THE ROLE OF GENDER NORMS IN ADOLESCENT BOYS' NAVIGATION OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

by

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Abstract

Focus group discussions were analyzed to gain a better understanding of adolescent boys' psychosocial processes of navigating their romantic relationships. In particular, the role of gender norms in boys' navigation of romantic relationships was explored. Using grounded theory methodology, focused discussions were held with 23 boys in Grades 9 through 12 at high schools in an urban school district. The central phenomenon identified to be occurring during these participants' relationship navigation was *getting experienced in dating*. Six other categories were identified: *initiating dating relationships*, *benefiting/"gaining" from relationships*, *communication, managing relationship issues*, *relationship breakdown*, and *disengaging from dating*. Contextual conditions were also found to be influencing participants' relationship navigation: *struggling to be confident, social/digital media culture, peers' perceptions, parental expectations, multicultural context, female gender stereotypes*, and finally, *masculine gender norms*. The significance of the findings in relation to boys' relationship navigation, social and emotional learning, the development of psycho-educational interventions, and the implications for school psychologists are discussed.

Preface

University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board (certificate number H14-0253) approved the current study, which was completed under the supervision of Dr. Laurie Ford and Dr. Catherine Ann Cameron. In this study, I developed the procedure, acted as a co-facilitator of the focus discussions, and conducted all data analysis. The study grew from my previous work in Dr. Catherine Ann Cameron's Child Study lab[1,2].

A pilot study was undertaken in January 2014 with Simon Lisaingo, Neringa Kubiliene and I as facilitators. A paper has been written about those data and has been submitted for publication with Toupey Luft, Paul-David Léger, Dana Dmytro, Neringa Kubiliene, Winni Chou and Catherine Ann Cameron as authors. The current study was undertaken with the support of the following Child Study lab members at the University of British Columbia: Michael Lee, Winni Chou, Neringa Kubiliene, Joanne Zhou, Alessandra Mafra Ribeiro, and Paul-David Léger. Michael was the focus group discussion co-facilitator, and he and Winni completed the transcriptions for the project. The other lab members, including Dr. Cameron, contributed to data analysis through discussions about codes, categories, and the emerging grounded theory.

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[1] Dmytro, D., Luft, T., Jenkins, M., Hoard, R., & Cameron, C. A. (2013). Rural adolescent boys' negotiating romantic relationships: "We need to sacrifice our brains." *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy, 47*, 259-276.

[2] Luft, T., Jenkins, M., & Cameron, C.A. (2012). Rural adolescent girls negotiating healthy and unhealthy romantic relationships. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy, 46*, 259–276.

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Glossary

Adolescent boys. For the purpose of this study, adolescent boys were males in Grades 9 through 12. Students in these grades are typically 14 to 17 years old. Keeping in line with key terms used in extant research related to adolescent males, this study employed the term *boy* when writing about participants.

Masuline gender norms. Masculine gender norms are common, socially prescribed beliefs regarding appropriate activities, behaviours, characteristics, and appearances for males (Kirch, 2008; Thomopson & Pleck, 1986). In this study boys' perceptions of masculine gender norms was the focus.

Romantic relationships. For the purpose of this research, romantic relationships were defined as any relationship, regardless of the gender of the individuals, in which both people have mutual interest in the other that extends further than friendship. These relationships may involve dating, physical attraction and intimacy, and may or may not have progressed to more serious commitment (Connolly & McIsaac, 2011; Sternberg, 1988).

Psychosocial processes. In this study, psychosocial processes were considered to be the ongoing and evolving development of actions, interactions, and emotions, often in response to psychological and social factors, that involve movement towards a goal or an outcome (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

To my mother, Janice Dmytro,

September 22nd 1961 – August 29th, 2002

With gratitude for teaching me perseverance and strength

Chapter One: Introduction

The developmental significance of romantic relationships during adolescence is profound (Furman, 2002). Adolescence, the life period between the ages of 11 and 18 during which biological and psychological changes occur very rapidly (Raskin, 2010), is a time when romantic relationships become increasingly important to youth (Berger, McMakin, & Furman, 2005; Furman, 2002). According to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health in the United States, approximately 50% of 15-year-olds and 70% of 18-year-olds reported having a current romantic partner, or a partner within the last 18 months (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003). Those relationships typically last at least six months with girls reporting longer relationships than boys do (Carver et al., 2003).

Teens' romantic experiences are associated with multiple psychosocial variables and outcomes, such as the qualities of their friendships (Connolly, Craig, Goldberg, & Pepler, 2004; Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999) and relationships with parents, (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Kinsfogel & Grych , 2004), and are predictive of characteristics of future romantic relationships (Connolly et al., 2000; Meier & Allen, 2009). Atypical romantic relationship trajectories have been linked to internalizing and externalizing problems (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Connolly, Nguyen, Pepler, Craig, & Jiang, 2013; Davies & Windle, 2000), and many teens are victims or perpetrators of dating aggression and violence (Connolly & Josephson, 2007; Giordano, Soto, Manning, & Longmore, 2010; Haberyan & Kibler, 2008).

In spite of the developmental significance of romantic relationships during the teen years, little is known about the specific issues that teens face while navigating their relationships and how they are addressed (Berger et al., 2005; Collins, Welsh, & Furman,

2009; Furman & Wehner, 1994). In particular, there is a paucity of research investigating boys' experiences negotiating their relationships (Collins & McIsaac, 2009; Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2006). Previous studies have stressed the need for psychoeducational programmes that focus on supporting boys' communication and relational skills development (Connolly & Josephson, 2007; Dmytro, Luft, Jenkins, Hoard, & Cameron, 2013; Luft Jenkins, & Cameron, 2012; O'Neil & Lujan, 2009), skills that are critical components of healthy intimate relationship navigation (Berger et al., 2005; Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2010; Widman, Welsh, McNulty, & Little, 2006).

     Boys' experiences in navigating romantic relationships have not often been discussed in the literature, nor has the role of masculine gender norms (Tolman, Spencer, Harmon, Rosen-Reynoso, & Striepe, 2004). The next chapter provides an overview of literature related to the developmental significance of dating during adolescence, boys' experiences in romantic relationships, and the role of masculine gender norms for boys during adolescence.

<center>**Chapter Two: Literature Review**</center>

Theories of Adolescent Romantic Relationships

Empirical evidence supports the existence of stages in adolescent relationships (Connolly & McIsaac, 2011), and progression through these stages has been supported in the US National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Meier & Allan, 2009). The first stage typically occurs in early adolescence with the beginning of crushes and infatuations. In mid-adolescence, romantic interactions usually occur within the context of large, mixed-gender peer groups, and more romantic couples within the peer group begin to emerge (Connolly et al., 2004; Connolly & McIsaac, 2011). Finally, in late adolescence, dyadic bonds become intensified. Couples spend less time within their peer group, and their relationships begin to resemble those of adults (Connolly & McIsaac, 2011).

