

**USING PEERS TO INFLUENCE DATING RELATIONSHIPS:  
AN EVALUATION OF A DATING VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAM**

by

Cami Jane Turner

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology

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This manuscript is dedicated to:

Margaret K. Turner

1918 – 2005

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	v
ABSTRACT .....	vi
Chapter 1 .....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Literature Review .....	5
The Program .....	17
Chapter 2 .....	21
METHODOLOGY .....	21
The Sample .....	21
Chapter 3 .....	28
DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS .....	28
Pre-Test Results .....	28
Students' Perceptions of a Healthy and an Abusive Relationship .....	28
Perceived Causes of Abuse in Dating Relationships .....	31
Gender Dynamics .....	31
Conflict Resolution .....	32
Post-Test Results .....	34
Students' Perceptions of a Healthy and an Abusive Relationship .....	34
Perceived Causes of Abuse in Dating Relationships .....	36
Gender Dynamics .....	38
Conflict Resolutions .....	39
Help Seeking Behaviors .....	42
Dating Behaviors .....	45
Peer Involvement in Abusive Relationships .....	47
Students' Evaluation of the Program .....	48
Chapter 4 .....	52
DISCUSSION .....	52
Students' Perceptions of Healthy and Abusive Relationships .....	55
Managing Conflict .....	58
Peer Involvement .....	59
Chapter 5 .....	64
CONCLUSIONS .....	64
Limitations to the Study .....	64
Policy Implications .....	69
Suggestions for Furture Research .....	70
Appendix A .....	73
Appendix B .....	76
References .....	82

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Sex of student participants .....	22
Table 2.2: Race of student participants .....	22
Table 3.1: I think people abuse their girl/boyfriend because of an anger management issue.....	37
Table 3.2 I believe that boys can be abused in dating relationships .....	39
Table 3.3 Who students would tell if they were in emotionally controlling relationship .....	43
Table 3.4: Who students would tell if they were in physically violent relationship .....	44
Table 3.5: Have you ever received pressure to stay in a dating relationship you did not want to? .....	46
Table 3.6: Did SDTP help you to better understand dating violence? .....	48

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the roles that peers play in abusive dating relationships through a primary prevention program, Safe Dates Theater Project (SDTP). The SDTP is funded through the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and was incorporated into the ninth-grade health curriculum in a public high school in a mid-Atlantic state. Data for this exploratory study was collected from pre-tests given to students before participation in the SDTP, and post-tests given after the SDTP was completed. Students were queried about their knowledge and attitudes about dating violence and post-tests were used to determine if the program succeeded in changing attitudes. Results indicated that, overall, the SDTP achieved moderate success in expanding students' knowledge and understandings of abusive relationships. Results also indicated that friends continue to play a central role in young adolescents' dating relationships. Future research directions and policy implications are also discussed.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Domestic violence, while it has been prevalent for centuries, was declared a public health issue in 1994 by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In fact, the CDC has committed millions of dollars to programs that address the needs of victims of domestic violence, such as battered women's shelters and counseling services, due to the federal legislative passage of Demonstration Grants for Community Initiatives in 1994. The legislation provides funding to non-profit community organizations to start and continue interpersonal violence intervention and prevention programs.

The legal arena has also transformed its initial neglect of domestic violence victims. For instance, laws addressing the problems of domestic violence were once applied solely to married couples who were living together. Today the definition of domestic violence has expanded to include separated or divorced couples, cohabitants who are married or unmarried, dating couples, and same-sex partners (Hickman et al. 2004). Even the language used to describe battering has changed: what was once termed domestic violence has evolved into what is now labeled intimate partner violence, or interpersonal violence as a means to include couples that were not originally covered under the traditional definition. Recent research has also reflected this change by focusing on people involved in dating relationships. As part of the CDC initiative, various states across the country were selected to participate in dating violence primary prevention programs. This present research focuses on a prevention program, the Safe Dates Theater Project (SDTP), which is implemented at a high school located in a mid-Atlantic state. The program received four years of funding through the CDC initiative. In



particular, the present research explores the roles peers play in abusive dating relationships.

Recently, research has focused on the problems faced by many adolescents and young adults as they become involved in dating relationships, and the abuse that may coincide with these relationships. In particular, studies focus on the experiences of young adults in their late teens and early 20s and the prevalence of date rape and sexual assault on college campuses (Avery-Leaf 1997). Unfortunately, despite the attention paid to college students, very few studies have acknowledged the victimization faced by many young adolescents in junior high and high school at the hands of their dating partners (Hickman et al. 2004). Teen dating violence mimics the violent relationships that adults experience; both exist along a continuum of behaviors ranging from verbal and emotional abuse to physical and sexual abuse (Sousa 1999). However, young teens are in a position that leaves them extremely vulnerable to dating violence. Young teens, whether in a dating relationship or not, are at an awkward and challenging stage in their development. They have to find the balance between claiming their freedom from adults, while still recognizing their dependence on adults. Young adolescents must navigate the transition between “self-focused, dependent relationships of childhood” to “more reciprocal, equality-based relationship” as adults (Wekerle and Wolfe 1999:437).

In addition to the stress of developing a sense of autonomy, young teens experience peer pressure at its peak. Many teens striving to fit in with their peers feel pressure to become involved in dating relationships and stay involved in them regardless of how damaging the relationship can be (Schewe 2001). Typically, young adolescents follow traditional gender expectations dictated by society, such as the importance of securing a romantic relationship. Peer groups have a tendency to reflect what society deems appropriate gender roles. Sousa (1999) stated that it is common for adolescent

relationships to adhere to “extreme gender stereotypes.” Cultural norms depicting men as dominant and controlling, while women are passive and accommodating, can support dating violence myths and prevent young teens from learning and understanding the importance of an egalitarian relationship.

When young adolescents first enter into dating relationships, they are at a disadvantage because they lack the experience and understanding of what constitutes a healthy relationship. Often, they misinterpret abusive behaviors by minimizing or romanticizing abusive behaviors (Sousa 1999; Schewe 2001; Jackson, Cram and Seymour 2000). For instance, instead of viewing a partner’s extreme jealousy as a means of control and a form of abuse, young adolescents often interpret their dating partners’ possessive behavior as a sign of how much they “really care.” Countless victims and perpetrators fail to see this kind of abusive behavior as problematic. This leaves only a handful of teens who recognize that there is something wrong with their abusive relationship, and even a smaller number who are willing to seek help (Schewe 2001). Similar to the violence that occurs between adult couples, abusive episodes have a tendency to increase in severity and frequency in teen dating relationships (Sousa 1999). When victims of teen dating violence come to the realization that the abuse they have experienced is wrong, there are very limited resources available to help them. In many states, shelters and battered women’s centers are unable to provide services to victims of dating violence who are under the age of 18 because of the legal issues surrounding the abuse of a minor.

Issues pertaining to intimate violence and dating violence experienced by young adolescents, often as early as middle school, have led activists and researchers to focus on developing prevention programs in hopes to demystify dating relationships, emphasize the importance of gender equality, and highlight an overall awareness of

dating violence. The need for prevention programs is particularly salient given that research on young adolescent dating violence suggests that anywhere from 9% to 41% of teens are affected by some form of dating violence, including emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse (Avery-Leaf et al. 1997; Lewis and Fremouw 2001).

The state examined in the present study is also a participating site for the National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (NYRBS), which found that dating violence occurs with high school students. The NYRBS is a biannual survey, which given to students in the public schools and most of the private schools in the country. For the state in which this research was conducted, results from the 2005 NYBRS reveal that almost 7% of ninth grade students in the state had been hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend during the last twelve months. Almost 6% of ninth grade boys and just over 8% of ninth grade girls had been hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose. The results are similar for the percentage of students that had been physically forced to have sexual intercourse: over 8% of ninth grade girls and practically 5% of ninth grade boys reported they were forced to have sexual intercourse against their will. These numbers indicate that abuse in adolescents' dating relationships is pervasive and prevention programs are needed to help address the needs of this specific population. Moreover, a national sample of 683 teenagers found that 80% of teens viewed verbal abuse in dating relationships as a "serious issue," and 73% believed that physical abuse as a "serious issue" (TRU 2005).

This research examines a primary prevention program designed to address dating violence in a high school in a mid-Atlantic state. More specifically, the focus of this research is on the role that peers play in abusive dating relationships. The next section summarizes the recent work on dating violence and provides a description of the prevention program under investigation. Chapter 2 provides the analytic approach to this

research as well as the sample used in the research. Chapter 3 discusses the data analysis and findings from both the pre-test and post-test. Chapter 4 provides a discussion of the findings related to previous research on dating violence. The final chapter addresses the limitations of this study, and the policy implications based on the findings from this research, as well as suggestions for future research pertaining to dating violence.

### **Literature Review**

Initial interest in violence in the school environment took the form of peer bullying and gun violence. In light of the many different school shootings that have occurred over the past six years, many students, parents, and school officials focused on the ways in which school violence can be stopped. Schools have started to acknowledge the damaging, and sometimes deadly effects bullying can have on the student body. Schools across the country have implemented zero tolerance policies that prohibit violence between students and have attempted to crack down on the bullying that takes place within the schools. However, programs designed to prevent school violence have neglected to recognize that dating violence is another form of school violence (Molidor and Tolman 1998; Sousa 1999). Thus, the new violence prevention programs in schools and communities do not address the specific nature of dating violence (Foshee et al. 1998). This omission ignores a sizable problem.

Mid-adolescence is often considered to be the “starting point” of relationship experiences that may extend across the lifespan (Foshee et al. 1998; Molidor and Tolman, 1998; Wekerle and Wolfe 1999). Molidor and Tolman (1998) found that males have a tendency to start abusing their female partners early in their life cycle. Some researchers have found that the first episode of dating violence occurs by age 15 (Arriaga

and Foshee 2004). Often, intervention does not occur until men in their early twenties become involved in the criminal justice system, and by then, they most likely already have a “substantial history of gendered violence” (Molidor and Tolman 1998). Others claim that situations involving dating violence can start as early as seventh grade (Weisz and Black 2001). Thus, specialists speculate that introducing dating violence prevention programs in seventh grade may increase the effectiveness of the program because young participants are more likely to accept the ideas presented, and less likely to have adopted abusive dating behaviors. Understanding dating violence that occurs within young adolescent relationships can give us a better understanding of the abuse that can occur in adult dating relationships (Arriaga and Foshee 2004). In addition, a focus on the prevention of interpersonal violence experienced by young couples could help in decreasing the number of abusive relationships experienced by adult dating couples, married couples, and children living in these abusive households (Foshee et al. 1998).

Some researchers express concern about the limited amount of research conducted on the prevalence of young teens that experience dating violence and the lack of evaluations of prevention programs (Hickman et al. 2004; Sousa 1999). Research that addresses the effectiveness of dating violence prevention programs is badly needed. Even though young teens are at particular risk for dating violence, there is also a “unique window of opportunity for prevention efforts to make teens more aware of how violence in relationships can occur and to teach healthy ways of forming intimate relationships,” supporting the call for an increase of research to evaluate dating violence prevention programs (Wolfe and Jaffe 2003:3).

Schools are often unprepared to deal with the dating violence their students experience. Schools lack the proper support networks, and institutional responses to address dating violence often do not exist. Even if violence occurs away from school

property, the victim and perpetrator still encounter one another in school (Molder and Tolman 1998). Dating violence prevention programs need to successfully structure institutional responses so that the school is viewed as a safe place where student victims of dating violence can seek and receive help (Molder and Tolman 1998). Public policy analysts advocate for school officials to include dating violence in their zero tolerance policies. If school administrators make it known that dating violence will not be tolerated, discipline the perpetrators, and provide victims and perpetrators with the services needed to help them end dating violence, then the school becomes a place where dating violence will not occur, or will occur less frequently.

The majority of existing dating violence prevention programs focus on primary prevention. Primary prevention programs seek to prevent a problem among a population before it occurs. Secondary prevention programs focus on populations that are considered to be “at-risk.” A few dating violence prevention programs have been implemented in areas where young adolescents are considered to be at risk. Some characteristics that are considered when determining if populations of adolescents are considered to be at-risk include the amount of violence present in the community, the presence of positive adult role models, and the percentage of people in the community living at or below the poverty line. Tertiary prevention programs are also implemented in areas to address unique problems, such as dating violence, in an area where problems have already surfaced. It is hoped that schools and/or communities that have recognized and accepted the fact that dating violence occurs among their adolescent population would seek a dating violence prevention program to address this violence.

