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Kimberly S. Reeb

Rochester Institute of Technology, ksr5439@rit.edu

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Parent-teen communication about dating behaviors and its relationship to teenage dating behaviors: From the teen's perspective

Kimberly S. Reeb
Rochester Institute of Technology

Research on parent-teen communication and teen sexual behavior has found that differing levels of parent-teen communication play a role in shaping a teen's subsequent behaviors. This study examined teen-reported parent-teen communication about dating behaviors and its relationship to the teen's own dating behaviors. The differences and relationships among communication between mother and father and male and female participants is reported. 1st year college students were invited by e-mail to participate in an on-line survey about parent communication topics and different dating behaviors. The college student-based sample consisted of 90 teens aged 18-19. Results present correlations and differences between the teen-reported frequencies of topics of parent-teen communication between teen females and males and the frequencies of dating behaviors presented correlations and differences between themselves and the communication topics.

Teenagers haven't always been a part of our history. The word "teenager" was first used in 1944 to describe young people age 14-18. During the Second World War, teens were taken out of the work environment and placed in school. This changed how much parents communicated with their teen because they now had many other adult figures in their lives. The "invention" of the teenager coincided with the Second World War, and for the first time youth had become its own target market, meaning that it had become a discrete age group with its own rituals, rights, and demands (Savage, 2007, p. xv). This age group has gained increasing attention since 1944, not only from marketing agencies but also from scholars who conduct research studies about teenagers. Parent-teen communication research continues to grow because there is a need to understand the importance of the interaction.

Violence in teenage dating relationships is a growing problem that gains more attention every year from schools and youth organizations. Teenage dating violence is a sub-category of domestic violence. Teenage dating relationships are known to begin during the pre-teen phase; as the teen ages, the intimacy of these relationships intensifies. The United States Department of Justice defines "domestic violence," or "intimate partner violence" as physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former intimate partner or spouse. This type of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007). Recently, in 2006, Teenage Research Unlimited partnered with Liz

Claiborne Inc. and conducted a survey on Teenage Dating Violence among teens aged 13-18. The survey revealed that “significant numbers of teens across America are experiencing rampant emotional, verbal, sexual, and physical abuse in their dating relationships” and that “the problem gets worse as teens get older and involved in more serious relationships.” The survey also found that “teens are accepting the abuse as normal” (Claiborne, 2007). Studies have found that parent-teen communication can impact their teen’s sexual behaviors (Eisenberg, Sieving, Bearinger, Swain, & Resnick, 2006; Whitaker, Miller, May, & Levin, 1999; Aspy, Vesely, Oman, Rodine, Marshall, & McLeroy 2007). The findings suggest that parent-teen communication may also have the ability to impact a teen’s behavior and decisions regarding other risky behaviors, such as smoking and drinking, (Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Dittus, & Bouris, 2006; Ennett, Bauman, Foshee, Pemberton, & Hicks, 2001; Dutra, Miller, & Forehand, 1999) which are behaviors known to increase violence in teenage intimate relationships (Sanders, 2003, p. 34) The present study examines the roles that parent-teen communication play in what behavioral choices teens make about and while in dating relationships.

Research Questions

1. What are the relationships and differences between frequencies of teen-reported levels of parental communication about dating behaviors and frequency of engagement of teen-reported dating behaviors?
2. How do the frequencies of teen-reported parental communication and teen-reported dating behaviors differ between female and male responses?
3. What is the relationship between the frequencies of teen-reported positive and negative parent-teen communication and the teens’ dating behaviors?
4. What is the difference between frequencies of teen-reported mother parental communication and father parental communication?

Rationale

Personal

I believe that there is a lack of awareness, and therefore prevention, of teenage dating violence. I was fourteen years old and in ninth grade when my unhealthy relationship began. My boyfriend was seventeen years old and he slowly became verbally, emotionally, and physically abusive. If I had been informed about the warning signs and cycles that are part of dating violence, I would have known that I wasn’t the only one in a bad relationship and that there are places for victims to get help. When I look back at the way my parents attempted to get me out of the relationship I realize that my mom was the active one, whereas my dad didn’t really know how to handle the situation. I suspect that if they would have had a

greater awareness of the dangers of dating violence, and a better communication style about why I should leave, I might have listened better.

Social

Growing up today is very tough for teenagers. One of the hardest issues that teenagers have to deal with is the boyfriend/girlfriend drama that exists in middle school and high school. Previous research has found that parents have an opportunity in the early teen years to influence their teens' behavior and choices concerning sex and other risk-behaviors (Eisenberg et al., 2006; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2006). There is great need for research detailing what impact parents can have on their teens' dating relationship behaviors. The research findings could also assist schools and peers in creating and establishing new ways of approaching the prevention of teen dating violence.