Many researchers have shied away from studying adolescent romance due to lacking suitable theoretical frameworks (Brown, Feiring, & Furman, 1999; Furman & Wehner, 1994; Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2001). Exner-Cortens (2014) posits that general theories of adolescent psychosocial development are most useful in understanding teens' romantic relationships. However, due to their focus on teens' development in the specific context of romantic relationships, behavioural systems theory and developmental contextual theory are summarized briefly below.

Developmental contextual theory is another stage theory of adolescent romantic relationships, and a number of key researchers assert that it is the most appropriate framework for understanding adolescent romance (Brown, 1999; Connolly et al., 2004: Connolly & McIsaac, 2011). The theory posits that adolescent romantic relationships evolve within the context of guidance and constraints from external social forces such as parents,

relatives, peers, mass media, religion, and community (Brown, 1999). Brown proposed four informal developmental phases. The *Initiation Phase* is self-focused and used by adolescents to explore their abilities in initiating relationships, although relationships at this stage tend not to last long. In the *Status Phase*, the focus shifts from the self to the objectives or benefits of the relationship, such as maintaining or improving status within a peer group. Eventually, in the *Affection Phase*, peers' influences decrease, and teens' relationships intensify, becoming increasingly more emotionally and physically rewarding. The *Bonding Phase* occurs late in adolescence or in early adulthood and involves a shift from affection and passion to establishing long-term committed relationships.

A fundamental premise of Furman and Wehner's (1994) behavioural systems theory of adolescent romantic relationships is that individuals' behaviours within relationships are motivated by desires to achieve relational goals. The four behavioural systems described by Furman and Wehner relate to attachment, caregiving, affiliation, and sexuality or reproduction. As adolescents mature, their reliance on parents and peers to meet relational needs in each behavioural system gradually declines and they increasingly turn to romantic partners for fulfillment of those needs. Adolescents' views of relationships, another primary component of the theory, include thoughts, beliefs, and expectations about relationships, Views of a particular relationship, of oneself and of one's partner, are influenced by previous relationship experiences, and have a significant effect on the way relationship processes unfold.

Qualities of Boys' Romantic Relationships in Adolescence

Studies have found that boys experience relationships differently than girls do (Dmytro et al., 2013; Giordano et al., 2006; Luft et al., 2012; Tolman, et al., 2004). A key

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study that highlighted these differences was Luft et al. (2012) and Dmytro et al.'s (2013) investigation of rural adolescents' negotiations of healthy and unhealthy romantic relationships. The core category identified using grounded theory methodology was teens' wrestling with gendered expectations, along with six related subcategories: determining responsibility, keeping it in/letting it out, standing up for oneself, making sacrifices, building trust/not trusting, and showing respect/showing disrespect. Media was identified as a contextual influence. Dmytro et al. found that similar relationship processes occurred regardless of gender, however each gender uniquely approached their struggles and held differing relationship attitudes and beliefs. Boys in particular struggled with communication, emotional disclosure, and negotiations of togetherness and separation. These difficulties reflect traditional masculine gender norms that prescribe that men be emotional stoic and strive for dominance and independence, reinforcing the need for further research into the role of gender norms in adolescent males' relationships.

Research has suggested that many boys are uncomfortable with intimate communication and lack confidence in their relationships (Cameron et al., 2007; Dmytro et al., 2013; Giordano et al., 2006; Rose et al., 2012). Giordano et al. (2006) found that White and Hispanic males but not African Americans found communication to be awkward and were less confident in navigating relationships than girls in their sample. The study shows, importantly, that cultural background, as well as gender, significantly influences males' attitudes and experiences of communication. In Rose et al.'s (2012) study, boys more so than girls expected that talking about problems would make them feel weird or uncomfortable. The girls were more likely than boys to expect that talking about their

problems would result in positive emotions. The study focused on communication in friendships, so it is unclear if these findings are also true for boys' intimate communication.

Perhaps surprisingly, boys express diverse motivations for pursuing romantic relationships in adolescence other than those of a sexual nature (Smiler, 2008; Tolman et al., 2004). Tolman et al. interviewed teen boys from diverse backgrounds, and participants consistently expressed desire for emotional connectedness and companionship in their relationships. They also indicated that romantic relationships were "safe haven[s] for intimacy" (pp. 241) and that male friends tend to resist intimate conversation. Smiler (2008) also found support against the dominant stereotype of the primacy of sexuality in boys' search for adolescent romance. The top three motives given by participants for pursuing romantic relationships were: "I liked the person", "I was really attracted to the person", and "I wanted to get to know her better". The top four motivations for pursuing sexual intercourse, as indicated by more than half of the boys in the study, were: "I felt desire", "to find out what it feels like", "because I liked/loved the person, and "my partner wanted to". The final reason, "my partner wanted to" indicates that boys as well as girls feel pressured by partners in relationships, suggesting that power is an important element of adolescent romantic relationships

Galliher, Rostosky, Welsh, and Kawaguchi (1999) found that the majority of teens in their study had a balance of power in their relationships. Over half of the couples were rated as egalitarian based on coding of videotaped interactions, and in the non-egalitarian couples, males and females were equally described as the dominant partner. For all couples, no gender differences were found regarding the likelihood of the male or female partner winning an argument. Although the study suggests a trend towards egalitarian

relationships, other studies have raised concerns that boys feel less power in their relationships than females do. Giordano et al. (2006) for example, found that boys reported increasingly less power as their relationships increased in duration. This is particularly concerning due to the association of power imbalances and dating aggression, particularly for adolescent males (Giordano et al., 2010). A separate study by Giordano et al. (2010) also found that boys felt less power in relationships than girls. However, while girls' sexual engagement was related to perceptions of having less power, boys' was not. These findings suggest that, in teen relationships, power dynamics affect each gender differently, and each gender may enact power and influence in different ways. Bentley, Galliher, and Ferguson (2007) found that boys were more likely to give-in to their partners during structured, observed interactions, and girls were more likely than boys to use shaming behaviours. The authors suggested girls' power advantage may be related to boys' sense of awkwardness and anxiety in their relationships. Both male and female participants were significantly more likely to report that the male partner made final decisions. Participants may have done so to conform to traditional gender norms that prescribe male dominance and preservation of masculine pride.

Masculine Gender Norms

Gender norms are socially prescribed, commonly accepted beliefs about appropriate activities, behaviours, and characteristics for males and females (Kirch, 2008; Thomopson & Pleck, 1986). Gender norms prescribe how a male or female is expected to act based on their gender. Throughout life, gender norms are perpetuated through social influences such as parents, peers, mass media, and consumerism (Kane, 2012).

In the past several decades, a number of normative attitudes and behaviours have been identified as typically valued for men. David and Brannon (1976) first described the following as the tenets of traditional masculine ideology: "no sissy stuff" refers to the distancing from feminine characteristics, including emotions and homosexuality; "be a big wheel", which is the drive to be successful and compete; "be a sturdy oak" prescribes that men should be tough and avoid being vulnerable; and "give 'em hell" refers to the drive for aggression and dominance.