More recently, groups focused on preventing dating violence have placed a greater emphasis on the need for primary prevention programs. Interpersonal violence is not something that occurs in one racial or ethnic group, social class, or geographic area.

The implementation of prevention programs in areas that are not considered to be at-risk reflects that notion that interpersonal violence can happen anywhere, to anyone.

Accordingly, programs are implemented in schools and communities where dating violence has not been identified as a problem. Many of the attempts stress the creation of community-based dating violence prevention programs, but the primary prevention programs that have been the most popular and well received are the school-based programs (Weisz and Black 2001). Moreover, students themselves find the programs informative. For example, close to two-thirds of young adolescents in one national study suggested it would be helpful to learn about abuse issues in school (TRU 2005).

The majority of the prevention programs that have been evaluated were implemented in schools, both middle and high, and involve students in activities in hopes of increasing awareness and dispelling myths about dating violence by changing the attitudes of students who condone abusive behavior (Wolfe and Jaffe 2003; Hickman et al. 2004). There are many reasons as to why schools are ideal places for the implementation of dating violence prevention programs. Schools provide program coordinators with access to students, space, time, and support from school staff (Wolfe and Jaffe 2003; Wekerle and Wolfe 2003). Wolfe and Jaffe (2003) believe that, “changing the norms and climate about relationships and providing students and teachers with the skills needed to foster healthy relationships is the only viable way to shift from a crisis orientation to one of prevention in response to [dating violence]” (7). Many of the programs attempt to influence students’ attitudes and change school norms as a means to end dating violence among adolescents. Wekerle’s and Wolfe’s research (1999) stressed the importance of including a component of the prevention program that addresses behavioral modification. Teaching problem-solving strategies, such as cooperation, planned ignoring, delayed responding, non-confrontational communication, altruism,

assertive communication skills and help-seeking behavior are believed to have a positive effect on young adolescents who have not yet developed these skills.

Despite the fact that it is difficult to conduct research in secondary schools, especially public schools, there is much that can be gained from targeting young adolescent populations, and many researchers have been able to add to the existing body of literature of dating violence (Cano et al. 1998). The earliest published evaluation of dating violence prevention programs occurred in the mid-1980s (Hickman et al. 2004). The Minnesota School Curriculum Project (MSCP) was an education-based program that was implemented statewide. It addressed the issues of partner violence among adults and youths. The curriculum was delivered in junior high and high schools by regular classroom teachers. Schools were given the choice as to whether or not they wanted to participate in the program, and teachers within the schools were also given the option as to whether or not they would include the program in their curriculum. Close to 225 teachers agreed to participate in the program, but the actual number of classrooms in the final sample was not reported. No uniform guidelines were set, leaving the presentation of material at the discretion of the participating schools and teachers. A pretest was given to the control groups and the treatment groups (those who were participating in MSCP) and results revealed that there was no significant difference between the groups. After participation in the program was complete, a post-test analysis revealed that program participation did not appear to have an effect on the attitudes of junior or high school students of the experimental group as compared to the control group (Hickman et al. 2004:131). However, within the treatment groups, there was a gendered difference between the male and female students. Four out of the five post tests revealed that females were more likely to “endorse attitude items in a positive direction” (Hickman et al. 2004). In other words, females were less likely to accept and participate in victim



blaming when considering the dynamics of dating violence. Results suggested that a multi-session programming may have an effect on knowledge of partner violence, but not necessarily on the attitudes or actions of the participants.

In a different program, Avery-Leaf et al. (1997) conducted an evaluation study of a dating violence prevention program in Long Island, NY. The program's goals were to reduce dating violence by changing pro-violence attitudes, promote equality in dating relationships, improve communication skills, and to educate students about resources available for victims. The participating eleventh and twelfth grade health classes were divided into a control group and a treatment group. The program's curriculum consisted of five sessions that were delivered in the classroom by the regular teachers, who received an eight hour in-service training prior to teaching the sessions. Both groups of students took the Justification of Interpersonal Violence Questionnaire, which measured physical aggression and victimization, dating violence attitudes, justification of dating jealousy and violence, and social desirability. There were no differences between the two groups before the control group participated in the dating violence prevention program. The post-test revealed that there were not any significant differences in the rates of aggression, victimization, and injury between the control and experimental groups. There was, however, a significant change in the attitudes that justified male-to-female dating aggression and female-to-male dating aggression in the experimental group. After completion of the program, participating adolescents were less likely to support attitudes that justified dating aggression, whether it was perpetrated by a male against a female or by a female against a male partner (Avery-Leaf et al. 1997).

In another analysis of five school-based and one community-based "relationship" violence prevention programs that targeted adolescents, Wekerle and Wolfe (1999) found that there was a significant, desired change in attitudes concerning

dating aggression, knowledge of myths about woman abuse, and behavioral intentions in hypothetical conflict situations, but they did not measure actual behavioral changes. These changes remained consistent after a three-month follow-up assessment. However, Wekerle and Wolfe (1999) were unable to determine if the programs had a significant effect on the rates of perpetration and victimization in teen relationships because it was questionable as to whether students decreased reporting due to their heightened awareness about what constituted abuse and their commitment to social desirability. It was also noted that the programs evaluated did not examine mutual violence between couples and how this affects victimization. The programs also failed to emphasize protection skills and avoidance skills as much as they stressed perpetration.

Lavoie et al.'s (1995) research explored whether there was a difference in the effect of dating violence prevention programs between those programs that were implemented over a short period of time, or those programs that were implemented over a longer period of time. Two different programs were delivered to tenth grade students in two different urban high schools in Quebec City, Canada. The short program consisted of two classroom sessions (2-2 ½ hours), and the long program was comprised of 4 classroom sessions (4-5 hours). Unlike other prevention programs, the curriculum was delivered by representatives of community organizations as opposed to the regular classroom teacher. There were no comparison groups used at either high school. Students were tested before the program and one month after participation in the program was completed. Researchers found that the program length did not have an effect on students' overall attitudes. In fact, those students who participated in the shorter program had greater improvement in knowledge about dating violence than those students in the longer program. It was speculated that preprogram differences in students' knowledge, as

well as differences between schools, could have influenced the results (Hickman et al. 2004).

The most well known evaluation of dating violence prevention programs was conducted with the Safe Dates project. It was funded through the CDC and took place in the predominately rural Johnson County in North Carolina. Safe Dates, which the Safe Dating Theater Project mirrors, consisted of a school play about dating violence, a ten-session curriculum delivered by a classroom teacher, and a poster contest. The program, which targeted students in eighth and ninth grades, intended to reduce dating violence among students by changing the attitudes that condoned violence and promoted gender stereotyping, building conflict management skills, and increasing knowledge about community resources available to those who are involved in abusive relationships. The fourteen participating schools were randomly selected to participate in either the treatment group which received the school-based program or the control group which received the community-based program (Foshee et al. 1998).

A 116-item questionnaire was administered to students in order to assess demographics and dating violence behavior; it asked students to report their involvement in abusive relationships, either as victims or perpetrators (Foshee et al. 1996). Before the beginning of the program, there were no differences between the control group and treatment group. However, one month after completion of the program, there was a significant difference between the groups, with the school-based program participants showing a greater decrease in the attitudes that condone dating violence and promote gender stereotyping. There was also 25% less psychological abuse perpetration, 60% less sexual violence perpetration, and 60% less violence perpetration against the current dating partner in schools that received the school-based program. Although students became significantly more aware of community services, those victims and perpetrators

involved in the school-based program were not any more likely than their counterparts in the community based program to seek help (Foshee et al. 1998).

In order to determine if the positive short term effects of the study were maintained, a follow up survey was administered to both groups of students one year after Safe Dates was completed. The results revealed that there were no significant differences between the control group and the treatment group in any of the behavioral outcomes. However, students in the treatment group were less accepting of dating violence, perceived more negative consequences from engaging in dating violence, reported using less destructive responses to anger, and were more aware of the services available to victims and perpetrators. In addition, those who participated in the school-based program showed a significant difference in the perpetration of psychological and sexual violence and violence in current relationships. There was also a decrease in the reported perpetration of physical violence, although it was not significant (Foshee et al. 2000; Hickman et al. 2004). Researchers have obtained funding from the CDC to conduct a two- year follow-up study of students who have completed the program. In addition, researchers will also test the effectiveness of a “booster intervention” which is to be delivered to a random half of the original participants (Foshee et al. 2000).

Young teens have a tendency to avoid confiding their problems to an adult because they are searching for their own independence. A national study conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited (TRU) (2005) found that 33% of teens who have been in or known about an abusive relationship did not tell anyone about it. When young teens who are involved in abusive relationships do turn to someone for help, however, they overwhelmingly turn to a friend, suggesting that there needs to be a conscious effort to educate adolescents so they will be able to effectively respond to their friends (Schewe 2001; Molder and Tolman 1998, Jackson et al. 2000). The reason why adolescents may

be more likely to confide in to their peers could be their perception that there would be greater consequences if the adolescent went to an adult to discuss the abusive relationship (Jackson et al. 2000). While young adolescents in abusive relationships turn to peers, they are more likely to discuss involvement in an emotionally abusive relationship and less likely to disclose information about physical or sexual abuse.

When young adolescents do turn to their friends for help, there is a danger that their peers will not know how to react. A national survey of thirteen to eighteen year olds revealed that practically one-third of the youth sampled would not know what to do if a friend had confided that they were involved in an abusive relationship. For this same sample, 63% of respondents said “it would be helpful to learn about such issues in school” (TRU 2005:6).

Educating peers about dating violence can also serve as a deterrent. Peer pressure exerts a strong force over young adolescents’ actions; when adolescents disapprove of dating violence, peer pressure can serve as method of prevention. By targeting different social groups, prevention efforts can harness the influential effects of peer social relationships and decrease dating violence through their peer networks (Wekerle and Wolfe 1999).

Witnessing violence in the home was once considered to be the most influential factor as to whether or not adolescents would become involved in abusive relationships. Recently, there has been a focus on the influence that peers have on involvement in abusive relationships. Results from DeKeseredy’s 1988 college study of men who abuse women indicate that social networks, or close relationships with peers, can influence whether or not men will abuse their wives, or female dating partners. Men who are involved with male peer groups that “perpetuate and maintain women abuse in

university dating relationships” are more likely to engage in violence against women (75).

Supporting the call for more prevention programs that address peer involvement in adolescent dating relationships, Arriaga and Foshee (2004) found that a respondent’s friend’s use of violence in his/her dating relationship had a significant effect on whether or not the respondent would perpetrate violence in his/her own dating relationships. Arriaga and Foshee (2004) also found that peers’ participation in dating violence predicted the onset of their own perpetration. Similar results were found when the probability of victimization was examined. Respondents who had friends who used violence in their dating relationships were more likely to experience dating violence victimization. It was also found that the odds of being a victim of severe violence in a dating relationship were twice as high for girls, compared to boys, when their friends were involved in abusive relationships.

In Foshee et al.’s (2004) longitudinal study of 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders, having a friend who had been a victim of dating violence was found to be a consistently reliable predictor as to whether or not someone would become a victim of either physical or sexual forms of dating violence. With many studies of peers’ influence on an adolescent’s behavior, it is difficult to determine if peers influenced a change in behavior, or if adolescents who participate in the same activities seek out peers who are most similar to them. Due to the longitudinal methodology, the researchers were able to determine that adolescents experienced victimization after their friends had been victimized (Foshee et al. 2004).

Price et al. (1999) also found that males were more accepting of dating violence if they had aggressive friends. Williamson and Silverman’s (2001) study of male university students found that peers attitudes about dating violence and their actual use of

dating violence when combined with other factors were influential predictors in determining young males use of abuse against their dating partners.

Adhering to traditional gender stereotypes has also been determined as a predictor of whether or not dating violence is deemed as acceptable behavior. Price et al. (1999) found that students' willingness to accept psychological, physical, and sexual dating violence was influenced by adolescents' acceptance of traditional gender roles. Boys were more accepting of both boys' and girls' use of dating violence when they held traditional attitudes towards women's roles. Girls that embraced more traditional attitudes of proper gender roles were also more accepting of boys' and girls' use of dating violence, than were "less traditional girls" (Price et al. 1999:372). Participants, both male and female, were more accepting of dating violence perpetrated by females than dating violence perpetrated by males. "The greater acceptability of female violence may make it more difficult for girls to identify their own behavior as abusive and for boys to report their own victimization" (Price et al. 1999:371). Price et al. (1999) also found that adolescents who were previous victims of dating violence were more accepting of psychological, physical, and sexual dating violence.