Scholarly

Parent-teen communication research has been gaining attention and has focused on its impact on teen behavior. One subject of parent-teen communication that is gaining attention is sexual behavior. Studies have found that parent-teen communication about sexual behaviors, the context of it, and the timing may lower their teen's sexual activity, if not deter it from starting if discussed early enough and in the correct context (Dutra et al., 1999; Aspy et al., 2007). However, the review of literature finds little attention has been paid to the importance of effective communication between parents and teens and teen dating behavior. Research conducted about the relationship between parent-teen communication and its impact on teens' dating behaviors offers further understanding of what role parent's play in influencing their teens' dating relationship. The present research begins a program of investigation into the parent-teen communication environment to establish new ways to work with teens to prevent dating violence. The results will determine the relationship between the frequency of teen-reported parental communication about dating behaviors and the frequency of engagement of teen-reported dating behaviors, opening the door for scholars to conduct further research on the impact that parents can have in preventing their teen from engaging in negative dating behaviors.

Literature Review

Communication between parents and teens is known to be a critical part in a teenager's upbringing. The search process and terms used for the literature review are presented in Appendix A. Present studies that focus on the parent-teen communication relationship address its impact on sexual behaviors and risk-behaviors such as smoking cigarettes and drinking. The studies do not address the relationship between parental communication and teen relationship dating behaviors. In November 2006 the American Bar Association (ABA) Steering Committee on the unmet legal Needs of Children sponsored a national summit in Washington, D.C., on teen dating violence (Tebo, 2005, p.60). The summit led to

the creation of the first Teen Dating Violence Prevention Week, which was held the week of February 6-10, 2006 (Tebo, 2005, p.60). The establishment of the prevention week hopes to generate new awareness about the problem of teen dating violence. Teenagers are able to make their own decisions, and when teens are at school, or at social gatherings it is easy for them to make negative decisions leading to negative behaviors.

Parent-teen communication about sexual behaviors has been found to have both positive and negative effects on teen sexual behaviors. The most substantial body of parent-teen communication research concerns sexual behavior. This stems from teen dating relationships. Sexual behavior tends to occur after a dating relationship is formed. Studies have skipped over the relationships and focused on sexual behavior and risk. Whitaker et al. (1999) addressed the importance of parent-teenager discussions and how it can influence teenage partner communication about sexual risk and condom use (p. 117). The results showed that sexuality discussions were positively related to partner communication, as were risk discussions (p. 118) Their findings underscore the importance of examining both the content and the process of parent-teenager communication about sex to arrive at a more complete understanding of how that communication affects teenagers' sexual behavior (p. 120). The need to use specific content subjects to assess the importance of parent-teenager communication is presented by Whitaker et al. The current study addresses this by measuring the reported frequency of parent-teen communication, as perceived by the teen subject, categorized by topic.

Timing is important in parent-teen communication. Eisenberg et al. (2006) studied whether parents' perception of need—that is, their belief that their adolescent has ever been involved in a romantic relationship—is associated with their communication on six sexuality topics (p. 896). In comparing parents who discussed sex with their teen, it was found that “parents who believed their teen was romantically involved were up to 2.5 times more likely to have talked with them about sex-related topics included in the study compared to those who believed their child had never been in a romantic relationship” (Eisenberg, 2006, p. 898). This suggests that in parent-teen communication there are peak opportunities of discussing sexual behavior, “parents may miss important opportunities to influence behavior, and should initiate conversations about sexuality before they believe their child to be romantically involved” (Eisenberg et al., 2006, p. 893). Teenage dating violence prevention can be assessed by addressing the need and importance of parent-teen discussion about dating behaviors and what dating behaviors teens' engage in based on the level of frequency of communication.

Sexual behavior generally occurs once a romantic relationship begins. Parent-teen communication might have the ability to influence positive or negative lifestyle choices among their teens at this time. Parents can discuss behaviors with their teen with the intent that they are making a positive impact, but if parents do not address the proper subjects in the right manner then the impact might be negative.

Researchers Aspy, Vesely, Oman, Rodine, Marshall and McLeroy (2007) collected data from 1350 randomly selected households in inner-city areas and interviewed a parent and teen from each household in separate rooms (p. 451). Their overall findings support the idea that parents have the opportunity and ability to influence their children's sexual behavior decisions. They found that "youth were more likely to report having had sexual intercourse if they said their parents only some of the time or never: a) talked about problems, b) understood their point of view, c) had high expectations for them, d) loved them and wanted good things for them, and e) set clear rules" (p. 454). However, family communication topics, including both birth control use and STD prevention, tended to increase the likeliness of the youth reporting they have had intercourse (p. 454). These findings suggest that more research is needed to further investigate how different levels of parent communication impact their teens' decisions.