Measures of masculinity have been created which outline norms traditionally valued for men. Scale validity studies, factor analyses, similarity of items between scales, and wide use of such scales in psychological research support the use of the measured norms to inform data analysis in the current study. The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974) is one of the first measures of masculinity and femininity and has been frequently used in psychological research. Masculine items are primarily agentive and self-focused (e.g., acts as a leader, aggressive, independent) whereas the feminine items reflect relational and caring qualities (e.g., affectionate, sensitive to the needs of others, and yielding). A recent meta-analysis of participants' endorsement of BSRI items from 1974 to 2012 found that females' identification with feminine items has significantly decreased while males' identification with masculine items has stayed the same (Donnelly & Twenge, 2016). The results of this meta-analysis, largely due to its large sample ($N = 8027$), strongly suggest that masculine norms on the BSRI are still representative of male norms in recent years.

Thompson and Pleck (1997) confirmed Status, Toughness, and Anti-femininity as top characteristics that define masculine ideology in their creation of the Male Role Norm Scale (MRNS). Levant, Hirsch, Celentano, and Cozza's (1992) Male Role Norms Inventory

(MRNI) has a seven-factor model comprised of Avoidance of Femininity, Fear and Hatred of Homosexuals, Self-reliance, Aggression, Achievement/Status, Non-relational Attitudes Towards Sexuality, and Restrictive Emotionality. Levant et al. (2012) confirmed Emotionally Detached Dominance, Toughness, and Avoidance of Femininity as the three-factor model underlying the revised adolescent version of the scale. The Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI) is comprised of 12 norms (i.e., Winning, Emotional Control, Risk-Taking, Violence, Dominance, Playboy, Self-Reliance, Primacy of Work, Power over Women, Disdain for Homosexuals, Physical Toughness, and Pursuit of Status) and were identified through literature review and from over 40 hours of focus group discussions (Mahalik et al. 2003).

Traditional Masculinity and Romantic Relationships

Traditional masculine norms have been associated with a number of dysfunctional relationship outcomes for adults, such as high numbers of sexual partners, adversarial views of romantic relationships, less intimacy with current partners (Pleck, Sonenstein, and Ku, 1993), and decreased relationship satisfaction (Burn and Ward, 2005). Sinn (1997) found that endorsement of masculine ideology predicted lower levels of self-disclosure, homophobia, adversarial views of sexual relationships, and a greater number of sexual partners and encounters. However, there is a gap in the literature about the role of traditional masculine norms in adolescents' relationships, apart from an association with teen dating violence (Reed, Silverman, Raj, Decker, & Miller, 2011).

The endorsement of traditional masculine ideology has been found to negatively impact both heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Wade and Donis (2007) found that both heterosexual and gay men who endorsed higher levels of traditional masculinity

reported significantly less romantic relationship satisfaction. Somewhat surprisingly, men

who identified less with males in general through a questionnaire also reported lower

relationship satisfaction. This questionnaire ascertained men's feelings of similarity to

other males, and appreciation for diversity among males. These results suggest that a

diverse view of masculinity rather than endorsement of traditional masculine ideology is

an important component of relational wellbeing regardless of sexual orientation.

In spite of the plethora of studies investigating the relationship between traditional

masculine norms and negative relationship outcomes for adults, the question remains as to

whether the norms commonly measured in these studies are currently representative of

many teen males. Further, do traditional masculine norms influence teens' attitudes and

behaviours in their dating relationships, and if so, how? Has the movement towards gender

equality influenced societal conceptions of masculinity in younger generations? Men's

studies have focused in recent years on investigating and supporting a conceptualization of

positive masculinity.

Reconstruction of Masculinity

In response to the negative outcomes often associated with traditional masculinity,

Levant (1992) argued for a reconstruction that promotes valuable, positive masculine

characteristics with helping men come to terms with aspects that need to be changed.

Levant listed a number of positive attributes of masculinity such as the ability to withstand

hardship and pain to protect others, expressing love by doing things for others, and

assertiveness. He identified men's inability to identify and express emotions (alexithymia),

and tendency towards anger and aggression as in need of transformation. To support

adolescent boys' adoption of positive masculinity, O'Neil and Lujan (2009) have expressly

made a "call to action" for the development of psycho-educational programs that support boys' relational skills development.

Parks Daloz (2011) argued that a reconstruction of masculinity involves a new kind of courage that is different than the bravery traditionally valued by men. He stated that this requires " that he acknowledge to himself as well as to others his humanity, his vulnerability, and his interdependence with others." (p. 81). He identified empathy, engagement with others, and acting for the common good as the primary traits that men need to foster to transform masculinity.

Research supporting the reconceptualization of masculinity provides an optimistic view and reframing of men's studies. If masculinity is to be re-conceptualized, where and when must this occur? Gender norms are perpetuated in each stage of life, and are especially salient during adolescence.

Masculinity During Adolescence

Gender expectations intensify in adolescence, which may be due to the increasing importance of peers and strong identity needs during this period (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Females are typically granted much more leniency than males if they deviate from socially prescribed gender norms, as are boys with higher social status, such as athletic and popular boys (Way, 2011). Masculine norms are often enforced through shaming boys who violate them (Kimmel, 1994; Martin, 1996; Pascoe, 2007; Pollack, 2006). For example, Chu (2005) interviewed adolescent boys in Grades 7-12 over the course of two years. Many indicated that their peers discouraged them from being vulnerable and emotionally expressive. They described "being watched, scrutinized, always with a possibility of being attacked, and a subsequent need to protect oneself" (p. 13). They also feared being called 'gay', and felt the

need to prove their masculinity through denouncing feminine things. Some boys managed to have close male friendships, and described how these friendships helped them to resist pressures to conform to the masculine norms expected by their peers.

Masculinity and the "Boy Crisis"

In recent decades, there has been increasing concern for the academic, social and emotional realms of boys' lives, which are seen to be in jeopardy partly due to the consequences of conforming to some masculine norms. According to Cappon (2011), boys lag behind girls in academic achievement, especially in reading, drop out of high school and obtain less post-secondary education compared to females. Cappon asserts that gender differences in academic achievement are related to a 'boy culture' that views education and reading as "girl activities" (p. 17). He also suggested the difficulties may partly be due to some boys' disregard for authority and "the identification with concepts of masculinity which are frequently seen to be in direct conflict with the ethos of the school" (p. 23).

Other researchers have focused on the social and emotional implications of the "boy crisis", which directly impact boys' ability to interact with others (Kimmel, 2008; O'Neil & Lujan, 2009; Pollack, 1999; 2006; Pollack & Schuster, 2000; Way, 2011; 2013). William Pollack (1999; 2000) asserts that boys yearn for intimate relationships, but increasingly give in to the pressures of a "boy code", a "gender straightjacket" that leads boys to cut themselves off from their emotions, silence themselves, and not reach out for connection or support. Only a small number of participants in Pollack's (1999) study expressed positive hope for their future as men, and many of the boys reported feelings of loneliness and alienation in spite of showing a cheerful façade (Pollack, 2006).