Weisz and Black (2001) were concerned with students' knowledge levels and attitudes about sexual assault and dating violence, and if there was a change in knowledge and attitudes about sexual assault and dating violence They were also interested in possible gender differences in the results after students participating in the prevention program. They found the prevention program to be effective in increasing knowledge and improving students' attitudes about sexual assault and dating violence. The changes were still present at a six month follow up.

Weisz and Black (2001) also found gender to be an influential factor in students' changing levels of knowledge and changing attitudes about sexual assault and

dating violence. In both the pretest and post-test, girls had a greater understanding of what constitutes abusive dating relationships, and girls were less likely to hold attitudes that supported abusive behaviors. The results from the TRU (2005) survey showed similar gender differences in the awareness of abusive dating relationship: more women (71%) than men (65%) said that they knew the warning signs of an abusive relationship, and were able “to spot an abusive relationship” (6).

In sum, dating violence prevention programs are in the infancy stage of their development. Research on dating violence is also in the early developmental stages, yielding inconsistent measures of the prevalence of dating violence, what are considered risk factors, and what can be done to prevent it. However, the limited evidence that researchers have uncovered supports the belief that dating violence prevention programs are needed and that these programs often have an effect on preventing dating violence in early adolescent populations, by changing the attitudes that promote and accept dating violence (Avery-Leaf 1997; Cano et al. 1998; Wekerle and Wolfe 1999; Schewe 2001; Weisz and Black 2001; Wolfe and Jaffe 2003; Hickman et al. 2004).

### **The Program**

The present research evaluated a primary dating violence prevention program funded through the CDC as part of the Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancement and Leadership Through Alliances (DELTA) program, which provides funding to local nonprofit community organizations (CDC website). The Safe Dating Theater Project (SDTP) is a primary prevention program that combines an interactive theater production, in-class education, and teacher in-service to “provide an intensive learning experience focusing on the prevention of teen dating violence” (RFP 2003:1). The intended purpose of the program is to engage students in an educational experience that is both skill-based



and service-based, while promoting learning in a manner that will allow students to educate their peers, parents, and other members of the community about dating violence.

Starting in the fall of the 2003-04 school year, the SDTP focuses on the incoming ninth grade students at a high school in a Mid-Atlantic state. There are two primary reasons why the ninth graders were selected as the target population. First, “students in 9th grade are beginning their high school careers, and as ‘underclass(wo)men’, are heavily influenced by their peers.” Secondly, “high school years will likely offer these students their first significant dating relationship opportunities” (RFP 2003:1). For the next four years, the project continues to focus on incoming ninth graders. Those students who participated in the program during the previous years are encouraged to remain involved and serve as mentors to incoming students. Over four years it is hoped the SDTP will have a positive effect on all the students at the High School.

The SDTP is incorporated into the required health course each student takes during his/her first year of high school. The high school divides the health and physical education curriculum between two semesters. During the first semester of the year, half of the ninth graders are enrolled in health class, while the other half of the ninth grade students are enrolled in physical education. At the mid-point of the school year, the students switch from one class to the other. In order to be able to reach the entire ninth grade population, the SDTP is conducted twice a school year, once in September and again in January.

The project begins with the City’s Theater Company’s (CTC) production of “Maddie & Paul.” The five scene interactive play, performed by local, professional actors, depicts a “romantic relationship in trouble, deteriorating toward violence” (RFP 2003:2). The “thought provoking” play showcases a dating relationship between teens

Maddie and Paul, and also includes the roles of their friends. The friends' involvement is an accurate depiction of the same dilemmas that many students in the audience may be experiencing if one of their friends is involved in an abusive relationship. In-between the scenes, audience members are encouraged to interact with the characters in the play, who remain in character throughout the production, even in between scenes. Members of the audience are invited to ask questions and give advice, while CTC staff and the Project Coordinator "facilitate questions and discussion with the audience, clarifying myths about abuse, defining abuse, and calling into question victim-blaming beliefs" (RFP 2003:2).

After the production of "Maddie & Paul," once a week for the remaining twelve weeks of the semester, the Project Coordinator conducts follow up sessions during the ninth grade students' health classes. All of the sessions follow the health curriculum requirements established by the State Department of Education. The sessions are designed to concentrate on defining abuse and recognizing warning signs, establishing appropriate peer responses to dating abuse, identifying school and community resources, identifying gender stereotypes and implications, relationship expectations, defining healthy relationships, communication styles/assertiveness, boundaries, decision-making, and problem solving. The follow-up sessions also include three supplemental sessions provided by the YMCA Resource Center. The Resource Center runs peer leader workshops, which emphasize teaching communication skills, decision-making skills, problem solving skills, and refusal skills.

An after-school club focusing on issues pertaining to dating violence prevention is available to students who participated in the theater presentation and the health class curriculum. Upper class(wo)men who participated in the program during the previous years are encouraged to continue their involvement in the program and serve as

mentors and peer educators. While the Project Coordinator assists in coordinating club activities and provides additional education, the club is primarily run by the participating students. One of the main focuses of the club is for the students to develop their own play that addresses dating violence; their play is then presented to the school at the end of the year.

The Project Coordinator also provides information and referrals of services to students who are currently dealing with an abusive dating relationship or violence in their home. In addition to holding a one-day in-service training for teachers and staff at the High School, the Project Coordinator develops and produces a manual to assist teachers in expanding their knowledge of dating and domestic violence and how they can incorporate materials into their classrooms. The project also provides the parents of the high school students with information about dating violence.

The project coordinator was key to facilitating access to the students for this study. A questionnaire was designed to explore the participating students' perceptions and attitudes about abuse in dating relationships. The methodology behind the pre-test and post-test administered to students, as well as the results are discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **The Sample**

The pre-test was completed by 121 students, and 102 students completed the post-test. The decrease in the number of participating students could have been influenced by the fact that the surveys were administered during health class by the health teacher. It is possible that some of the students that completed the pre-test were absent when the post-test was administered. It is also possible that students decided not to participate. The sample for the pre-test was comprised of 44% female students and 56% male students. Students were asked to write their race/ethnicity on the survey, instead of checking a category. The race/ethnicity breakdown for the pre-test was 44% white, 33% black, 9% Hispanic, 5% other, which was mainly comprised of different ethnicities from the Pacific Islands, and 9% of the students identified as multiracial.

The break down of the sample for the post-test was slightly different than that of the pre-test. Unlike the pre-test the majority of respondents were female, 50%, while the remaining 50% were male. The demographics of the post-test sample were similar to the pre-test when examining the race/ethnicity of those students who completed the pre-test. The majority of students were white, 52%, with 23% blacks, 7% Hispanics, 7% other, mainly Pacific Islanders, and 11% of students that self identified as multiracial. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 report the descriptive statistics of the sample. Despite the fact that there were a high percentage of non-white students, no distinct patterns or differences in students' responses emerged from the data analysis.

**Table 2.1 Sex of Student Participants**

	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	N	%	N	%
Female	53	43.8	49	50
Male	68	56.2	49	50
Total	121	100	90	100

**Table 2.2 Race of Student Participants**

		Pre-test		Post-test	
		N	%	N	%
Valid	White	51	43.6	47	52
	Black	38	32.5	21	23
	Hispanic	11	9.4	6	7
	Other	6	5.1	6	7
	Multiracial	11	9.4	10	11
	Total	117	100	90	100
Missing	System	4	3.3	12	10
Total		121	100	102	100

**Analytical Approach**

Even though the SDTP is currently funded through the CDC, a formal means of evaluation is not in place, and is not required at this time. Although the CDC does not require a formal evaluation component, the Project Coordinator, a LCSW, developed a

pre-test, which include both open-ended and close-ended questions to administer to the ninth grade students participating in the SDTP program (See Appendix A). The pre-test was distributed immediately before the participating students saw “Maddie & Paul” in September of 2004. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part consists of six questions that ask students’ opinions about issues pertaining to dating violence and abuse; students respond to whether not they agreed to statements on an ordinal scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree). For this particular analysis, the categories of strongly disagree and disagree are collapsed into the category of ‘disagree.’ The categories of strongly agree and agree were also collapsed together by the researcher to form the category of ‘agree.’

The second part of the pre-test consisted of seven open ended questions and eight demographic questions. The open-ended questions were developed to further explore dating violence issues. Students were asked to respond to questions about things that make a dating relationship abusive, as well as what constitutes a healthy relationship. Students were also asked to identify what they would do if either they or their friend was involved in an abusive relationship.

Based on the questions asked and the students’ responses, there was a focus on four main areas. The first was students’ perceptions of healthy and abusive dating relationships. Three open-ended questions were used to analyze students’ attitudes towards dating relationships. The first question asked students to list three words that they would use to describe a healthy relationship. The second open-ended question used for analysis asked students to describe how they would like to be treated by a boyfriend or a girlfriend. The final question asked students to describe what makes a dating relationship abusive.

The second area of focus was on what students believed were the causes of abuse in dating relationships, and this was measured by looking at two different questions. The first question asked students if they agreed with the statement “I think that people abuse their girl/boyfriends because of an anger management problem.” Students were asked to respond on an ordinal scale of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. For purposes of this analysis, the categories of strongly disagree and disagree are collapsed into the category of ‘disagree.’ The categories of strongly agree and agree were also collapsed together by the researcher to form the category of ‘agree.’ The second question used in the analysis asked students to describe what makes a dating relationship abusive.

The third topic explored in the pre-test was the role of gender in students’ description of abusive dating relationships. The question that students responded to in a gendered way was the one that asked students to describe what makes a dating relationship abusive. A second question was used in determining students’ perception of gender in abusive dating relationships. Students were asked to respond on an ordinal scale to the statement “I believe that boys can be abused in dating relationship.” As with the analysis of other questions that asked students to respond on an ordinal scale, the five separate categories were collapsed into two categories.

The final area of investigation was the ways in which students managed conflict with their girl/boyfriends. Students were asked to respond to an open-ended question that asked students what they do, or what they would do, if they were angry with their girl/boyfriend.

After the students participated in the dating violence prevention program, a post test was administered the day after the program was completed in January of 2005. The post test included the same questions administered in the pre-test, as well as

additional questions aimed to assess whether or not students' perceptions were influenced by their participation in the program (See Appendix B).

Like the pre-test analysis, the post-test analysis also focused on students' perceptions of healthy and abusive relationships, students' perceived causes of abuse, the gender dynamics in students' descriptions of abusive dating relationships, and how students resolved conflict with the girl/boyfriends. The same questions used in the pre-test analysis were also used in the post-test analysis.

The post-test included additional five additional areas of inquiry. The first was students' beliefs about "appropriate" hitting. Students were asked if they ever a time when they felt that hitting a partner would be okay. If students answered "yes" they were asked to describe when it was okay to hit their partner.

The second area explored in the post-test was what students' would do if they were involved in an abusive dating relationship. Students were also asked to evaluate their own personal involvement in an abusive relationship, more specifically, who they would turn to for help, and what they thought they would need the most if they were involved in an abusive relationship. The type of abusive relationship was divided into two distinct types, emotionally controlling and physically violent. Students were asked to describe what they would need the most if they were involved in each type of abusive relationship. Students were also asked to select from a list (friend, sibling, parents, other and who that other person was, or no one) who they would tell if they were in either type of relationship. Students' help-seeking behaviors were based on a combination of what students' described as something they would need and who students' would tell if they were in an abusive relationship.

Another area of interest was students' dating behaviors. The survey asked students if they had every felt pressure from their friends to stay in a dating relationship,



even if they did not want to stay in the relationship. Students were also asked if they felt it was important to be involved in a dating relationship while they were in high school, and why they felt that way. To gain a better understanding of the influence that parents, siblings, and peers have on who young adolescents decide to date, three questions were developed. Students were asked to respond on an ordinal scale as to whether or not they would date someone if their parents, siblings, or peers did not approve. The five categories were collapsed into two categories.

The open-ended questions included in the post-test specifically sought to reveal the roles peers can play in abusive dating relationships. To measure peer involvement students were asked to what they would do if their friend was involved in an abusive dating relationship and they made the respondent promise not to tell anyone.

Finally, the post-test included a series of three questions to examine students' evaluation of the SDTP. First, students were asked to list something that they did not know before they participated in the SDTP. Students were also asked ('yes' or 'no') if they felt the SDTP helped them to better understand dating violence. If students selected 'yes' they were asked to describe what they had a better understanding of. Finally, students were asked if they could change one thing about the program, what would they change.