Parent-teen communication can also influence risk behaviors such as cigarette smoking, drinking alcohol, and engaging in risky sexual behaviors. Dutra et al. (1999) studied sexual risk taking behavior by addressing what the relationship is between parent-adolescent sexual communication and adolescent sexual risk taking behavior (p. 65). The difference between mother and father communication was also addressed. The researchers found that "there was substantial variability across the discussion of topics, and adolescents reported that a higher percent of mothers discussed each sex related topic than did fathers" (p. 63). The study also found that as the process of sexual communication with mother became more open and receptive, the frequency of sexual-risk behavior decreased (p. 64). Even though this study found that fathers did not have as high an influence on risk-taking behaviors, it does raise the question that teens might feel more comfortable talking to their mother about sex. At the same time, when discussing the present study of dating behaviors, it is relevant to address what impact fathers have on their son's or daughter's dating behaviors. The present study will expand on the findings of Dutra et al. (1991).

Some risk-behavior studies have found a relationship between parent communication and teen risk behaviors (Ennett et al., 2001; Ramos et al., 2006). One study reported that parent-child communication about tobacco and alcohol use is multidimensional and that the content and timing of communication may be important when considering the effect on adolescent behavior (Ennett et al., 2001, p. 11). Another study assessing the dimensions of parental expertise, trustworthiness, and accessibility in parent communication as measured by cigarette smoking and the engagement in sexual intercourse, found that adolescent perceptions of the dimensions were most critical in predicting behavior (Ramos et al., 2006, p. 1245). This research presents support that when addressing the relationship between parental communication and teen behavior it is important to measure the *teen-reported* perception of parental communication and *teen-reported* behaviors.

The reviewed literature presents different forms of parent-teen/adolescent communication research. Each study found positive and negative parental communication influences on teen sexual and risk-taking behaviors. Research on sexual behavior and parent-teen communication supports the present study's premise that parents have the ability to influence their teens' dating decisions about romantic/non-romantic relationships.

Methods

Data was collected from a convenience sample of 99 first year college students attending Rochester Institute of Technology. Participants were recruited through an e-mail invitation sent to them by their First Year Enrichment Teacher (FYE). The director of FYE sent an e-mail to the FYE teachers asking them to forward the e-mail invitation to their students. The e-mail provided a link to the on-line survey. It is unknown how many FYE teachers forwarded the survey invitation to their students. A pilot test was done on the survey to ensure that the questions were comprehensible and to verify an approximate amount of time needed to complete the survey. The Institutional Review Board at the Rochester Institute of Technology, which requires evidence that the privacy and confidentiality of the participant's responses are ensured, approved this research.

Measures

The survey consisted of three sections. The first section asks about the degree of frequency that the teen engages in communication with their parent for each of five positive and five negative subjects. The second section asks about the levels of frequency that the teen experienced ten different dating behaviors. The last section collected demographics of the participants for statistical purposes.

The survey consisted of closed-ended statements to help move the participants through the study and to ensure that the participant isn't sitting on the fence about a response, they are instead forced to pick one of the four options. The variables measured in the survey were (1) the frequency of parental communication about positive subjects, (2) the frequency of parental communication about negative subjects, (3) the frequency of the teen's engagement of positive dating behaviors, and (4) the frequency of the teen's engagement of negative dating behaviors.

In Part I, the variable is the level of reported frequency with which parent communicate about dating behaviors as reported by the teen. This section of the survey lists different types of conversations they may or may not have with their parents. Previous studies have used established parent communication scales (Eisenberg et al., p. 896). Eisenberg et al. modified the pre-established scale to examine if parents are missing the opportunity to discuss sexual behaviors with their teen. They asked parents about a series of six topics related to sexual behaviors. To test the level of teen-reported parental communication, this study modified the number and the topics of the six different types of communication that teens have with their parents. Five positive and five negative subjects of

communication were presented on the survey. The frequency of parental communication about dating behaviors was measured by dividing the subjects into positive and negative subjects of communication.

To measure the difference between the teens communication with mom and dad separately, and their respective levels of frequency, Part I of the survey provided a place for the teen to respond with regard to their mom and their dad. The questions in Part I were measured using a four-point frequency scale of: 1. Almost daily; 2. Once a week; 3. Once or twice a week; and 4. Never or almost never, based on the structure of Dutra et al. (1999).

Part II of the survey looked at the dating behaviors of the responding teens. The survey had a variety of positive and negative behaviors and activities for which the teens reported their frequency of engagement using a general scale of four points: 1. Almost daily; 2. Once a week; 3. Once or twice a week; and 4. Never or almost never.

Procedures

Participants used the survey link provided in an e-mail to access the survey. A list of the survey question can be found in appendix B. Once the participants received the e-mail and clicked the link, they signed into the survey using their RIT username and password. Each participant should not have taken any longer than 15 minutes to complete the 34-question survey. The end of the survey provided resources for the RIT counseling center in case the survey provoked uncomfortable feelings. The data was collected using an on-line survey program named Clipboard. The students were kept anonymous. RIT's DCE username and password was required to make sure each person only took the survey once and not for respondent identification.