Way (2011; 2013) identified the "crisis of connection" that boys face when transitioning from boyhood to manhood. She uses boys' narratives to describe how they feel a deep sense of loss and isolation during this transition as the pressures to conform to masculine norms cause them to become increasingly separated emotionally from others. Way interviewed Black, Latino, Asian, and White adolescent boys, whom she describes as belonging to cultures that have longstanding traditions that value male friendships. Participants vulnerably described their desires for intimacy, their need to share their "deep secrets", and their valuing of close male friendships over and above their friendships with girls. Their narratives were simultaneously riddled with the conflicting, "mocking voice of masculine conventions" (p. 112), such as not wanting to tell friends about certain things because "that's gay" or not wanting to appear as a "wuss". Way describes these boys' conflict as needing to conform to the "boy code", which prescribes that boys must remain independent and emotionally invulnerable, while simultaneously deeply desiring intimate connections with others.

The boy crisis, however, is controversial, and some researchers argue that it is a myth (Kleinfeld, 2009; Okopny, 2008; Vail, 2006). Kleinfeld argues that "neither girls nor boys are in "crisis" with the exception of Black young men" (p. 3) because both genders experience serious academic, social and emotional difficulties at similar rates, though each gender experiences unique issues. She does assert, however, that boys' issues are of great concern, such as higher rates of suicide, conduct disorders, emotional disturbance, and juvenile delinquency, and that these issues have largely been neglected.

Current Study Rationale.

Tolman et al. (2004) suggested that certain sociological and psychological underpinnings of adolescent masculinity lay the groundwork for understanding boys' unique ways of navigating dating relationships. They refer to Way's (1998) work that highlights boys' uncomfortable predicament that requires them to avoid expressing vulnerability in order to conform to masculine gender norms, while at the same time, deeply desiring close, intimate relationships. With consideration of this double bind, in the present study the issues, experiences, and ways in which boys uniquely approach and navigate romantic relationships during adolescence was explored.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Overview

The aim of the current study was to address the gap in the literature and investigate the role of gender norms in adolescent boys' approaches to and handling of dating issues. Grounded theory methodology was used to examine focus group discussions (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory methodology is particularly useful for delineating theories about social processes for which a deeper understanding is sought (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The research purpose, research questions, and the details of the methodology are outlined in this chapter.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study was to explore adolescent boys' navigating of dating relationships and their perception of gender norms in order to advance theory in adolescent relational development and contribute to the development of psycho-educational interventions to support adolescent boys in their dating relationships.

Research Questions

The following questions were posed in the current study: 1) What are adolescent boys' psychosocial processes in navigating dating relationships? 2) How are these psychosocial processes influenced by the boys' perceptions of masculine gender norms? 3) What gender norms do they indicate exert an influence on their navigation of dating relationships? 4) How do they describe the way in which gender norms influence their navigation of dating relationships?

Ontology and Epistemology

The ontological perspective in current study was relativism, which states that no objective reality exists but rather, reality is subjective in nature (Luper, 2004). Gender roles, influenced by changing cultural values and norms, have considerably transformed in recent decades (Quynn, 2007), as have the qualitative features and trajectories of romantic relationships (Dush, 2009). Relationship qualities vary considerably due to cultural and contextual factors (Crissey, 2005; Milbrath, Ohlson, & Eyre, 2009)). Studies of adolescent relationships, therefore, must acknowledge the subjective nature of teens' experiences and beliefs, which vary as a function of their place in time and culture.

Social constructivism, the epistemological perspective of this study, posits that knowledge and beliefs are social constructions influenced by social forces such as experiences, history, and culture (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Grounded theory methodology, using a social constructivist paradigm, allows the researcher to generate theories about psychosocial processes while remaining attuned to the subjectivity of participants and the researcher (Charmaz, 2000). Focus group discussions have been described as particularly effective in eliciting participant interactions that reveal subjective belief systems and group norms. The discussions allow the co-construction of meaning by participants and researchers through mutual dialogue and exploration.

Grounded Theory Methodology

The study was conducted using grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), with data collected through focus group discussions. A grounded theory was inductively derived through systematic, iterative data

collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory has been used extensively and considered appropriate for exploring social processes (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

Strauss and Corbin (1998), two leading proponents of grounded theory methodology, state that grounded theory begins with rich data collection, often through in-depth interviews, and is followed by open coding. Coding identifies concepts within the data, which are eventually grouped into categories. Coding and data analysis occur simultaneously. Findings are used to inform further data collection pertaining to concepts identified within the data. This iterative process is referred to as theoretical sampling. A central category is identified as the central phenomenon described by the data. Axial coding then seeks to make connections between the categories, and contextual factors are determined which describe the conditions under which the central phenomenon occurs. Throughout the analytical process, writing memos and drawing diagrams assist the researcher by allowing him/her to work with concepts and develop categories.

Participants

The 23 participants in the current study were adolescent boys from three high schools (i.e., School A, School B, and School C) within an urban school district in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The boys were in Grade 9 (n = 3), Grade 10 (n = 9), Grade 11 (n = 8) and Grade 12 (n = 3). The majority of the students (i.e., 78%) identified with an Asian cultural background (i.e., Chinese, Canadian-born Chinese, Taiwanese, Taiwanese-Canadian, Japanese-American, Korean, or Korean-Canadian). The remaining participants included one Filipino, one Filipino-Canadian, one Caribbean-Canadian, and one boy who did not identify a cultural affiliation. All but two of the boys indicated they were heterosexual. One boy indicated he was bisexual and another indicated that he was unsure

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of his sexual orientation. Religion was reported as fairly unimportant or not important at all to 74% of the participants. With regards to general dating history, 48% of the boys reported that they had never been on a romantic date before. The remaining boys had varying degrees of dating experience (Table 1).

Table 1
Dating History of Participants

Previous Dating Experience	Percentage of Participants
Never been on a romantic date	48%
Less than 10 romantic dates a month	9%
More than 10 romantic dates a month	9%
Previously had a girlfriend for less than 6 months	17%
Previously had a girlfriend for more than 6 months	13%

Ethics Approval

The current study was part of a larger study of dating relationships, for which the school district Research Committee previously had granted approval. The school district granted further approval for this extension of the larger study. After school district approval was received, the UBC BREB approved the protocol for this thesis study.

Recruitment

Once the school district and UBC BREB approved the study, school principals were contacted by one of the researcher's supervisors to request an in-person meeting to discuss their possible participation in the study. Schools that had previously expressed interest in participating in similar studies with the research team were approached first. Three Grade 8 to 12 secondary-school principals agreed for their students to participate. Once the principals agreed to the study, the researcher was put in contact with a teacher or counselor from each school to coordinate student participant recruitment.

Recruitment from individual classrooms occurred next. In School C, 3 students were recruited, with the help of the school counselor. In the other two schools (i.e., School A and School B), the study was conducted with the support of psychology teachers recommended by the principal. The study was considered by the teachers to be an appropriate curriculum-related activity for their psychology students. In School B, the psychology teacher also arranged recruitment from an English class and a Foods class.