Both the pre-tests and post-test were exhaustively read and common patterns of the students' responses were identified. The responses were analyzed in light of existing literature on dating violence. Findings show that student responses supported previous research, in addition to contributing new information to the present knowledge on dating violence, to be discussed subsequently. Following grounded theory practices, once no new conceptual categories emerged, saturation was achieved (Strauss 1987; Krueger 1994).

The identity of the participants in the study was completely confidential and anonymous. No efforts were made to match up pre- and post-test surveys. In the unlikely event that a student might react adversely to the questionnaire, there were several procedures in place to help. First, the Project Coordinator is a Licensed Social Worker and counselor with a non-profit agency where she provides counseling to teens who have been victims of dating violence. She also met with the participating students in their health classes once a week, from September through January. In addition, the students had access to other resources such as the program advocate at the Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the high school guidance counselor, as well as the phone numbers for a hotline set up to assist victims. High school health class is mandatory under the ninth grade curriculum and the only subject requiring parental approval under Delaware state law involves sex education (which is not covered by the prevention program or in the pre- and post-tests).

The next chapter discussed the findings of the pre and post-test, as revealed by the data.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

This chapter explores students' responses to the pre-test and post-test questionnaires. Results from the pre-test include students' definitions of healthy and abusive relationships, the perceived causes of abuse in dating relationships, the gender dynamics of abusive dating relationships as reported by students, and students' descriptions of conflict resolutions. The discussion of findings in the post-tests discusses the same topics covered in the pre-test in addition to students' descriptions of "appropriate hitting," help seeking behaviors, the dating behaviors of students in the sample, peer involvement in abusive dating relationships, and the students' evaluation of the SDTP.

#### **PRE-TEST RESULTS**

##### **Students' Perceptions of a Healthy and an Abusive Relationship**

Students were asked to describe what traits they believed made a dating relationship healthy. Overwhelmingly, students reported in the pre-test that trust was a characteristic that constituted a healthy relationship. Honesty and respect were also frequently mentioned, but not to the same extent as trust.

In addition to defining what constitutes a healthy relationship, students were asked to describe how they would like to be treated by a boyfriend or girlfriend. A larger percentage of females (58%) than males (29%) stated that they wanted to be treated with respect. A male student wanted to be treated "with respect and [for their partner to] like

me for how I am.” Another male student stated “I would like to be treated with respect, honesty, and tlc [tender loving care].” Female students had similar responses. One female simply stated that she wanted to be treated “with respect!” Another female student stated that she wanted to be treated “With respect. I’m not a possession, or something to be taken lightly. I have feelings and emotions that need to be considered. I like being sweet-talked and all that cute stuff, but there[’]s a line between ‘cute’ and disrespectful.” Still, another female stated that she would “...like to be treated like a queen. I want respect for my body as well as my mind.”

In addition to respect, both male and female students frequently mentioned that they want to be treated the same way their partners would want to be treated. One male student stated “I want my girl to treat me with respect and if she does she will get the same results.” A female stated that she would “...like to be treated with respect. I want to be treated the same way I would treat them.” Another female student stated that she “...would like that my boyfriend should treat me nicely, [my partner] should respect me and my life so that he would get the same from me also.” Two males stated that they wanted to be treated “the way they [their partner] like being treated” and “the same way she want[s] to be treated.” Another male student “...would like to be treated the way I treat my girl.”

A couple of students mentioned that they did not want their partners to participate in behaviors that could be considered to be abusive. However, it was only two female students that used the word abuse(d) or gave examples of actions that are considered to be physical abuse. A female stated that she would “...like to be treated as a person, and not abused physically or verbally.” Another female stated “I like to be treated with respect (& not as a punching bag!) and to be able to have fun & joke around.” A female had a similar response, “Well I would rather my boyfriend treat me right

don't...raise his hand up at me." A female stated "I'd like my boyfriend to treat me nicely, never yell at me or hit/abuse me. He should be able to talk to me and I should be able to talk with him about anything. And he should not be around me ALL the time so we can still have separate lives (emphasis in original)." There was only one male student that mentioned behavior that could be considered to be verbal abuse. He wants to be treated "Nice[ly], not always being yelled at by my girlfriend."

Students were also asked to describe what made a dating relationship abusive. Results from the pre-test revealed that an overwhelmingly majority of the students believed that an abusive relationship involved unwanted physical contact. For instance, one Hispanic male student stated that an abusive relationship is "any physical contact not wanted or anything that makes you feel offended or your partner offended." Some of the students acknowledged that there were behaviors that they considered to be abusive, including sexual and verbal abuse, yet they did not clearly define the behavior as verbal or sexual abuse. For example, one male said that abuse was, "when they say that you are ugly or fat," which can be a form of verbal abuse.

Based on students' limited definitions of abuse, mentioned above, 31% of students stated that they knew someone that was currently being abused or had previously been abused by their boyfriend or girlfriend. Seventeen percent of students stated that they knew someone who was either currently abusing their partner, or someone who had abused their partner in the past. It is possible that fewer students were able to identify perpetrators of abuse because there is a tendency for girls to date older boys and for boys to date younger girls. It is possible that students have friends or acquaintances that are in abusive relationships, but the offender is not known in that particular circle of friends.

### **Perceived Causes of Abuse in Dating Relationships**

There is a common misbelief by students that abuse in intimate relationships is a result of one or both of the partners' inability to control their anger. The pre-tests also revealed that a large number of the students believed that violence in dating relationships was caused by an individual's anger. Approximately 80% of respondents agreed with the statement that "I think that people abuse their girl/boyfriends because of an anger management problem." An inability to control one's anger was also found in responses to the open-ended question that asked what makes a relationship abusive. Two students directly stated that abuse was caused by anger. A female stated that "An abusive relationship is caused by anger." A male student stated that abuse in dating relationships was caused by "anger when your [you're] made [mad] or drugs or beer." In the pre-tests, control was listed by four students as a behavior that was believed to be abusive, which will be discussed in the post-test findings as well as in the discussion of this research in Chapter 5.

### **Gender Dynamics**

Students' definitions of an abusive relationship in the pre-test were gendered in that females were identified as the victim and males as the abuser. While the majority of the students did not specifically mention gender in their responses, those students who did mention specific behaviors or interactions between romantic partners indicated that the male was always the aggressor. One male student simply stated that an abusive relationship was "the boy hitting the girl." Students were also asked about the possible roles that boys can play in an abusive relationship. Roughly 14% of students agreed with the statement that boys can be abused in dating relationships.

## **Conflict Resolution**

One of the components of the prevention program was designed to educate students about conflict and demonstrate how students can successfully resolve conflicts through communication, as opposed to violence. The pre-test asked students what they do, or have done, when they were angry with their boyfriend or girlfriend. The most popular responses were to talk to their partner (43%), take a time out (22%), or give their partner the silent treatment (14%).

Roughly, 35% of males and 51% of female students stated that they would try to talk to their partner and work it out if they were angry. For instance, two male students stated that they would “talk to her” and “try to work it out.” Three female students emphasized that they would talk to their partners in a non-confrontational way. One female stated that she would “talk to them [,] not yell. Talk.” Another female student mentioned that she would “talk it over nicely” and another female student stated “I would talk to them about it calmly.”

Only two students stated that they would talk to their partner specifically about how they were feeling. A female student stated “When I’m angry with a boyfriend I usually try to talk to them and make them realize how I’m feeling and why I feel that way or I try to realize my mistake if he’s the one that’s angry with me.” A male stated that he would “Tell them how I’m feeling [feeling].”

The second most frequently mentioned action was that students would take a timeout when they were angry with their partners. A higher percentage of males (26%) than females (16%) stated that they would take a timeout. A male reported that he would “Go hit the punchin [punching] bag. Take a walk. Calm down.” A male stated “If I am on the telephone I would tell her I’ll talk to her tomorrow. If I am with her I would walk away.” Another male reports that “I just don’t talk to my girl intill [until] my angriness

goes away.” A male reported that he would “talk about what’s on your mind or don’t talk for a day and let everything get placed out and talk when your [you’re] both calm.” A female stated that she “...would stay away from them.” Another female stated that she would “Leave for a while to chill out until I’m not angry anymore.”

Giving their partner the silent treatment was the third most frequently mentioned action students would take if they were angry with their partner. A male student stated that he “just don’t [does not] speak to her for a bit.” A male student reported that he would give his partner “...the silent treatment.” Female students also reported giving their partner the silent treatment when they were angry. A female student reported that she “...would give them the silent treatment and then talk to them.” A female student reported that she “...would ignore them [un]till I[‘]m ready to talk.” Another female student reported that she “...would proboly [probably] either say something to him or ignore him.”

Six students, two female and three male students, specifically stated that they would not resort to physical violence if they were angry with their partners. A female student mentioned that she would “try [and] talk it out or walk away so that no one gets hurt.” The other female student stated that she would “try to calm down[,] I would never hurt someone [I am] in a relation ship [relationship] [with].” Three of the males stated that they would attempt to talk to their partners if they were angry with them, but they would never resort to physical violence. One stated they he would “Walk away. Or try and talk about it but never would I hit the person.” Another male student mentioned that “I would try to talk as much and work it out, but never put my hands on a woman/girl.” The last male student stated that he would not be physically abusive, “I would cuss them out but I would never hit them because that is wrong.” However, ‘cussing someone out’ could be considered to be verbally abusive behavior.



Three female students stated that they would resort to physical violence, more specifically slapping, if they were angry with their partners. One stated that she would “Yell at him [,] maybe slap him upside his head.” A second student simply stated that she “...will slap [him].” The last female mentioned she would not talk to them, but she also stated that she would “Maybe hit them[,] but it depends on the situation.”

Students were also asked whether or not they agreed with the statement, “I feel it is normal to yell at my partner if they disagree with me.” The majority of students (76%) indicated that it was not normal to yell at their partners when in a disagreement.

## **POST-TEST RESULTS**

After the SDTP was complete, five months later a post-test was administered to the same students that had participated in the SDTP. Despite the fact that this is an exploratory study, it can be speculated that results from the post-tests indicate that the prevention program was successful in altering students’ perceptions of dating violence and its causes, as well as other concepts specific to the program.

### **Student Definitions of a Healthy and an Abusive Relationship**

The post-test results were similar to those found in the pre-test in regards to how students wanted to be treated by their partner. Students still wanted to be treated with respect, but they elaborated in their written responses to include things like being able to communicate with their partner, having a healthy relationship, and not being involved with an abusive partner. A male student stated that he wanted to be treated “with respect.” A female student stated “I want my boyfriend to treat me with lots of respect.” One student stated that she wanted to be treated “with respect. Also make sure that he is not in control of me.” Another female student stated “I want to be respected.

Don't put your hands on me. But open doors for me." A female student stated that she liked "...to be treated with respect and kindness. My boyfriend has to be able to communicate well with me." Another student stated that she wanted her partner to "never yell at me. Never put his hands on me."

Two students mentioned that they wanted to be able to have a healthy relationship. A female student stated that she wanted to be treated "in a way so that they won't abuse you and [you can have] have a healthy relationship." Another female student stated that "I would want them to treat me nicely and I want to be trusted. If they can do that, I could do it to them also, so we can have a healthy relationship." Contrary to the last statement, fewer students mentioned treating their partners in the same ways that they wanted to be treated than in the pre-test.

After participation in the prevention program, it appears that the students' understandings of what behaviors constituted an abusive relationship had expanded to include other abusive behaviors besides physical violence, which was the most frequently mentioned in the pre-tests. Physical abuse was still the most frequently mentioned characteristic of an abusive relationship, but there was an increase in the other types of abuse mentioned by students, which is most likely due to the program's focus on educating students about all types of abuse instead of focusing solely on physical abuse. Verbal and emotional abuse were cited more frequently in the post-test than in the pre-test, but sexual abuse was only mentioned by a select number of students in the post-test. Only 2 students listed all forms of abuse (physical, verbal, and sexual).

Based on students' responses in the post-test of what behaviors are considered to be abusive, the percentage of students that stated that they knew someone that had been abused by their partner or was currently being abused by their partner slightly increased from 31% in the pre-test to 34% in the post-test. It is possible that

students' definitions of abusive behaviors expanded to include non-physical forms of abuse. The percentage of students who stated they knew someone who was either currently abusing their partner, or someone that had previously abused their partner, increased slightly from 17% in the pre-test to 18% in the post-test. These minor changes in percentages could have been influenced by the decrease in the post-test sample size. However, it is important to acknowledge these possible changes as an area where future research is needed. Even with an increase in their knowledge of abusive behaviors, it is possible that the students that responded to the survey were not exposed to perpetrators because it is not unusual for students date other students that are not in their grade, or even in the same school.