Analysis

Results

Of the 90 participants in the convenience sample, 46% were age 18 and 51% were age 19. Caucasian was the largest demographic group (80%). There was a single 20 year old and one unreported age. Male respondents totaled 60%. The collected data was processed using SPSS 16 for Windows. A standard alpha of 0.05 was used to determine statistical significance.

RQ: 1 asks, "What are the relationships and differences between frequencies of teen-reported levels of parental communication about dating behaviors and frequency of engagement of teen-reported dating behaviors?"

This was the only research question that was non-significant. The study does show relationships and differences among each group. Positive dating behaviors were shown to have a relationship with other positive dating behaviors. The communication topics that related to a few dating behaviors are discussed under

Research Question 2. The results were not significant to report a relationship between high and low frequency levels of parent-teen communication about dating behaviors and high and low frequency levels of teen engagement in dating behaviors. The findings that came about from this question are addressed further.

RQ: 2 asked, “How do the frequencies of teen-reported parental communication and teen-reported dating behaviors differ between female and male responses?”

An independent sample t-test compared the difference between females and males and their reported communication topics and reported dating behaviors. The question “How often did your mom talk to you about standing up for yourself?” had statistical significance at $p = .015$. The teen males reported they talked with their moms about standing up for themselves once or twice a week (mean = 3.12, $n = 60$) and the teen females reported between one a week and once or twice a month (mean = 2.59, $n = 39$). Males and females differed ($p = .037$) in responses to “How often did your mom talk to you about emotional abuse?” The mean difference was $-.39$. Teen females reported that their mom talked to them about emotional abuse once or twice a month (mean = 3.23, $n = 99$). Teen males reported close to never or almost never for how often their mom talked to them about emotional abuse. (Mean = 3.62, $n = 99$). Males and females also differed ($p = .006$) in responses to “How often did you talk to your mom about physical abuse?” ($p = .006$). The females answered with a mean of 3.33 and the males answered with a mean of 3.62. In this question the males reported their mom talked with them about physical abuse never or almost never. This is consistent with “How often did you talk to your dad about physical abuse?” This question has a p -value of 0.050. The females answered with a mean of 3.54 and the males answered with a mean of 3.83. In a previous study Dutra et al. (2007) found that “there was substantial variability across the discussion of topics, and adolescents reported that a higher percent of mothers discussed each sex related topic than did fathers” ($p. 63$). The present study found this to be consistent among the reported dating behavior communication. The four questions that were significant also showed that the teen girl discussed all of the topics with their mom more than their dad.

RQ: 3 asked, “What is the relationship between the frequencies of teen-reported positive and negative parent-teen communication and dating behaviors?”

A Pearson Correlation test measured the parent-teen topics of communication and the teen-reported dating behaviors. When examining the positive and negative topics and behaviors, many correlated with one another. The strongest significance was between “How often did your dad talk to you about standing up for yourself?” correlates ($r = .573$, $p < .001$) with “How often did your dad talk to you about respecting yourself?” Both reported communication frequency with the teen to be once or twice a month. Dad talking about respecting yourself also correlates positively ($r = .560$, $p < .001$) with “How often did your dad talk to you about being an individual?” Some more positive or comfortable communication questions that had correlations are: “How often did your dad talk to you about

standing up for yourself?" ($r = .489, p < .001$) and "How often did your dad talk to you about getting good grades?"

Three negative conversation topics also correlate. "How often did your dad talk to you about emotional abuse?" ($r = .612, p < .001$) and "How often did your dad talk to you about verbal abuse?" Both scored between once or twice a month, and never or almost never, leaning more towards never or almost never. "How often did your dad talk to you about physical abuse?" correlates ($r = .575, p < .001$) to "How often did your dad talk to you about verbal abuse?" Positive and Negative conversations both correlate in varying ways. These correlations will be further explored in the discussion section of this paper.

Aside from the parent-teen communication topics, frequencies of teen-reported behaviors correlate positively as well. The statement "My dating partner complimented me" correlates to the following other statements: "My dating partner respected me" ($r = .813, p < .001$); "My dating partner encouraged me to achieve my dreams" ($r = .501, p < .001$); "My dating partner and I spent our free time together" ($r = .569, p < .001$); and "My dating partner and I spent time with mutual friends" ($r = .569, p < .001$).

Five negative behaviors were found to correlate: "My dating partner threatened me verbally" ($r = .254, p = .014$) and "My dating partner put me down." Verbal abuse ($r = .407, p < .001$) and physical abuse have a lower significance than the positive behaviors, but the significance is important because these topics were infrequently talked about to their daughters and sons. Females and males did not differ enough to mention. Out of 99 participants, at the most 30% reported that their parent talked to them about different kinds of abuse maybe once or twice a month. Verbal and Physical abuse were reported to happen never or almost never among the respondents. Verbal abuse and "My dating partner accused me of seeing other people" have a slightly lower correlation ($r = .239, p = .022$).