Arrangements for the focus group discussion sessions were made in collaboration with the teachers, including dates, times, and spaces. In School A, the focus group discussions were held all on one day during two separate class times in an empty library room. In School B, the discussions were held on three separate days at lunch hour in an empty meeting room. The discussion was held in a library after school at School C.

Student recruitment meetings were held during class times at School A and School B. The researcher introduced herself and the goals of the study, requested student participation, and outlined the consent and assent process. Parent/guardian consent forms and student assent forms were handed out. The teachers later collected completed consent and assent forms and returned them to the researcher.

Both parent/guardian consent forms (Appendix A) and student assent forms (Appendix B) were required to be signed and returned for students to participate in the study. A second student assent form (Appendix C) was distributed at the end of the first focus group discussion to determine if students were interested in participating in a follow up focus group discussion at a later date.

Facilitator Training

Facilitator training sessions were conducted in conjunction with training for the larger study of teen relationships with which the current study coincided. The lead researcher, who had previous facilitation experience in the larger study, planned and conducted training for research assistants in collaboration with her research co-supervisor. Facilitators were recruited members of the researchers' lab. Training was conducted according to guidelines outlined by Charmaz (2014). Training occurred during two, two-hour sessions and included discussions of the goals of the study, trouble-shooting, and role-play activities. An outline for the training sessions is found in Appendix E.

Data Collection

Overview. Six initial focus group discussions were held, with two discussions at School A, three discussions at School B, and one discussion at School C. The discussions began with a brief description of the purpose of the study, and a mutual determination of guidelines addressing confidentiality and respectful listening. An ice-breaking skit was then performed (Appendix E) based on previous research that has found that proposing relevant stimuli at the beginning of a focus group discussion can enhance the interactions that follow (Caillaud & Kalampalikis, 2013). One follow up discussion was conducted at each school approximately one month later with participants who expressed interest in participating during the first discussion session. Follow up participants were told that the purpose of the discussion was to ensure the researchers had understood the main issues participants identified in the first discussions and to elicit further feedback about those issues. At School A, eight boys (out of the original nine) participated in the follow up discussion. At School B, five boys (out of the original 11) participated, and all three boys

from School C. The names of all participants were entered into a draw for a $25 gift card for Cineplex, as outlined on the participant consent and assent forms.

Group Composition. The original aim of the study was to have groups comprised of 6-8 participants. Various arguments have been made for the optimal group size (Doody, Slevin, & Taggart, 2013). Small groups tend to be more useful when discussing emotionally charged topics to accommodate potentially heated discussions that may ensue, whereas larger groups are more effective for neutral topics (Morgan, 1996). Larger groups may also increase the likelihood of the group containing more outspoken boys, however larger groups may also lead adolescents to feel more self-conscious, as adolescence is a time of increased concerns about peer acceptance (Somerville et al., 2013). Based on previous research, it was expected that boys would find discussing dating relationship experiences to be awkward (Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2006). For these reasons, moderate sized groups were planned: not too small in order to facilitate more discussion, and not too large to reduce participant self-consciousness. However, due to scheduling difficulties and attrition, actual groups were comprised of two to six participants.

The discussions were audio- recorded and transcribed soon after each discussion occurred. Separate discussions for each grade were planned based on previous research that has found that dating relationship experience increases with age (Collins et al., 2009). Separating the groups by grade was thought to have increased the likelihood that participants with similar levels of dating experiences would be grouped together, increasing the relevance of the discussion topics to members of the same group. Separating groups of teens in discussions based on age has also been thought to increase students' comfort discussing dating relationships (Cameron et al., 2007; Luft, et al., 2012). However,

based on scheduling feasibilities, sometimes participants from adjacent grades were in the same group (e.g.., Grades 10 and 11 in the same group).

Facilitators. The lead researcher, a female, and a male research assistant, facilitated each discussion session. Originally, the male assistant was planned to lead the discussions while the female lead researcher audio-recorded the session and helped engage the boys' participation. It was anticipated that a male facilitator leading the discussions would increase the boys' comfort in expressing their thoughts and opinions, based on previous research (Cameron & Creating Peaceful Learning Environments Team, 2002; Vaughn et al., 1996). However, due to the positive engagement and obvious comfort level of the boys as the discussions unfolded, the researchers jointly and equally engaged in facilitation.

Session Format. The facilitators defined romantic relationships for participants as couples that were dating, as well as established romantic relationships regardless of the gender of the people involved. Emphasis was made that having their own personal experience was not necessary to participate, and discussions of their perceptions of friends' experiences were encouraged.

Based on recommendations by Vaughn et al. (2006), the initial discussion questions were easy and non-threatening, followed by more challenging questions. The first line of questioning was designed to elicit participants' answers to the first research question which seeks to understand boys' dating relationship navigation processes. Next, questions were more challenging in an attempt to elicit the boys' perceptions of the influence of gender norms on their relationship navigation, which is the second research question. The questions were developed based on recommendations by Charmaz, and leading or loaded

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questions, which can skew responses and may make participants feel uncomfortable, were avoided (Charmaz, 2014). Discussion questions can be found in Appendix F and G.

Background Information A background information form was given to the students at the end of the first discussion. The form requested personal information (i.e., grade, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and general dating history) (See Appendix D). For confidentiality, students' names were not written on the forms. Obtaining background information allowed for an accurate description of the sample (Vaughn et al., 1996). Additionally, the background variables selected have been found to be related to adolescent dating relationships, and therefore warrant consideration in the discussion of the findings of the study (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009; Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2010; Milbrath et al., 2009). For example, Halpern, Young, Waller, Martin, and Kupper (2004) found that dating violence may be more common in same-sex adolescent relationships versus opposite sex adolescent relationships, and that heterosexual and homosexual youth who rated religion as fairly important to them were less likely to be victimized.

Confidentiality and Privacy

All documents were kept in a locked filing cabinet at the thesis co-supervisor's research lab along with the background information forms. Names were not written on the background forms or included in transcripts. Participants choose pseudonyms, which were used throughout the discussions and in the transcripts. Consent and assent forms were kept separate from transcripts, and computer files were password protected.

Procedures to Ensure Methodological Rigor

Overview. Tracy (2010) describes rigor as one of the eight "big-tent" criteria for ensuring excellent qualitative research. She describes rigor as characterized by rich descriptions and face validity that can be confirmed by examination of the "care and practice of data collection and data analysis procedures" (p. 841). Reflective journaling, in the form of data analysis memos, and triangulation also served as tools to ensure methodological rigor.

Reflective Journaling. Field notes written by the researcher explored impressions of the visit, group dynamics, and contextual information with regard to the school visits. Memos and diagrams were also important reflective journaling tools that captured the abstract thinking that occurred during the entire process of data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Memos contained quotes, ideas, and conceptualizations of the emerging aspects of the theory. Some memos pertained to coding (i.e., code notes), while others related to theory development (i.e., theoretical notes). Diagrams were used as an analytical tool to graphically map out relationships between the categories and the emerging theory.