### **Perceived Causes of Abuse in Dating Relationships**

Results from the post-test reflected a similar pattern found in the pre-test when examining students' perceptions of the role anger management plays in abusive relationships. DELTA intended to dispel the myth that dating violence is a result of one's inability to control his/her anger. It is important to distinguish between anger management issues and how one partner might use his/her power over a partner as a means of control, which is an abusive behavior; however, it rarely is defined as such. By equating abusive behaviors to anger management issues, it provides an excuse for the behavior. Students did not mention specifically anger as something that makes a dating relationship abusive in the open ended questions like they did in the pre-tests; however, almost 57% of the respondents agreed with the statement that people abuse their partners due to an anger management problem, which is an increase from the 49% of students in the pre-test (See table 3.1).

Another important pattern that emerged in the data was how students perceived the role of power and control in abusive relationships. While control was mentioned as a form of abusive behavior by only a couple of students in the pre-test, 25% of the students included controlling behavior as something that constitutes abuse in the post-test. One male student defined an abusive relationship as “when one partner uses power to try to hurt or control the other person.” Another male student stated that, “I think that a[n] abusive relationship is with jealousy, dishonesty, no respect, fighting, control, not communicating well.” One female described an abusive dating relationship as when “...one person controls [controls] their partner by physically or emotionally abusing them.” The language of “power and control” was used to describe abuse dynamics in the program, and this transcended into students’ responses. Instead of seeing abuse as caused solely by anger, it appears that students might have conceptualized the role of power and control in abusive relationships.

**Table 3.1 I think people abuse their girl/boyfriend because of an anger management issue.**

		Pre-test		Post-test	
		N	%	N	%
Valid	Disagree	14	11.6	30	42.9
	Agree	59	48.8	40	7.1
	Total	73	60.3	70	100
Missing	System	48	39.7	32	31.3
Total		121	100	102	100

Students also expressed a better understanding of how power and control surfaces in abusive relationships, despite the fact that they did not specifically use the terminology of power and control in their responses. In response to a question that asked students “What makes a dating relationship abusive?” two males described situations in which control was present. One male stated that “not letting your girlfriend do anything” was an abusive behavior. Another male described a scenario in which control through physical force would make a dating relationship abusive. “Like if your girlfriend wants to go out and you say no and she says yes and she go’s [goes] out the door and you grab [grab] her and start to beat on her[,] that is abusive.”

### **Gender Dynamics**

The post-test responses did not identify the abuser as male and the victim as female, unlike the responses in the pre-test. Instead of classifying the abuser as male and the victim as female, students opted to use the word partner in their descriptions of what would make a dating relationship abusive. For example a male stated that abuse was, “when one of the partners starts to hit the other.” The rest of the students that did not use the word partner still provided gender neutral responses. A female student defined abuse as, “when one of them [a partner] is controlling them [victim].” A male provided a similar response, “...I would talk to the guy/girl who is abusing them.” There were only three students that responded by identified the male as the aggressor as this female did, “when...a person thinks that he has more authority than the other.”

Despite this apparent shift from identifying the victim as female and the male as perpetrator, almost 9 % of students remained in disagreement with the statement that boys can be abused in dating relationships, which is smaller than the 13% of students that did not believe that boys can be victims of dating violence in the pre-test (See table 3.2).

**Table 3.2 I believe that boys can be abused in dating relationships.**

		Pre-test		Post-test	
		N	%	N	%
Valid	Disagree	13	13.4	9	9.3
	Agree	84	86.6	88	90.7
	Total	97	100	97	100
Missing	System	24	19.8	5	.9
Total		121	100	102	100

### **Conflict Resolution**

The results from the post-tests suggest that students continue to react in similar ways when they were angry with their partner as they listed in the pre-tests. Talking to their partners, taking a time out, and giving their partners the silent treatment were the most cited actions students would take (48%, 27%, and 9%, respectively).

The majority of the students reported that they would talk with their partner if they were angry. However, instead of simply stating that they would talk to their partner as they did in the pre-test, students elaborated on the situation. There was a greater emphasis placed on staying calm, discussing actual feelings, and trying to find a solution to the problem. A male reported that “I would try to work things out peacefully [peacefully].” A female reported that she “...would calmly talk to him about what I was mad about [and] talk the situation over.” A male stated that he “...would talk about the problem and stay calm.” Similarly, a female stated “I would talk to them [and] try to

work the problem out,” and a male student stated that he “...would try to find some common ground with each other to see what we can do.”

Students also placed a greater emphasis on articulating their feelings to help their partner understand their position. However, all of the students were female. One female reported that she would “...tell him how he makes me feel or what he does to get me angry.” Another female stated that she would take a break and “...then I would come back and let him know how I feel.” Two female students stated that they would convey their feelings to their partners, and they would find out how their partners felt about the situation. One female student reported that she “...would tell my boyfriend how I feel and ask him how he feels about what I just said.” The second student, a female, stated that “I talk to him [and] let him know how I feel. Also hear how he feels of the situation not just me and we try to work it out.” One male did not specifically mention his feelings but he said that he “...try[ies] to be calm and explain to them why I[']m angry [angry]...”

Finally, one male student confessed that he and his partner have yelled at each other when they were angry, which suggests that he now views the behavior negatively. “I usually just talk to her and try to work it out but sometimes we do yell at each other and raise our voices.”

The post-test results mirrored the results found in the pre-tests with respect to students taking a time out when they were angry with their partners; more specifically students mentioned that they would count to ten or take a walk. Two male students stated that they would “just count up to 10.” Another male student stated that he would “discuss the situation at a later time after cooling of.” A male student stated “I would [go] out side [outside] for a quick second to cool down.” Students no longer mentioned using the silent treatment when they were angry with their partners. Instead there was a greater focus on

strategies such as cooling off and talking calmly about why they were angry with their partner.

Similar to pre-test results, there were students who specifically mentioned that they would not resort to physical violence if they were angry with a partner. In the pre-test, one female student and three male students stated they would not resort to physical violence. In the post-test one female student reported that she would not be physically violent toward her partner and two male students specifically stated that they would not choose to use physical violence when they were angry with their partners. The female student stated that when she is angry with her partner she would “probably [Probably] yell, but then talk about it later. I would never hit my boyfriend.” The one male stated that “I might raise my voice and yell, but I really don’t call names and I’ve never hit anyone out of anger or action.” This response suggests that this particular student understands that “name calling” can be considered to be emotionally abusive behavior. The second male student alluded to the fact that he possibly partook in physical violence in the past when he was angry with his partner. He stated that “I would tell them and try to work it out with them instead of hitting them or anything like that.”

Despite participation in the prevention program, there were still students that stated that they would resort to physical violence if they were angry with their partner. Similar to the pre-test, four female students reported that they would use physical violence against their partner in the post-test. Four female students reported that they would resort to verbal and physical attacks on their partners. One female student stated “I would yell and if it was necessary [necessary] I would hit him.” Another female student reported that she would “get upset & take it out on him an[d] depending on the situation I might hit them...” The third female student would “not talk to them or if I[‘]m very mad I may hit them.” The fourth student stated that she would “yell and scream[,] hit him if



nessesary [necessary].” Even though all of their responses included using physical violence against their partners, they each gave conditional responses, which suggests that using physical violence is not viewed as the most desirable way to handle conflict and that it would not be their first and only response.

Students were also asked if they agreed with the statement, “I feel it is normal to yell at my partner if they disagree with me.” Post-tests results were consistent with results from the pre-test with 76% of students disagreeing with the statement in both set of surveys.

### **Help-seeking Behaviors**

The data appears to supports prior research findings that demonstrate that young adolescents who are involved in abusive relationship will most likely turn to their friends. In addition, more students in the sample were willing to disclose information about being involved in a verbally controlling dating relationship than if they were involved in a physically violent relationship, suggesting the results support previous research.

Students were asked to indicate who they would tell if they were involved in a verbally controlling relationship. Over one-fourth of the students marked that they would tell their friend, and that was the only person they indicated that they would tell. Almost half of the students indicated that they would tell multiple people about the verbally controlling relationship. Of those students that marked more than one person, close to 95% of the respondents indicated that their friends would be one of the people they would talk to about the abusive relationship.

Students also indicated that they would talk to their parents if they were in a verbally controlling relationship. Roughly 62% of students would talk to their parents if

they were involved in an abusive relationship, however; 52% of students indicated that they would inform their parents of their involvement in an abusive relationship in addition to talking to their friends. Only 10% of respondents indicated that their parents would be the only people they would confide in, reinforcing the important role played by friends.

Students were given the option to list an additional person they would inform about their involvement in a verbally controlling relationship. Approximately 10% of students indicated that they would turn to school officials, counseling services offered in the school, as well as outside services that specialize in teen dating violence (See table 3.3).

**Table 3.3 Who students would tell if they were in emotionally controlling relationship**

		N	%
Valid	Friend	23	25.6
	Sibling	7	7.8
	Parent	9	10.0
	Other	2	2.2
	No one	4	4.4
	Multiple	45	50.0
	Total	90	100
Missing	System	13	12.7
Total		102	100

When students were asked who they would tell if they were in a physically violent relationship, friends were again the most frequently listed category. Of the students that marked only one category, a friend remained the person that respondents were most likely to tell, followed by no one, parents, and siblings. Over half of the respondents indicated that they would tell multiple people if they were in a physically violent relationship. Of the students that indicated they would talk to multiple people about their involvement in a physically violent relationship, 60% indicated that they would at least tell a friend and roughly 39% included a parent as someone they would talk to. Twelve percent of students indicated that they would turn to either school officials, counseling services offered in the school, or outside services that specialize in teen dating violence (See table 3.4).

**Table 3.4 Who students would tell if they were in physically violent relationship**

		N	%
Valid	Friend	12	13.6
	Sibling	6	6.8
	Parent	10	11.4
	Other	4	4.5
	No one	10	11.4
	Multiple	46	52.3
	Total	88	100
Missing	System	15	14.7
Total		102	100

Despite participation in the program, a small percentage of students indicated that they would not tell anyone if they were in an abusive relationship. Four percent of students indicated that they would not tell anyone if they were in an emotionally controlling relationship. The percentage of students who would keep the abuse to themselves increased to 11% when asked who they would tell if they were in a physically violent relationship. There were four students that indicated that they would discuss their involvement in an emotionally controlling relationship with their parents, but they would not talk to their parents if they were involved in a physically violent relationship.

### **Dating Behaviors**

At the beginning of the program, 38% of the students were currently dating someone. At the time the program was completed, 41% of the students stated that they were dating someone.

The post-test included several questions that were not included in the pre-test. The additional questions were designed to help understand different aspects of dating behavior of the students involved in the prevention program. Results indicated that 17% of students indicated that it was important to be involved in a dating relationship when they were in high school. A larger percentage of females, (20%), expressed a preference to be involved in a dating relationship, while 15% of the male respondents stated that it was important to them. Students were also asked if they had received pressure from their friends to remain involved in a dating relationship, despite the fact that the respondent did not want to remain in the relationship. Of the 29% of students that stated that they felt pressure from their friends to remain in a dating relationship, 31% of the boys and 29% of the girls revealed that they had felt pressure from their friends. It was not specified as to whether or not the relationship was abusive (See table 3.5).

**Table 3.5 Have you ever received pressure to stay in a dating relationship you did not want to?**

			Received pressure		Total
			yes	no	
Sex	Female	N	14	35	49
		%	28.6	71.4	100
	Male	N	15	33	48
		%	31.3%	68.8	100
Total	N		29	68	97
	%		29.9	70.1	100

Three questions were developed to identify how influential parents, siblings, and peers are in the student's selection of dating partners. Students were asked to respond to six statements on an ordinal scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree). The first three statements asked students if they would date someone that their parents, siblings, and friends did not approve. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents stated that they would date someone even if their parents did not approve of their partner. The number of students that would continue to date someone that their siblings did not approve of declined slightly to 27%. Only 22% of respondents stated that they would date someone that their friends did not approve. Based on the students' responses, it appears that peers play a stronger role than parents and siblings do in influencing adolescents' choices as to whom they become involved with in a dating relationship.