Teen-reported mother-parental communication topics correlated differently than father-parental communication. Mother conversations about "standing up for yourself" ($r = .661, p < .001$) and "respecting yourself" have a strong positive correlation between the two. Conversations about the "dangers of drinking" ($r = .644, p < .001$) and the "dangers of smoking" and the "dangers of smoking" ($r = .521, p < .001$) and "verbal abuse" both correlated significantly among one another. Other topics that fall under the $p < .001$ correlation level are mom talking about "emotional and verbal abuse" ($r = .779$), and mom talking about "physical and emotional abuse" ($r = .732$).

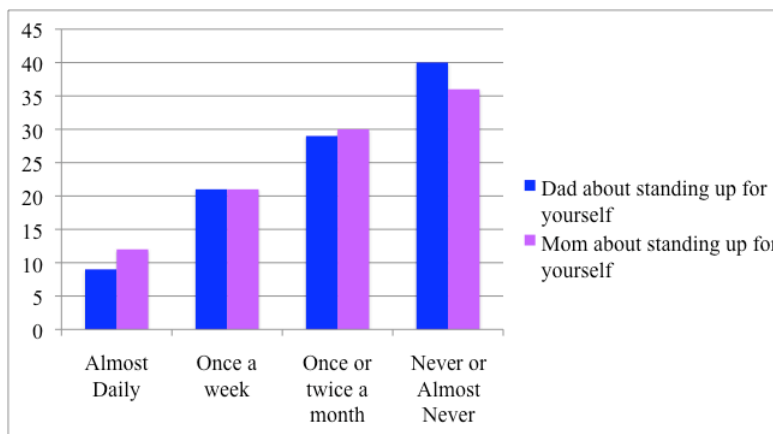
RQ: 4 examined the difference between frequencies of teen-reported mother parental communication and father parental communication.

To statistically analyze this question the responses to "How often the teen perceived each parent to talk to them about different subjects?" was compared. A paired t-test was used to establish the differences between mother and father

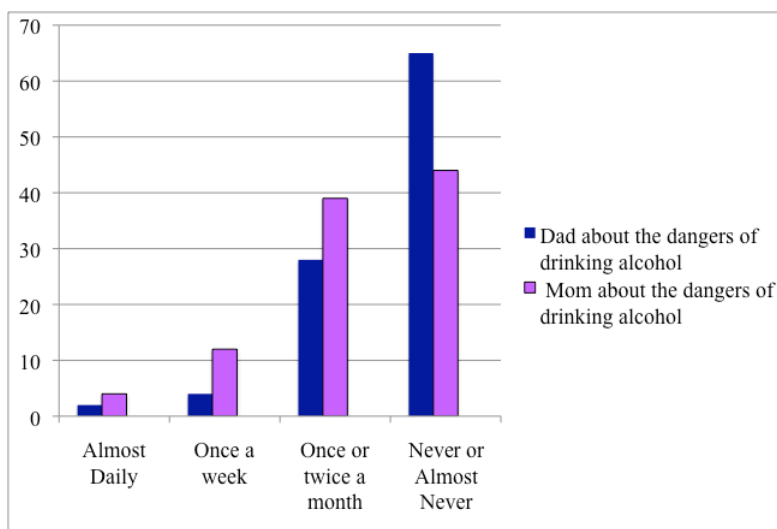
communication. All of the mother and father questions were paired up based on common topics. Nine out of the 10 topics showed a statistically significant difference with a p-value ranging from $p < .001$ to $p = .019$. The one question that didn't show any difference was the question discussing mom/dad talking about "standing up for yourself." The results show that moms discussed every topic in higher frequencies than the dads. This was the case for both males and females. None of the topics had a mean that outweighed the moms. Even with the negative subjects that were rarely talked about, the mom still reported having talked a tad bit more to both male and females. The one exception was the subject of physical abuse. The mean for mom and dad only differed by 0.01. See chart below for mother-father reported communication levels.

Comparing responses of frequency between Mom and Dad discussions about Standing up for Yourself (Positive/Comfortable conversation).

This chart shows that comfortable topics are discussed more frequently but still not as frequently as they could be. If you don't learn to stand up for yourself as a teen you may be susceptible to abuse in all areas of life.



Comparing responses of frequency between Mom and Dad discussions about the Dangers of Drinking (Negative/Uncomfortable conversation).



This chart shows that parents are not acknowledging the levels of drinking that occur during teen years and the need to reinforce positive behaviors. This shows that uncomfortable subjects are neglected when parent's talk to their teens about risky behaviors.