Triangulation. Mathison (1988) described triangulation as the use of "multiple methods, data sources, and researchers to enhance the validity of research findings" (p. 1). Multiple methods were used in the current study. Research assistants in one of the co-supervisor's research lab reviewed transcriptions for accuracy. Weekly discussions were held in the co-supervisor's lab about the progress of the data analysis. In particular, other lab members and the same co-supervisor reviewed all codes and the emerging theory. In the case that someone did not agree, the matter was debated. Finally, triangulation also

occurred by returning to the participants for the follow up discussions, which was used to confirm and further develop the concepts that had emerged from the initial discussions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred through the progression of steps. Preliminary analysis involved a review of the transcripts to obtain a general familiarity with the content. During this stage, the lead researcher read and reviewed the transcripts numerous times. The remaining data analysis steps are outlined sequentially below (Figure 1), though, some of these steps often occurred simultaneously as expected by Corbin & Strauss (2008).
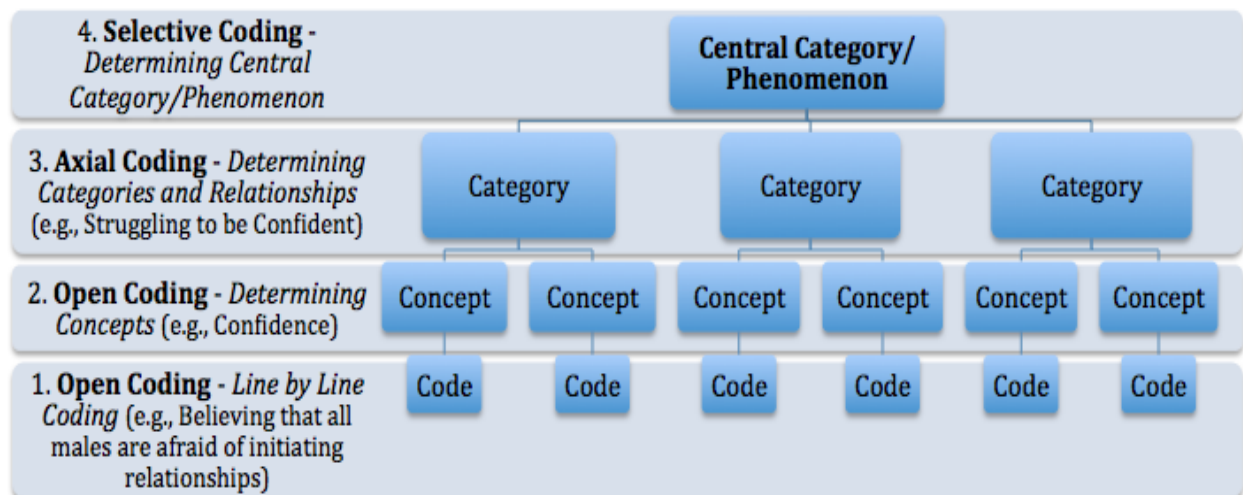
Figure 1. Steps taken during data analysis

Open Coding – Line-by -Line. Open coding began, line-by-line. To avoid decontextualizing the data, a common criticism of data analysis software, coding was carried out using Microsoft Word, a general word processing program. Each line was reviewed and comments were created indicating the name of the code that was determined for that section of the data, and a tracking number to ensure that the code could later be

traced back to the original transcript (e.g., the tracking number "1.5" indicated the code came from Transcript 1 page 5).

For the purpose of this research, *codes* were defined as conceptual labels that described what the lead researcher believed to be occurring or referred to in the selected words of the participant. These conceptual labels were considered to be 'low-level', meaning that they were intended to be literal restatements or summaries, with little or no interpretation on the part of the researcher. Examples of codes from the transcripts include *Believing that guys' lack of communication about their feelings leads to conflict in relationships; Believing that girls can be hurt or upset by guys actions easily (i.e., "overly sensitive girlfriend");* and *Valuing communication as a way to resolve relationship issues.*

Open Coding – Determining Concepts. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define concepts as "labels placed on discrete happenings, events, and other instances of phenomena" (p. 61). For the purpose of this research, concepts were defined as high-level conceptual labels that reflect what the lead researcher believed to be described by the participants' words. Concepts were determined by identifying the particular process that was being described, or by identifying attributes of particular phenomena (Saldana, 2013). These high-level conceptual labels were considered to be more general than low-level codes, and grouped together low-level codes that pertained to the same subject.

To determine concepts, the lead researcher copied all codes from each transcript into new documents. For example, all codes from Transcript 1 were listed in a new document entitled *Dating Codes Transcript 1*. A total of nine documents were created for the codes for each of the nine transcripts. Next, each of the nine *Dating Codes* documents was reviewed, and codes that appeared related to the same subject or process were

grouped together to create concepts. Finally, after concepts were created for each one of the nine *Dating Codes* documents, the other eight documents were reviewed once again to identify evidence of those concepts. In some cases, codes were grouped under more than one concept. Examples of concepts include *Attraction/Wants in a Relationship*, *Advice/Support*, and *Miscommunication*.

Each concept was expanded by grouping together codes within each concept that appeared related to the same aspect of that concept. For example, the concept *Advice/Support* was broken down into five aspects: *Not Getting Advice/Support; Getting Advice/Support; Gender Differences in Advice/Support Seeking; Reasons for Not Seeking Advice/Support; and Girls' Advice/Support-Seeking.* Memo-writing was used to explore and deepen the researcher's understanding of the concepts through the use of analytical tools, which Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe as ways to enhance theoretical sensitivity: "the awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data" (p. 41). Analytical tools used for the current analysis, as recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2008) included: asking questions of the data; thinking about various meanings of a word; the flip-flop technique (i.e., turning the situation upside down or the other way around; drawing from personal experiences; and constant comparisons of participants' words and instances.

Axial Coding – Determining Categories. Similar concepts were merged into categories with labels that would indicate how all the concepts contained within it related to each other. Examples of categories include *Social/Digital Media, Initiating Relationships*, and *Managing Relationship Issues*. To further explicate a category, they were further broken down into various aspects. For example, four aspects of the category *Benefiting/"Gaining" from Relationships* were determined that represented the primary ways the participants

described that they benefited/"gained" from relationships: *Experience/Maturity, Fun, Intimacy/Support*, and *Positive Feelings (e.g., Physical/Sexual Attraction)*.

The purpose of axial coding is to identify relationships among the categories and to determine the contextual conditions through which a central phenomenon arises. Drawing diagrams was an analytical tool used heavily in this stage, based on Corbin and Strauss's (2008) "Conditional/ Consequential Matrix" and "paradigm". The strategy involves mapping relationships between causal conditions, the central phenomenon, contextual conditions, action/interaction strategies, emotional reactions, and consequences. The central phenomenon is the main event to which the all the data refers. Causal conditions refer to the antecedent events or situations through which the phenomenon arises. The participants' experiences of managing the specific phenomenon are enacted through action/interaction strategies. These transaction strategies occur under specific contextual conditions, also identified within the process of axial coding. Consequences, in relation to the various actions and interactions that participants' engaged in, were also identified as part of the paradigm model. Through the use of memo writing and diagraming, an integration of all of these components of the paradigm model informed the emerging grounded theory.