### **Peer Involvement in Abusive Relationships**

Students were asked what they would do if their friend had made them promise not to tell anyone that she or he was in an abusive relationship. Close to 37% of the students stated that they would tell someone despite the fact that they had promised their friend that they would not tell anyone. For example, one female student indicated that she would "...tell [be]cause they could get really hurt or killed." Some of the people/places that were listed as places respondents would turn to for help included: other friends, trusted adults, local teen organizations, and parents of both the victim as well as the respondents' own parents. Although many students felt they would not honor their promise to keep silent about a peer's abusive relationship, some students did not want their friend to find out that they had actually revealed the secret. One male student wrote that he "...would tell an adult but I would try as much as possible for him/her to not find out I told."

Another 27% of the students stated that they would not tell, regardless of the situation. Students maintained that they would not get involved. One female stated, "No (I wouldn't tell), really it['s not my business and I don't wanna [want to] effect [affect] the relationship!" Some of the students said that they would try to help their friend with advice to get out of the relationship or to seek help. One male stated, "I would talk them into getting out of the relationship." Other students stated that they would go and talk directly with the abuser. A male stated, "I wouldn't tell anyone but I would talk to the guy/girl/ who was abusing them." A female declared, "I would try to resolve it myself."

The other 20% of the students, who said they would honor their promise, believed that they would do so only under certain conditions. A female student declared that she would give her friend an ultimatum, "I would tell them they have a week to get help themselves or I'm going to tell someone." Other students would gauge the severity

of the abuse before deciding whether or not they would tell an adult. Another female declared, “I wouldn’t tell unless things really got out of hand to the point someone could be deathly injured.” A female stated, “I would keep my promise until things got way out of hand, then tell a trusted adult. Or, if things were already escalating I’d lie to my friend for her/his safety, then tell a trusted adult and get help.”

A handful of students (5%) stated that they would have never promised to keep the abusive relationship a secret in the first place. The same percentage of students stated they would not know what they would do if their friend had made them promise not to tell anyone about the abusive relationship in the first place.

### **Students’ Evaluation of the Program**

Unlike the majority of evaluation studies, the survey included questions to evaluate students’ perceptions of the program. The information collected provides added insight into whether or not students viewed the program as beneficial. Seventy-two percent of students stated that SDTP increased their understanding of dating violence (See table 3.6).

**Table 3.6 Did SDTP better help you to understand dating violence?**

		N	%
Valid	Yes	61	72.6
	No	23	27.4
	Total	84	100
Missing	System	18	17.6
Total		102	100

Students were asked to list something they learned following their participation in the dating violence prevention program. Students had a variety of responses, but the themes that were repeated were consistent with the topics covered in the classroom sessions. Students frequently mentioned that they were now aware that males can be victims in a violent dating relationship. One male stated he had learned “that guys can be abused too.” Students also frequently mentioned that students had a better understanding of the various forms of abuse, and what actions were classified as abuse in a dating relationship. Another male stated that he had learned “about the different kinds of abuse.” Another male declared that “It [the program] helped me tell the difference between abusive and not abusive relationships.” One female stated that she had learned “the warning signs of an abusive relationship.” Yet another female recognized her own involvement in an abusive dating relationship. She stated that as a result of participating in the SDTP she learned “that my Ex boyfriend [ex-boyfriend] is a verbal abuser [abuser].”

Students also indicated that they learned what to do if they or a friend became involved in an abusive relationship. A female indicated that “yes [she had learned something] because without it [the program] I would not know what to tell a friend in a[n] abusive relationship.” A male indicated “...that you can go to many places for help” if your friend has become involved in an abusive relationship. Approximately 84% of the students surveyed knew there were places where teens in abusive relationships could find help. Some of the most frequently listed places included, local counseling centers designated to deal with dating violence, the school wellness center, teachers, school counselors, and the police.

One of the most notable themes concerned students’ increased understandings of what causes abuse and who is responsible for the abuse. Victim



blaming is often present when examining abusive dating relationships, as well as in cases of domestic violence. Victims, perpetrators, and outsiders often perceive that the perpetrator had been provoked by the victim and that the abuse could have been prevented. The program attempted to eliminate victim blaming by educating students about the danger and inaccuracy of victim blaming. Numerous students mentioned that victims were not responsible for their own abuse. A female declared “that it is never the victim[']s fault.” One female indicated that “It’s never the person who is abused’s [the victim of abuse] fault.”

The pre-test had revealed that roughly half of students in the sample (49%) believed that dating violence was the result of an anger management problem. Results from the post-tests, however, indicated that there was a possible change in students’ perceptions of the causes of dating violence. Students frequently mentioned that a control problem exerted the most influence on why someone would abuse his or her partner, and not an anger management problem. One female indicated “that abuse is about controlling (emphasized in original) someone, not about an anger problem.”

In their open ended responses, twenty-two students (25%) specifically mentioned control as something that makes a dating relationship abusive. One female stated that “people abuse because they want to control.” Another female indicated that “...it isn’t the abusee’s [person who is being abused] fault for getting abused, and the abuser has a control problem not an anger problem.” The inconsistency in students’ perceptions of roles of anger management and power and control in abusive dating relationships suggests a need for future research to better explore these issues.

Overall, the SDTP program appeared to be well received by the students. When students were asked if there were things about the programs that they would change, 68% of students responded that they would not change anything about the

program. As one female commented, she would change, “nothing, it was a great learning experience.” Most of the students that responded with suggestions for improvement that included elements having to do with the length of the program. A female stated that “It [the program] was too short.” Another female declared that a “longer time period” would help improve the program. Other students commented on the frequency of the classes. For example, a female stated that the project coordinator needed to “come to our school more [;] some kids need people in your position to talk to.” One female mentioned that the program “...started in middle school (8<sup>th</sup> grade) so we could have learned about dating violence sooner” indicating that dating violence can begin before students enter high school. Thus, the students’ comments seem to endorse the SDTP, many responses revealing a desire to learn about dating violence earlier in the education process.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DISCUSSION**

This research sought to explore students' knowledge and perceptions of abusive dating relationships before and after participating in a dating violence prevention program. More specifically, it focused on the roles that peers play in abusive dating relationships given that prior research has demonstrated their significance in young adolescent dating relationships. Using a sample of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students from one public high school in a mid-Atlantic state, survey data was collected from 121 pre-tests and 102 post-tests administered to students before the Safe Dates Theater Project (SDTP) began and immediately after the SDTP ended. The surveys included ordinal questions as well as open ended questions designed to better understanding of students' attitudes towards dating and their actual dating patterns. Other questions were designed to gain information about the roles that peers play in abusive dating relationships. Almost half of the students in the diverse sample were members of a racial minority (47% of students in the pre-test and 48% in the post-test). Despite the large percentage of minority students, no significant racial differences emerged in the analysis.

The data collected from this high school sample indicate that dating violence is relatively common in dating relationships in the school in which the prevention program was conducted. The results from this study are consistent with results found in the National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which is part of a national biannual survey that is distributed to students in all public schools, and most of the private schools, in the same state. Results from the 2005 survey indicate that abuse in adolescents' dating relationships is in fact a reality in the state and prevention programs are needed to help this specific population.

Before focusing on peer involvement in dating relationships, findings on students' perceptions of dating violence are discussed. Not surprisingly, results indicated that moderate levels of abuse in dating relationships existed in the participating school, even though the administration had not formally or informally acknowledged the existence of abusive relationships. In both the pre-test and post-test, a fairly high percentage of students indicated that they currently knew someone, or have known someone that was involved in an abusive relationship. It was also found that 17% of the students that participated in the pre-test and 18% of students that participated in the post-test knew someone that was currently abusing their partner, or had abused a previous partner. Moreover, the post-test results indicated that 34% of the student population knew someone that was currently being abused by their partner, or had been involved in an abusive relationship, which is a slight increase from the 31% of students in the pre-test.

With abusive dating patterns and relationships starting as early as seventh-grade, it is important to address the issues of dating violence before the abuse actually begins (Weisz and Black 2001). Adolescents are at a particular risk for becoming involved in abusive relationships. Many adolescents enter their first dating relationships without experience or knowledge of what actually constitutes a healthy relationship. For example, when an adolescent limits his or her dating partner's interactions with other people, instead of being viewed as controlling and abusive behavior, the adolescent may think that his or her partner is acting out of love.

While there remains a need to address the needs of populations that have already identified dating violence as a problem, it is important to focus on preventing dating violence and educating younger populations about the topic. Primary prevention programs are designed and implemented in areas where a problem has not been formally acknowledged, or there is little concern about its need. These programs typically focus on

educating groups about the dangers of particular activities related to dating violence. More specifically, dating violence prevention programs seek to educate young adolescents about dating violence as well as the societal factors found to be associated with it, such as, gender stereotypes, sexism, and inadequate conflict resolution skills. The dating violence that occurs in young adolescents' dating relationships mirrors the violence experienced in adult dating relationships; both exist along a continuum of behaviors ranging from verbal and emotional abuse to physical and sexual abuse (Sousa 1999). Educating young adolescents about the dangers of dating violence can help to decrease the number of abusive relationships experienced by young adolescents, adult dating couples, married couples, and children living in these abusive households (Foshee et al. 1998).

The majority of existing dating violence prevention programs seek to change students' perceptions and attitudes about dating violence. The particular program examined here, like so many others, designed a curriculum with the goal to expand students' understanding of dating violence. This research sought to determine students' attitudinal changes, as opposed to actual behavioral changes. Similar to most prior research conducted on prevention programs, the analyses could only discern attitudinal changes as opposed to actual behavioral changes as a result of participating in the SDTP. It is hoped that the attitudinal changes will exert an influence on students' actual behavior in dating relationships, despite the fact that some studies have found that attitudinal changes do not always translate into behavioral changes (Clayton et al. 1996).

After students watched and participated in an interactive play about dating violence, they participated in follow-up sessions during their scheduled health class once a week for half of the school year. The sessions were facilitated by a trained social worker involved with the prevention program, and focused on helping students to define

abuse and recognize warning signs, establish appropriate peer responses to dating violence, identify school and community resources, identify gender stereotypes and implications, formulate relationship expectations, define a healthy relationship, develop clearer communication styles/assertiveness, and enhance their boundary, decision-making, and problem solving skills. Student evaluations of the program were overwhelmingly positive.

### **Students' Perceptions of Healthy and Abusive Relationships**

One of the main objectives of the program was to educate students about abusive and healthy relationships. Adolescents often minimize or romanticize abusive behaviors due to a lack of knowledge of what behaviors are abusive (Sousa 1999; Schewe 2001; Jackson, Cram and Seymour 2000). By defining what constitutes a healthy relationship and facilitating discussions about realistic relationship expectations, students' understanding and knowledge of dating relationships increased regardless of their actual experiences. After participation in the prevention program, respect remained on of the most cited qualities attributed to a healthy relationship. This response probably reflects the facilitator's strong emphasis on the notion of respect, which includes having respect for one's partner as well as respect for oneself. Students also reported that they wanted to be able to openly communicate with their partners when there was a conflict. Because of their inexperience in negotiating dating relationships, it is important for students to learn effective skills, such as conflict resolution tactics and other communication styles, so they will be better able to express themselves and resolve conflict without resorting to verbal insults or physical assaults.

It appears the DSTP also achieved success in expanding students' understanding of what behaviors are considered by students to be abusive. Before

participation in the program, when students defined the characteristics that made a dating relationship abusive, they often limited their definitions of abusive actions to physically violent acts typically committed by a male against a female partner. While physical violence can and does occur in young adolescents' dating relationships, it is likely that abusive behaviors will begin with controlling and verbally abusive behaviors. Some students' responses in the post-test acknowledged this pattern and included verbal and emotional abuse along with physical abuse in their descriptions. Despite extensive research findings revealing that sexual abuse is also prevalent in young adolescent relationships, only two students mentioned that sexual abuse could be part of an abusive relationship. This small number of responses probably reflects that the school program was not permitted to raise or discuss topics related to sex without parental consent, including sexual abuse.

Another misconception the program addressed was individual responsibility for dating abuse. The program sought to eliminate victim blaming and encourage participants to hold the perpetrators responsible for their abusive actions. This is particularly important due to adolescents' lack of experience in dating relationships. Both victims and perpetrators of abuse may justify the abuse as warranted and without a greater understanding of abuse in dating relationships, it is likely that the behaviors will continue.