Discussion

After careful review of related literature about parent-teen communication and teen behaviors, the need to study the relationship between parental communication about dating behavior and its impact on teen dating behaviors is suggested. The sexual behavior studies address how parents can impact their teen's sexual activity and sexual knowledge, suggesting the parent can communicate about the actual dating relationship itself before the sexual activity occurs. The dating behavior conversation is easier than the sexual conversation.

The current study presented the idea that parents have the ability to be a major influence on their teen and the behaviors in which their teen engages, suggesting that preventing teen dating violence by utilization of parents may be a successful prevention and educational tool for teenagers. This study aimed to find relationships and differences between teen-reported frequencies of parent-teen communication about dating behaviors and the frequencies of teen dating behaviors. The idea for the study was created based on the literature reviewed and the question of "how parent-teen communication and teen dating behaviors impact one another" was explored. The premise of the study was that if a teen-reported their parent talked to them about standing up for themselves, they would then be expected to report that their dating partner never put them down and that their dating partner respected them on a daily or weekly basis. This relationship was also predicted to be true among the abuse topics. If the responders said that their parents talked to them about verbal abuse a fair amount (between two and three on the survey scale), then their experience with verbal abuse would be nonexistent.

This was not the case. Previous studies found that parent-teen communication has the ability to influence sexual behaviors, including sexual risk and condom use. (Whitaker et al., 1999). As stated in the results this was not found to be true among parent-teen *communication* about dating behaviors and their impact on *reported* teen dating behaviors. However, the abuse questions correlated with each other in that not one of them received a high frequency response. Their relationship is positive because it shows that the sample has not had to deal with abuse in their relationships, or has chosen not to report on those behaviors. There were very few that reported experiencing verbal, or physical abuse.

One main finding that relates to the problem of teenage dating violence is that both mom and dad were perceived by the teen to not have talked to them about verbal, emotional, and physical abuse. Based on the results of the study, it can be suggested that verbal abuse is the most comfortable topic for parents to talk about to their teens. Emotional abuse is just a little uncomfortable to talk about, and physical abuse is extremely uncomfortable for parents to talk about to their teens. Out of the 39 females who responded, 15 out of 39 reported their mom talking to them about physical abuse once or twice a month or more. Eleven out of 39 females reported their dad talking to them about physical abuse. The males reported 10 out of 60 for mom and 9 out of 60 for dad. It is shocking to see that

parents are not talking about problems that are commonly found in high schools and colleges such as date rape, physical abuse, and sexual activity. This study found that teen-reported parent-teen communication about physical, emotional and verbal abuse was talked about to teens “never or almost never.” Teen-reported frequency of their dating partner threatening them physically was also reported to be “never or almost never.” Even though there is no significant relationship between communication topics and dating behaviors, relationships found within the communication topics and in the dating behaviors are significant. Findings suggest relationships between parent-teen communication about negative dating behaviors to relate in a positive way.

The relationship between the frequency of positive and negative teen-reported communication and dating behaviors raises a few key points. Whitaker et al. found that parent-teen communication about sexual behaviors has both positive and negative effects on teen sexual behavior. Their results showed that sexuality discussions were positively related to partner communication, as were risk discussion (Whitaker et al., 1999). The present research found that the negative or uncomfortable topics for which teens reported low frequency levels of the questions was common among both females and males. Positive topics and behaviors were reported at higher frequency levels. Positive dating behaviors correlate positively among “my dating partner respected me,” “my dating partner encouraged me to achieve my dreams,” and “How often your mom talked to you about standing up for yourself?”

Liz Claiborne Inc. and Teenage Research Unlimited (2007) partnered together to conduct a survey across America. The survey found that “significant numbers of teen across America are experimenting rampant emotional, verbal, sexual, and physical abuse in their dating relationships” and that the problem gets worse as teen get older and involved in more serious relationship. The problem of teenage dating violence is becoming an accepted problem among teens. This may be one reason for the low reported frequency level of engagement in negative dating behaviors. The sample might be desensitized to the many forms of dating violence. It is encouraging that the sample reported little engagement in negative/uncomfortable dating behaviors. However, it is not heartening that teens perceive parents are ignoring the importance of talking to their teens about problems that they may face in life.

The design of this study was structured after Durtra et al. (1999) who addressed the difference between mother and father communication and adolescent risk. That study found that “there was substantial variability across the discussion of topics, and adolescents reported that a higher percent of mothers discussed each sex related topic than did fathers (p. 63). The present research has the same findings. The last research question examines the differences between mother and father parental-communication frequency levels.

Overall, mothers were found to talk to both their daughters and sons more than fathers do about dating behaviors. Females reported their mom talking to them

more frequently about positive and negative topics in higher numbers than males. Regarding the question "How often the teen-reported their mom/dad to have talked with them about standing up for yourself?" male and female responses were almost equal for both mom and dad. Comfort levels of the topics involved in parent-teen conversations were found to impact the frequency of father communication. Father communication is more frequent about positive behaviors than negative behaviors. This study emphasizes the *need* for father-teen communication among females and males about uncomfortable subjects to be significant.