Selective Coding: Determining the Central Category and Outlining the Grounded Theory. During the final phase of analysis, selective coding was used to solidify the central category (i.e., central phenomenon) and the relationships between it and the other categories. The central category encompasses all other categories. Strauss and Corbin (2008) recommended considering the storyline that seems embedded within the data, and rearranging the categories in a way that supports the storyline through the use of the

paradigm. Once the theory has been determined, statements regarding the relationships

between categories and the contextual conditions are compared to the original data to

validate the theory. Through this iterative and recursive process, a grounded theory of the

processes these particular adolescent boys engage in during the navigation of romantic

relationships was determined. The findings that were used to inform the development of

the theory are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

A detailed analysis of all nine focus discussion transcripts resulted in the delineation

of a grounded theory of adolescent boys' navigation of dating relationships, including an

understanding of the role of masculine gender norms. The theory is comprised of a central

category (*Getting Experienced in Dating* - with "*short-term gain*" as a primary goal), which is

the overarching phenomenon and process identified. Six categories describe these boys'

psychosocial processes during their relationship navigation (i.e., *Initiating Dating*

Relationships, Benefiting/"Gaining" from Relationships, Managing Relationship Issues,

Relationship Breakdown, Communication, and *Disengaging from Dating*). Finally, seven

contextual conditions were identified as influences on these boys' navigation of

relationships, ranging from a micro to macro level (i.e., *Struggling to be Confident,*

Social/Digital Media Culture, Peers' Perceptions, Parents' Expectations, Female Gender

Stereotypes, and *Masculine Gender Norms*). A diagram of the grounded theory is found in

Figure 2. The findings of the current study, and relevant quotations from the participants,

follow in the next chapter. A summary of categories and associated issues is found in Figure

3.
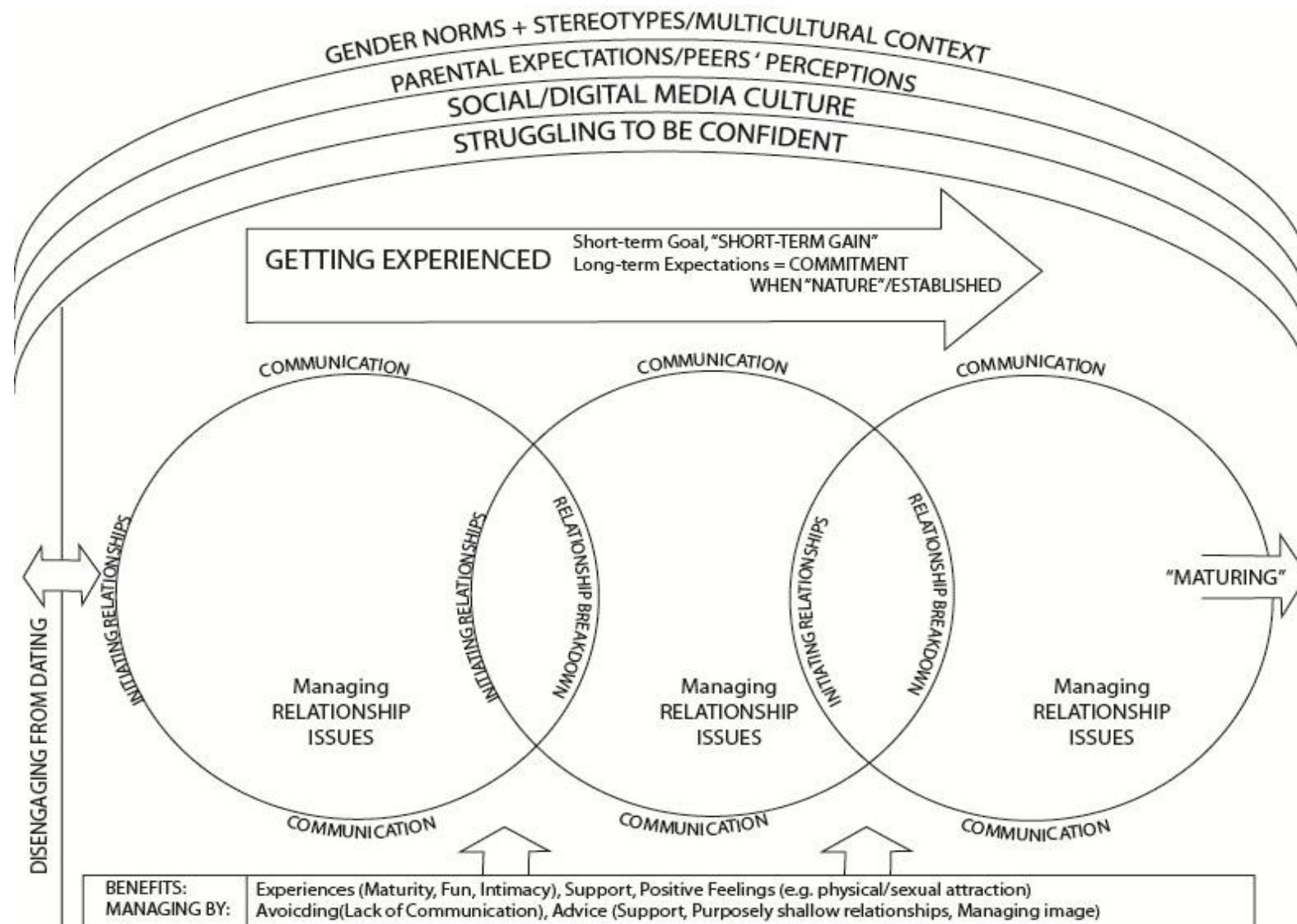
Figure 2. Diagram of Categories and Contextual Condition

Central Category: Getting Experienced in Dating	• Preparing for the Future • Gaining Confidence • Males' Unfair Advantage • Likelihood of Short-term Relationships • Goal: "Short-term Gain"
Category 1: Initiating Dating Relationships	• Males Expected to be the Initiators • Needing Confidence to Initate Relationships • Initiating Relationships through Social/Digital Media
Category 2: Benefiting/"Gaining" from Relationships	• Experience/Maturity • Rewarding Feelings • Intimacy/Support
Category 3: Managing Relationship Issues	• Advice/Support • Managing Image • Avoidance/Lack of Communication • Purposely Shallow Relationships
Caetgory 4: Relationship Breakdown	• Due to Problems • Due to Lack of Communication • Consequences of Breakups
Category 5: Communication	• Individual and Gendered Communication Differences • Males' Versus Females' Communication Styles • Miscommunication • Social/Digital Media Communication
Category 6: Disengaging From Dating	• Due to Parents' Expectations • Due to Focusing on other Priorities • Due to Anxiety

Figure 3. List of Categories and Associated Issues

Central Category/Central Phenomenon: Getting Experienced in Dating.