In hopes of changing students' perceptions as well as school norms, the program challenged students' understanding of gender stereotypes and sexism, while debunking dating violence myths. There is a common misconception that in a heterosexual dating relationship females are always the victims of abuse, but this is not always the case. Thus, one of the goals of the program was to change students' misconceptions of who can be victims or offender in dating relationships. For example,

prior to their participation in the program, 14% of students believed that boys could not be abused in dating relationships. It can be speculated that participating in the SDTP influenced the drop in the percentage (to 7%) of students that disagreed with the statement that boys could be the victims of abusive dating relationships. In addition, students' written responses reflected the possible change in viewing the female as the victim and the male as the perpetrator. The majority of students' responses in the post-test used the gender neutral word "partner" when describing abusive relationships, instead of signifying that males are always the perpetrator and seeing females always as the victim.

In addition to trying to increase students' understanding of who is responsible for dating abuse, the SDTP sought to address the misconception that abusive behaviors are caused by an inability to control one's anger. It is a common misconception that people abuse their partners due to an inability to control their anger. This is problematic because by equating abusive behaviors to an anger management issue provides an excuse for the abuse behavior. For example, a young male adolescent is upset because of what his female partner wore to school and decides to yell at and call her demeaning names in front of a large group of their friends. If the behavior is justified as an anger management issue, there is a failure to examine the role that power and control play in abusive relationships. On the surface it looks as if the aggressor became upset at his partner and was unable to control his actions. However, when examined at a deeper level the aggressor was using his power as a means to control his partner. Because the victim was publicly embarrassed, it is unlikely that she will wear the same outfit, or a similar outfit for fear that her partner will react in the same way that he had previously. The aggressor is controlling what his partner wears by making her afraid of what he might do if she dresses that way again. Another example of a controlling action that



could be mistaken as an anger management issue is when one female student stated that it was ok to hit your partner “when your boyfriend cheats on you.” On the surface it may seem that if the respondent found out that her boyfriend cheated on her she would be upset to the point that she would use physical violence against her partner. However, her reasoning behind using the physical violence is probably due to the fact that she wants to convey to her boyfriend that cheating on her is wrong and that he should not do it again or there is going to be physically consequences. She is controlling his actions through fear of physical violence.

While almost 57% of the students in the post-test still believed that the abuse in dating relationships was a result of an anger management issue, students were more likely to identify an individual’s need for power and control over their partner as the cause of abuse in their open-ended responses. By expanding the knowledge of the dynamics of power and control, the program hoped to give students the tools to better recognize the beginning signs of abuse. If a person begins to limit who his or her partner can interact with, adolescents can better understand the behavior as abusive and be less likely to make excuses for the behavior.

### **Managing Conflict**

A large portion of the curriculum focused on how to navigate conflict in a dating relationship. Some researchers have emphasized the need to develop programs that help to teach students appropriate responses to conflict, as well as to teach students acceptable reactions (Lundenberg 2004). Accordingly, the SDTP taught students the skills needed to successfully address and resolve relationship conflict without resorting to abusive behaviors. Responses in the post-test suggest that students embraced the conflict management skills presented in the program. While the majority of students stated in the

pre-test that they would talk to their partners if they were angry with them, their responses in the post-test expanded to include more specific actions and they placed an emphasis on staying calm, discussing their feelings, and trying to find a solution to the problem.

Another goal of the prevention program was to educate students about community resources available to young adolescents involved in abusive dating relationships. The post-test data revealed that approximately 84% of students were able to list a variety of places where teens in abusive relationships could find help. This knowledge is crucial since many existing facilities, including schools, and programs cannot provide services to minors because of legal issues. The SDTP also sought to provide the school with the knowledge and tools to successfully confront dating violence, which is important because many schools are ill prepared to deal with dating violence (Molder and Tolman 1998). Without access to places where young adolescents in abusive dating relationships can turn to for help, it is likely that abuse within dating relationships will not be addressed, making it unlikely that the needs of teens in abusive relationships will be successfully met.

### **Peer Involvement**

Peers play a central role in adolescents' dating relationships, whether or not the relationships are abusive, and this centrality was reflected in SDTP's curriculum. A central component to SDTP was to teach students the best ways to react if their friend was involved in an abusive relationship. Educating peers about how to respond to abusive dating relationships is vital, since this study, like many others, demonstrates that young adolescents are more likely to turn to their peers first for help when they are involved in abusive relationships (Schewe 2001, Molder and Tolman 1998, Jackson et al. 2000). For

example, the 2005 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that over 46% of ninth grade students reported that they would turn to a close friend if they had a problem with drinking, drug use, or sexual behavior. Despite this reliance on peers, however, another national survey found that one-third of the young adolescents sampled would not know what to do if a friend confided he or she was involved in an abusive relationship (TRU 2005). Young adolescents' lack of experience with dating relationships leaves them ill prepared to deal with friends who are involved in abusive dating relationships.

Moreover, data from previous research confirms that young adolescents are more likely to turn to their peers, if anyone, if they were involved in abusive relationships. Almost 95% of the students that participated in the SDTP listed that they would turn to a friend if they were in an emotionally controlling relationship, and 60% of students indicated that they would talk to a friend if they were in a physically violent relationship. The big difference in the percentage of students that would report emotional abuse compared to physical abuse was also found in other studies (Jackson et al. 2000). It is possible that adolescents are more likely to disclose emotional abuse because it is easier to excuse the behaviors. It is also often harder to identify emotional abuse due to the fact that most associate "abuse" with physically hurting someone. Less ambiguity exists with physical abuse, and it is possible that victims of physical abuse recognize the stigmas associated with physical intimate violence. It is important to educate students about the less obvious forms of emotional abuse that can occur in dating relationships. The power of peer influence reinforces the need for prevention programs that address the role that peers play in adolescent dating relationships.

With young adolescents more likely to turn to their peers when involved in an abusive behavior, it is hopeful to find that over one-third of the students surveyed indicated that they would talk to an adult if their friend was involved in an abusive

relationship, despite the fact that their friend asked them to refrain from disclosing the abuse. This reality underscores the importance for young adolescents to be aware of how to react if a friend confides that he or she is involved in an abusive dating relationship. It is also important to increase students' understanding of abusive relationships because even if a young adolescent does not directly discuss his or her abusive relationship with their peers, peers' knowledge of dating violence provides tools needed to identify and respond to abusive relationships.

It can be speculated that results from this present study reinforce the influential role of peers in young adolescents' dating relationships. Peers were more influential than parents or siblings in validating adolescents' dating relationships. When students were asked how influential their parents', siblings', and peers' opinions were on whom the students decided to date, peers' opinions remained the most influential, reinforcing the notion that peers can play a central role in influencing healthy dating relationships. It was also found that 29% of the participating students had felt pressure from their friends to remain in a dating relationship. If adolescents do not understand the dynamics of abusive behaviors, it is possible they may unwillingly persuade their friends to remain in an abusive dating relationship.

What is interesting about this finding is that more boys (31%) than girls (29%) had experienced pressure from their peers to remain in a dating relationship despite the fact that they themselves did not want to continue with the relationship. Often women are judged as desirable or undesirable based on whether or not they are involved in a heterosexual relationship, so it would be assumed that more female students would experience pressure from their friends when the opposite was true. It is possible that in this particular school, there is a heightened emphasis placed on being involved in a dating

relationship, which is why male students would also experience increased pressure to remain in a dating relationship.

The questionnaires did not yield data on whether or not those students that experienced peer pressure actually listened to their friends and stayed in the relationship, or if they decided to leave the relationship in spite of peer pressure. While almost one-third of participating students indicated that they had felt pressure to remain in a dating relationship, only 17% of students, 20% of females and 15% of males, felt it was important for them to be involved in a dating relationship in the first place. With fewer students placing importance on being involved in a dating relationship, students may not give into the pressure placed on them by their friends to stay in a relationship despite the strong influence of peers in dating relationships.

The majority of prevention programs conducted nationwide included an evaluation component where students are asked to provide feedback about how the program could be improved, what they liked and disliked about the program, and what they learned from participating in the program. In similar research, Weisz and Black (2001) received a limited amount of feedback from the students who participated in the program, as well as from their parents. The little information, however, was “found to be most helpful” (98). The students in this study were asked to respond to three different questions about the prevention program. The vast majority of the students had positive things to say about the program, and a majority also indicated that the program expanded their knowledge of what makes a dating relationship abusive. More prevention programs need to include a participant evaluation in order to gain a better understanding of how the program was received, and suggestions for improvement.

The student evaluations of the SDTP appear to indicate that the curriculum was well received. Students actively and enthusiastically participated during the

interactive play, as well as during the classroom sessions. Over 84% of the participating students stated that they would not change anything about the prevention program. Those four students who suggested that they would change something about the program listed things such as lengthening the sessions, increasing the number of sessions, and beginning the program in middle school.

Results from this study indicate that the SDTP might have been influential in educating students about both healthy and abusive relationships, increasing students' understanding of dating violence, including the behaviors are considered to be abusive, and educating peers on the best ways to respond to dating violence. While it is inconclusive as to whether or not the SDTP participation will have an effect on students' actual behavior, it does appear that participating in the SDTP influenced students' attitudes.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

This research examined the effects of a school-based dating violence prevention program. Using a sample of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students from a public high school in a mid-Atlantic state, this research sought to determine attitudinal changes as a result of participation in the Safe Date Theater Project. Results indicate that the SDTP was successful in altering students' attitudes about abuse in dating relationships. Despite the positive results, there are some limitations of this research that need to be acknowledged.

#### **Statement of Limitations**

One of the possible reasons that explains why there is little knowledge of the prevalence of dating violence and the effectiveness of prevention programs is due to the fact that this study did not follow a true experimental design. Instead, this was an exploratory study and the findings from this study cannot be taken as absolutes nor can the findings be applied to other groups of adolescents. While interesting and informative data was collected from this sample, it is impossible to tell if there were actual attitudinal changes due to the small sample size, the absence of a control group, and significant tests were not run on the results. It is also impossible to tell if the slight changes between the pre-test and post-test is due to students' actual participation in the program or due to some other factor(s).

In this study, students were asked to respond to questions in their own words, therefore, allowing them to use their own definitions of concepts when responding to questions. While this allows for students to answer questions independently of the

researcher's definitions, there is a possibility that students will misinterpret a question, altering the accuracy of their response.

First, the definition of dating violence, specifically the term dating, is problematic. Research design originally defined partner violence as something that happened between married or cohabitating adult partners, relationships that typically do not exist among young adolescents. Also the term "dating" can vary from school to school, grade to grade, and person to person.

Similar to the problems of defining what is considered to be a dating relationship, there is often difficulty in defining what makes a relationship abusive. It is difficult for young adolescents to define their relationship or their friends' relationship as abusive because there is a mixture of love and affection alongside the abuse. Perpetrators hurt their dating partners, while simultaneously professing their love for them. Adolescents typically think of "domestic violence" as something that involves physical abuse, usually occurring between married adults. When reviewing answers to survey questions, the researcher here was aware of the fact that students may be unwilling to identify themselves or their friends as perpetrators or victims of dating violence. However, in the case of this research, due to the fact that students are already actively participating in the dating violence prevention program, it was assumed that the students had a solid exposure of what behaviors are considered to be abusive.

Another limitation that was recognized by the researcher was the risk of backlash. There have been instances of backlash following the introduction of educational programs on sexual and physical assault (Wolfe and Jaffe 2003). Some programs that have failed to recognize and address "mutual violence" have also experienced backlash. Research has shown that young girls participate in violence toward their partners at a higher rate than their adult counterparts and programs must be designed



in a way that views dating violence as something more than male abuse of female partners (Avery-Leaf et al. 1997). To combat this possibility, in addition to informing students the truth about dating violence, the program continually emphasized the fact that both males and females can be the victim, perpetrator, or both, alert there may be different motives or consequences of their acts.

Another issue that is related to the content of the survey has to do with the questions that were not asked. Sexual abuse can be a central component to an abusive dating relationship. Despite this fact, the prevention program was only permitted to acknowledge sexual abuse as a form of dating violence, as opposed to going into an in-depth discussion about sexual abuse. The state in which the program took place requires parental consent before students can be exposed to information that is related to sex. The project coordinator was allowed to mention that sexual abuse is a form of dating violence, however, failing to address sexual abuse can be damaging because of its frequency in teen relationships. Results from the National Youth Risk Behavior survey indicate that roughly 5% of males and 10% of girls in high school have been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to. Due to an agreement with the program coordinator and the principal, the survey did not ask questions related to sexual abuse or sexual assault. This translates into two separate problems.