Aspy and Vesely (2007) found that youths were more likely to report having had sexual intercourse if they said their parents only some of the time or never: a) talked about problems, b) understood their point of view, c) had high expectations for them, d) loved them and wanted good things for them, and e) set clear rules. These findings relate to the high frequency levels of reported positive parent-teen communication. The research conducted in this study found that parents talk more about positive than negative topics. This may be another reason that only the positive communication topics found to be discussed in high frequencies among parents and teens.

Limitations and Strengths

This study presents a few limitations and at least one or more strengths. The data was self-reported. Self-reported data will provide what the respondent says they do or feel, and it might not reflect their actual actions or behaviors. The distribution of the survey was through an e-mail that provided the link for the survey restricting the ability to know how many students were e-mailed and how many received the e-mail. This research seems to be a new idea and the lack of established measures of parent-teen communication and teen dating behaviors could also impact the validity. Teen Dating might be defined differently among participants raising the question of the validity of the responses about dating behaviors. The data was also limited to RIT students only which may not provide a good representation of teens who have engaged in dating relationships, and may be why abusive behavior was reported in very small frequencies.

The strength of the study is the sample. Rochester Institute of Technology 1st year students were e-mailed a link for the survey. Ninety-nine students responded, 60% male and 40% female. This echoes the population distribution of students at RIT almost identically. The sample is in their late teen years so they are most likely to have had at least a few dating relationships in high school. This provided good data correlations with high scores of 0.750-0.813 and differences with statistical significances of $p = 0.05$ to $p < .001$. High school students ages 14-18 would be preferred for the data but using a convenience sample of 18 and 19 year olds allowed for students with at least four years of dating experience. In addition, students 18 years or older did not present special privacy restrictions as would those students 17 years and younger. 1st year students' experience level seemed to

provide meaningful information that generated insight to the research questions in this study.

Future Research

The literature reviewed raised many questions that should be further investigated by future research. This study, as well, has contributed interesting and worthwhile findings that should gain interest among scholars for further research.

One aspect of teen dating is the non-verbal communication that occurs between the dating couple and between the parent and the teen. If parents learned the non-verbal signs of teen dating violence they may be able to address the problem from the start before it gets serious.

Parent-teen communication about dating behavior research was limited. Further research addressing the many relationships and impacts parent-teen communication can have on teen dating behavior is suggested, especially in the area of difference between mother and father parent-teen communication. A comparison of how teens perceive their parent-teen communication with mom and with dad, and teen dating behaviors, while in high school may differ significantly to views and responses when these same teens are in college.

Another question that should be considered is: Why is there a lack of parent-teen communication about topics teens encounter as they go through middle and high school? What is getting in the way of these important and needed conversations between parents and their children? This would expand on the research done by Liz Claiborne Inc. that found that teen dating violence increases as a teen gets older.

Conclusion

The present study brings new findings about the impact of parent-teen communication and teen dating behaviors and how they are influenced by one another. The problem of teen dating violence is serious and deserves greater attention by scholars, educators, families and parents and the government. "A Teen's Perspective" has opened further insight about parent-teen communication and its relationship to teen dating behaviors. Positive dating behaviors were found to have a strong correlation between one another. The same goes for negative dating behaviors. The study also validates that conversations with mothers become more frequent between mother-daughters as the communication increases (Dutra et al., 2007). Present findings found that females talk with their mothers and fathers more than males. Overall, parents are not talking with their teens about the topics studied here and this may relate to the rise in teen-dating violence. Teens reported that their parents engaged in discussion about comfortable/positive subjects slightly more than uncomfortable/negative subjects. However, overall parents are not engaging in discussions with their teens on topics needed to reinforce important life skills such as self-esteem and making

good choices when it comes to negative behaviors. Just as with Dutra et al.'s study, it was found that the frequency of mother-teen communication was higher than father-teen for 9 out of 10 topics. The relationship between parent-teen communication and teen dating behaviors deserves continued study and is an important genre of communication in our world today.

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Appendix A

Literature Review Process

Years Searched: 1995-2007

Databases Searched in Wallace Library:

- *EBSCO HOST
- *JSTOR
- *ProQuest
- *PsycArticles
- *Science Direct
- *Wilson Web

Terms Searched:

- *Adolescent relationships
- *Dating violence prevention
- *Family communication styles
- *Parent and teen
- *Parent communication
- *Parent-child communication
- *Parent-child relationships
- *Parents and parenting
- *Parent-teen communication
- *Parent-teen relationships
- *Teen dating relationships
- *Teen dating violence prevention
- *Teenage dating
- *Teenage dating behavior
- *Teenage dating violence
- *Teenagers
- *Wilson Web

Appendix B

Survey Booklet

Survey

Parent-Teen Communication from a Teens Perspective

Instructions

The purpose of this study is to investigate teens' perceptions of parent-teen communication about dating behaviors.

