examples of problems that teenage girls experience in dating situations? (e.g., what are behaviors teenagers use in dating situations to hurt or harm their partner?) Use the following probes (a, b, and/or c) to probe for additional types of dating abuse if participant is not giving examples of all 3.
   a. Probe for physical/sexual abuse: What about things like physically hitting or shoving? Or things like date rape or touching another person in a sexual way without their consent? What other behaviors may be physically or sexually harmful in a dating situation?
   b. Probe for emotional/psychological abuse: What about things like threats or spreading rumors? What other behaviors may be emotionally or psychologically harmful in a dating situation?
   c. Probe for technology and social media: What are ways that technology (cell phones, email, internet) or social networking sites (e.g., MySpace, Facebook) can be used to harm a dating partner?
6. If your daughter experienced problems in a dating situation, like the ones we just discussed, who could she talk to about the problems? Where could she go for help? Probing for family members as well as community members.

7. How would you feel talking to your daughter about problems in dating situations?
   a. What have you told your daughter about problems in dating situations?
   b. What might make it difficult to talk to your daughter about problems in dating situations?
   c. What might make it easier to talk to your daughter about problems in dating situations?

We are also interested in how being a Latina affects problems in dating situations.

8. How does your daughter’s cultural background, being a Latina, affect how she thinks about problems in dating relationships?

9. How does your own cultural background, being a Latina, affect how you think about problems in dating relationships?

Finally, we are also interested in the good things that you and your daughter expect from dating relationships.

10. What types of qualities do you want in someone your daughter dates to have?

11. What types of qualities do you think your daughters wants in someone she dates to have?
Vita

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