First, the inability of the program to address issues related to sexual abuse fails to provide students with the information necessary to understand the role that sexual abuse can play in an abusive dating relationship. The program focused on defining abuse and being aware of the signs of abuse. Without a greater understanding of sexual abuse, it is possible that students have an extensive knowledge of dating violence, except for sexual abuse. They may be able to recognize signs of abuse and know how to react, but they may fail to understand sexual abuse. If they do recognize sexual abuse as a

component of an abusive relationship, they may not know how to respond because they were not fully educated about sexual abuse.

A second problem with not addressing sexual abuse has to do with the full evaluation of the effectiveness of the program's ability to educate students about sexual abuse. The limitations placed on the prevention program content limits what exactly the researcher can investigate. In addition to questions about sexual assault, the researcher was not permitted to ask students about their own perpetration or victimization. State laws require that adults who are aware of issues pertaining to victimization must alert authorities. Results from the study were able to determine a change in perceptions and attitudes about dating violence, but could not determine if participation in the prevention program had an effect on students' behaviors.

Unfortunately, the survey did not ask students' perceptions about dating violence in same sex relationships. The research was unaware of the fact that the prevention program addressed violence in same sex relationships until after the post-tests had been completed by the students. Interestingly, no respondents volunteered any information on abuse in same sex relationships.

As with other survey research, there is a question of the validity of the responses. It is assumed that the fact that the participants' answers could and would not be traced back to the individual encouraged students to be truthful in their responses. Dating violence is a sensitive topic and students may be less likely to provide an accurate response without these assurances. It is also possible that students were less likely to provide accurate information because they knew that teachers and the program administrator would examine the surveys. The classroom teacher distributed and collected the surveys, so it is possible that students did not provide completely accurate information because they knew the teacher had access to the surveys after they were

completed. Moreover, the teacher grades the students in the classroom, and it is highly likely that students' handwriting is known, which could have influenced students' willingness to provide fully truthful and accurate responses.

One of the final limitations of this research pertains to students' retention of the information provided in the program. Students completed the post-test a day after the prevention program had ended. It is not known whether or not the change in students' attitudes about dating violence will continue after the program has been completed. A follow-up survey given a year or two years later could indicate if the change in attitudes remains consistent over time.

Finally, and arguably the most important limitation, this research sought to measure students' attitudinal changes and not behavioral changes. Due to an agreement with the program coordinator, the surveys could not include questions about students' personal experiences with being either a victim or a perpetrator of abuse in dating relationships. Without this information, it is impossible to conclude if the SDTP had an impact on students' actual abusive behavior. Despite this fact, it is promising to see changes in students' perceptions and attitudes after participating in the SDTP. The hope is that these attitudes will affect students' actual behaviors. It is also important to recognize that the results from this study may not be applicable to other student populations. There was not a control group with which to compare these results. Despite these limitations, with its focus on school-based prevention programs and on peer-based perceptions about dating violence, this study contributes to our growing understanding of teen dating violence.

## **Policy Implications**

The results from this research suggest that school-based dating violence prevention programs do have an effect on changing students' attitudes and understandings of dating violence. Post-test results were collected a day after the program had ended, so it impossible to conclude that these changes will be maintained over a prolonged period of time. However, the student responses revealed that dating violence prevention programs have the potential to alter students' attitudes and understanding of dating violence, even if it for a short period of time.

Future dating violence prevention programs should examine the previous research conducted on dating violence prevention programs and be sure to include the things that have been identified as successful components. Results from prior research indicate that abuse is often thought of as something physical that is perpetrated by males against females. It is important for prevention programs to help students in identifying all forms of abuse, and recognize that abuse can occur in all forms of dating relationships, including traditional long term couples, adolescents who may have engaged in on one or two dates, or group events such as group dates or school dances (Hickman et al. 2004).

There has been a string of successful school-based dating violence prevention programs, supporting the belief that the school environment is an optimal place to begin the fight against dating violence. However, it is important to remember that students are not the only ones who need to be exposed to dating violence prevention programs. It is critical for prevention programs to gain the support from teachers, school officials and parents. Without this support, it is impossible to address dating violence. Teachers and school administrators play an integral part in preventing dating violence. In addition to educating students about dating violence, teacher and administrators need to be aware of the dynamics of dating violence in order to prevent it, or stop it.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

While findings from this research are inconclusive, this exploratory study provides the base for further studying the SDTP. Future studies of the SDTP should follow a true experimental design. By using a control group and rigorous significance tests, researchers would be provided with the tools to determine if there was an actual change in students' attitudes and perceptions of dating violence as a result of participating in the SDTP. With this information, the actual effectiveness of the program could be determined. Instead of relying on students' attitudes and perceptions, it is crucial to include questions about students' own victimization and perpetration.

In following a true experimental design, the student evaluations need to be broken up to reflect the different components of the program. For example, it is unknown if the play had any influence on the students because none of the students surveyed mentioned the play. To combat the uncertainty of what component of the program would be most influential on students a pre-test should be given to students a week before the SDTP begins and immediately before students view the play. A post-test should then be given to students immediately after they viewed the play, half-way through the duration of the program, and a day after program participation was complete. Following a longitudinal design and giving students surveys one, two, and three years after completion of the program would provide researchers with the data to measure the longitudinal effect the program may have on students.

In addition to designing a research project to expand on the exploratory research that was conducted here, research on abuse in young adolescent dating relationships is still relatively new, and there are numerous factors that need to be further examined. First, some studies have shown gender differences in adolescents' understandings of abuse and adolescents' responses to participating in dating violence

prevention programs. It would be beneficial to explore this difference further, possibly with research that uses a more rigorous experimental design. Being able to determine gender differences, if any exist, can provide additional information needed to develop programs to meet the specific needs of both male and female participants.

Future research should also focus on peer involvement in dating relationships, and adolescents' actual behaviors in their responses to their peers' abusive relationships. While this research showed that peers say that they were more likely to intervene in an abusive relationship, it is unknown if they would actually intervene and how. Determining the factors that influence peers' willingness to intervene would also provide program developers and administrators with the information needed to design a program to help educate peers about the proper way to intervene, as well as to reinforce the belief that abuse will not be tolerated within their social network.

Finally, most research on teen dating violence examines teens and their experiences with their partners, peers, and families. It would be interesting to see how young adolescents' interactions with the school and other institutions might influence abusive dating relationships. A school's failure to recognize dating violence and to intervene when it occurs could greatly affect a student's willingness to disclose the abuse.

It appears that results from this research indicate that the Safe Dates Theater Project was successful in altering students' perceptions and attitudes about dating violence for the better. Because of the lack of experience in dating relationships, it is important to educate young adolescents about the behaviors and characteristics that make a dating relationship healthy. It is also important to educate adolescents about the behaviors that can be considered to be abusive, because many teens neglect to recognize abusive behaviors unless the behaviors are physical in nature. This research also supports previous research that has found school-based prevention programs to be successful.

Students received an intensive curriculum designed to challenge their beliefs about dating relationships, establish that abusive behaviors extend beyond physically violent acts, as well as to provide students with the conflict resolution skills needed to help them navigate conflicts that may arise in their dating relationships.

## APPENDIX A

### Safe Dating Theater Project Pre-Test

*Directions: For each statement, please circle the number that describes what you believe.*

1. I think that people abuse their girl/boyfriends because of an anger management problem.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. I think that in an abusive relationship, as long as the abuser says sorry, the abuse will stop.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

3. If my friend was being abused by their boy/girlfriend, I would listen and involve a trusted adult.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

4. I think that victims of abuse are sometimes responsible for his/her own abuse.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

5. I know that there is help available for teens in abusive relationships.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

6. I believe that boys can be abused in dating relationships.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

*Do you have questions or want more information about this topic? If so, please give us your name and how we should contact you (phone, email, mail, school):*

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**Please answer the following questions as truthfully as possible. In order to ensure that all answers will be kept confidential, please do not use your name or anyone else's name when answering questions.**

**Thank you. Your participation is appreciated.**

How do you like to be treated by a boyfriend or girlfriend?

What are three words that you would use to describe a healthy relationship?

Describe what makes a dating relationship abusive.

What do you do (or would you do) if you are angry with your boyfriend or girlfriend?

What would you do (or have you done) if your friend was being hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend?

What would you do (or have you done) if you knew that your friend was hurting his or her boyfriend or girlfriend?

Do you have any adults in your life that you trust and can easily talk to about dating relationships? If so, whom?

**Please circle your answer to the following questions:**

I feel it is normal to yell at my partner if they disagree with me.      Yes      No

I feel it is important to maintain my independence in a relationship (not hanging out ALL the time together, having different friends, having different interests, etc.)      Yes      No

It is important for me to be able to talk openly and honestly about anything with my partner.      Yes      No

I am currently dating someone.      Yes      No

I know someone who is abused (or has been abused) by their boyfriend or girlfriend.  
Yes      No  
What kind of abuse? \_\_\_\_\_

I know someone who abuses (or has abused) their boyfriend or girlfriend.  
Yes      No  
What kind of abuse? \_\_\_\_\_

Your Sex:      Female      Male

Your Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### Safe Dating Theater Project Post-Test

*Directions: For each statement, please circle the number that describes what you believe.*

1. I think that people abuse their girl/boyfriends because of an anger management problem.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. I think that in an abusive relationship, as long as the abuser says sorry, the abuse will stop.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

3. If my friend was being abused by their boy/girlfriend, I would listen and involve a trusted adult.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

4. I think that victims of abuse are sometimes responsible for his/her own abuse.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

5. I know that there is help available for teens in abusive relationships.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

6. I believe that boys can be abused in dating relationships.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

*Do you have questions or want more information about this topic? If so, please give us your name and how we should contact you (phone, email, mail, school):*

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**Please answer the following questions as truthfully as possible. In order to ensure that all answers will be kept confidential, please do not use your name or anyone else's name when answering questions.**

**Thank you. Your participation is appreciated.**

How do you like to be treated by a boyfriend or girlfriend?

What are three words that you would use to describe a healthy relationship?

Describe what makes a dating relationship abusive.

What do you do (or would you do) if you are angry with your boyfriend or girlfriend?

What would you do (or have you done) if your friend was being hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend?

What would you do (or have you done) if you knew that your friend was hurting his or her boyfriend or girlfriend?

Do you have any adults in your life that you trust and can easily talk to about dating relationships? If so, whom?

**Please circle your answer to the following questions:**

I feel it is normal to yell at my partner if they disagree with me.      Yes      No

I feel it is important to maintain my independence in a relationship (not hanging out ALL the time together, having different friends, having different interests, etc.) Yes      No

It is important for me to be able to talk openly and honestly about anything with my partner.      Yes      No

I am currently dating someone. Yes      No

I know someone who is abused (or has been abused) by their boyfriend or girlfriend.

Yes      No

What kind of abuse? \_\_\_\_\_

I know someone who abuses (or has abused) their boyfriend or girlfriend.

Yes      No

What kind of abuse? \_\_\_\_\_

Your Sex:      Female      Male

Your Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you date someone if your parents/guardians did not approve?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Would you date someone if your siblings did not approve?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Would you date someone if your friends did not approve?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

My parents' approval has an effect as to whether or not I decide to date someone?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

My siblings' approval has an effect as to whether or not I decide to date someone?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

My friends' approval has an effect as to whether or not I decide to date someone?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Have you ever felt pressure from your friends to stay in a dating relationship, even if you did not want to?      YES      NO

Is it important to you to be in a dating relationship while you are in high school?

YES      NO

If so, why do you feel this way?

If you were in an emotionally controlling relationship what help do you think you would need the most?

If you were in a physically violent relationship what help do you think you would need the most?

If you were in an emotionally controlling relationship who would you tell?

friend \_\_\_\_\_  
sibling \_\_\_\_\_  
parent \_\_\_\_\_  
other \_\_\_\_\_, who? \_\_\_\_\_  
no one \_\_\_\_\_

If you were in an physically violent relationship who would you tell?

friend \_\_\_\_\_  
sibling \_\_\_\_\_  
parent \_\_\_\_\_  
other \_\_\_\_\_, who? \_\_\_\_\_  
no one \_\_\_\_\_

If your friend told you he/she were involved in an abusive relationship and made you promise not to tell anyone, what would you do?

Do you think there is any time when hitting a partner would be ok?

YES NO

If yes, when?

Do you know of places where teens involved in abusive dating relationships can seek help?  
Please list.

What is something you learned in the DELTA program that you did not know before?

Do you think the DELTA program helped you to better understand dating violence?

YES NO

If yes, what?

If you could change one thing about the program, what would it be?



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