This survey should take you no more than 10 minutes to complete. All personal information will remain confidential and anonymous.

A risk of this research is that for some people answering the survey questions may cause discomfort. The likelihood of that is not great, and if you do feel uncomfortable and want to discuss this with a professional you can access the RIT Counseling Center. Their information is at the end of the survey. There is no penalty for not completing the survey.

The survey will benefit the teenage demographic. Looking at the importance of parent-teen communication in preventing teen dating violence will help to find new ways to approach the problem of teen dating violence.

Please carefully read and answer all items on this survey. There are no right or wrong answers.

IMPORTANT: This survey will time out in 2 hours. You must submit the survey by that time.

Part I

Below are subjects that your parents might have discussed with you. Please think back to high school about the discussions that your parents had with you. For each topic please circle the answer that best indicates how often your mom/dad discussed each topic with you. The words boyfriend and girlfriend will be presented as bf/gf.

How often have your parents talked to you about:

			Almost Daily	Once a Week	Once or Twice a Month	Never or Almost Never
1.	Having a bf/gf.	Mom	1	2	3	4
		Dad	1	2	3	4
2.	Respecting yourself	Mom	1	2	3	4
		Dad	1	2	3	4
3.	Standing up for yourself	Mom	1	2	3	4
		Dad	1	2	3	4
4.	Being an individual	Mom	1	2	3	4
		Dad	1	2	3	4
5.	Getting good grades in high school	Mom	1	2	3	4
		Dad	1	2	3	4
6.	Dangers of drinking	Mom	1	2	3	4
		Dad	1	2	3	4
7.	Dangers of smoking	Mom	1	2	3	4
		Dad	1	2	3	4
8.	Emotional abuse	Mom	1	2	3	4
		Dad	1	2	3	4
9.	Verbal abuse	Mom	1	2	3	4
		Dad	1	2	3	4
10.	Physical abuse	Mom	1	2	3	4
		Dad	1	2	3	4

Part II

Next, listed below are statements concerning different types of behaviors that occur in dating relationships. Boyfriend and girlfriend will be represented using the term “dating partner”. For each statement please circle one number that best describes how often you experienced each behavior in your high school dating relationships.

	Almost Daily	Once a Week	Once or Twice a Month	Never or Almost Never
1. My dating partner and I spent our free time together.	1	2	3	4
2. My dating partner and I spent time with mutual friends.	1	2	3	4
3. My dating partner complimented me.	1	2	3	4
4. My dating partner respected me.	1	2	3	4
5. My dating partner encouraged me to achieve my dreams.	1	2	3	4
6. My dating partner put me down.	1	2	3	4
7. My dating partner did not let me hang out with my friends and family.	1	2	3	4
8. My dating partner checked up on me.	1	2	3	4
9. My dating partner accused me of seeing other people.	1	2	3	4
10. My dating partner threatened me verbally.	1	2	3	4
11. My dating partner threatened me physically	1	2	3	4

Part III

The following questions ask about selected personal characteristics. Your responses are for statistical purposes only.

1. What age were you on your most recent birthday?
_____ years old

2. Are you?
_____ Male
_____ Female

3. Ethnic group (Please check only one response)
_____ African American or Black
_____ Asian
_____ Caucasian or White
_____ Hispanic
_____ Multiracial
_____ Native American

END

Thank you for your time. To receive the results of this study please provide your e-mail address and they will be sent out at the end of spring quarter.

If this survey caused any emotions that you would like to discuss with a counselor the RIT Counseling Center is available to all students.

<http://www.rit.edu/studentaffairs/counseling/index.php>

Hours

Regular hours for the Counseling Center are 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Monday, Tuesday, and Friday, and 8:30 a.m. - 7:00 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, except during finals weeks, break weeks, and summer quarter. During those periods, the hours are 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Location

2100 August Center (building 23A), second floor

Address

Counseling Center
Rochester Institute of Technology
114 Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, NY 14623-5608

Kimberly S. Reeb

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Phone

(585) 475-2261 (V/TTY)

Fax

(585) 475-6548

AIM via AOL (APPOINTMENTS ONLY):

RITCounselingCtr

Emergency Contacts

For psychological emergencies during Institute business hours, contact the Counseling Center at 475-2261 (V/TTY) / 475-6897 (TTY) or go directly to Room 2100, August Center (second floor).

For psychological emergencies that cannot wait for business hours, call Public Safety at 475-3333 (V/TTY) and ask to speak with the counselor who is on-call.

Note: Do not use e-mail in an emergency situation, since you cannot be assured that a counselor will open it at your time of need.