The main phenomenon these boys described is the process of *getting experienced in dating*. Getting experienced, for these boys, meant preparing themselves for future serious relationships and gaining confidence. They also discussed the unfair advantage teen boys have over girls in gaining dating experience, and the tendency towards short-term relationships. Additionally, these boys' primary dating goal was described by one Grade 9 boy to be "short-term gain".

Preparing for the Future. Participants believed that getting experienced meant gaining maturity and becoming prepared for more serious relationships that they thought would occur when they are older:

> …if you meet the girl you really like you don't want to have like no experience dating, right? …It's like one of the pros of having little short term dating relationships in high school. You kinda gain experience, cause later on when you are really serious about like finding a wife, settling down, you need to have like good experience in dating to know how girls work or how to do this, how to, you know, act properly. (Grade 9 boy)

There also seemed to be a long-term expectation that they would have serious, committed relationships some time in the future once they were "mature" and established. It appeared as though some put pressure on themselves, or felt pressure from others, to succeed in their careers and academics and to eventually "have a good salary to get a good girl". Some boys said that university would be the time for serious relationships. Another boy, who was a Chinese student, said that said the best time would be after he had abided by his mother's rule and received two Master's degrees.

Gaining Confidence. Through gaining dating experience, these boys believed they would be gaining confidence about dating. In particular, they talked about lacking the

confidence to communicate with romantic interests and partners and to initiate

relationships. One of the Grade 11 boys described this relationship between experience,

confidence, and communication the following way: "And often times because like a lot of us

don't have a lot of like experience, it's really hard to be as good as you want to be, so then

it's really hard to like talk about things".

Males' Unfair Advantage. These boys recognized that getting experienced in dating

is more acceptable for males than females during high school. Some boys' parents wanted

them to get experienced in dating. However, they discussed how this is often not the case

for girls:

> Like those people who are kind of more chill and laid back, they probably wouldn't
> care, but I know a lot of parents who are a lot more, they have like expectations and
> those expectations have to be met. In that case they're a lot more strict about the girl
> because they feel like they need to protect them, their daughters, more than they
> need to protect their sons. Especially dads. (Grade 11 boy)

Likelihood of Short-Term Relationships. The boys also indicated that

relationships during high school are likely not long-term. Instead, they expected

relationships to be short-term and not "serious". Some of the boys talked about lacking the

desire to put effort into relationships, and that relationships tend to end as soon as

problems or difficulties begin.

"Short-term Gain". While getting experienced in dating, these boys had a primary

goal in mind, described by one Grade 9 boy as "short-term gain". He described it in the

following way: "Yeah, I mean 'cause we are in high school…talking about a person's

interests isn't that much of a big deal. It's more about short-term gain….like no 14-year-

old's looking to get married. Short-term gain." Although some of the boys reported being

uncomfortable when asked if they agreed that boys are looking for short-term gain in

relationships (one boy said that it made them sound "douchey"), many of the boys did agree with the statement. One boy elaborated by saying that "there's nothing inherently about gains, people just kinda want *easy* experiences". The boys described many ways that they benefited or "gained" from relationships, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Category 1: Initiating Dating Relationships

Males Expected to be the Initiators. Initiating relationships was an issue these participants spoke about at length, especially about the gender norm that males are expected to be the initiators. These boys operated under that expectation, and identified society, tradition, cultural norms, peer pressure, and girls' expectations as reasons why. Peer pressure, they said, comes in the form of other males' policing this gender norm through teasing and shaming. They also believed that girls uphold the expectation that males initiate relationships. However, they stated that sometimes girls do try to initiate relationships, albeit indirectly.

The boys stated that although they believed they have to comply with the expectation to be the initiators, they believed this expectation to be unfair for males and "dumb":

> …it's stupid, it's very stereotypical, and also it's very biased that the fact is always, oh it has to be the male that gets the girl. Because why can't it ever be the other way around? I mean, we rarely see that, right? It's always just one plus one is two. Guys get the girl, like straight up. (Grade 11 boy)

Another boy questioned what this gender norm meant for homosexual males: "The bigger issue is when you have two guys, one guy wants to talk to another guy, and what do you do then? (Grade 12 boy)".

Needing Confidence to Initiate Relationships. Initiating relationships, according to these boys, requires confidence they do not yet have. In many cases, due to societal

expectations, boys initiate relationships in spite of not having confidence, and in spite of

their fears of potential negative outcomes. However, ultimately, these boys valued having

the confidence and bravery to initiate relationships, perhaps even likening it to the

confidence required when playing sports: "I think he should just go for it 'cause if you don't

take a shot, you won't know if you're gonna like score or not" (Grade 10 boy).

Initiating Relationships through Social/Digital Media. Most of these boys

indicated that communicating with a potential new romantic interest happens most of the

time online through social media, or through texting. One boy equated the process of

getting to know someone online with the tradition of "wooing" a girl in the past:

Boy 1:	Nowadays it's obviously the guy tries to get the girl and then 50-50 chance for a girl like whether the girl's with the guy, it's her choice, right? ...so the guy tries to get the girl through, electronically so he would try to um woo her or I guess nowadays it's just they just talk to each other um through social media.
Boy 2:	So flirting over the Internet.
Boy 1:	Yeah, basically.

Social media was described as a tool to learn more about a girl they liked and as a

way to mitigate some of the discomfort associated with lacking confidence initiating new

relationships:

> ...when they see a girl and...like gets interested in this girl, and then he'll just go on
> Facebook or ask a few friends for her name and then you'll just maybe say Hi to her
> on Facebook...I think that way is less awkward than you just go out and talk to her.
> (Grade 10 boy)

Category 2: Benefiting/"Gaining" from Relationships

Although some of the boys felt discomfort with the phrase "short-term gain", most of

the boys agreed that the phrase was fairly accurate. Many of the boys described their

interest in experiencing the positive aspects of relationships and avoiding the negative. A

variety of ways in which teen males benefit or "gain" from relationships were mentioned,

although *Experience/Maturity, Rewarding Feelings,* and *Intimacy/Support* were mentioned the most and are described in more detail below. Less frequently mentioned benefits or "gains" from relationships included social status (e.g., from dating a "hot chick" or treating a girlfriend like a "trophy or a medal"), academic support, and happiness.

Experience/Maturity. The most frequently mentioned and most valued benefit of dating during high school for these boys was gaining experience and maturity. These boys saw dating as preparation for serious relationships in adulthood through gaining experience and confidence. They also implied that they were learning about relationships solely through experiencing them rather than through other methods of learning.

Rewarding Feelings. Boys also benefit through experiencing positive and rewarding feelings, especially feelings of physical or sexual attraction and "the obvious fun-factor" (Grade 9 boy). One Grade 11 boy stated, "I don't think people consciously think like, "Oh I'm going to date like just to get emotions and to like get a boner" and stuff like that, but I feel like that's kind of what it really is". Physical and sexual attraction was frequently mentioned in many of the discussions. However, they indicated that although these feelings usually initially attract them to relationships, they're not enough to sustain a relationship.

These boys also, somewhat slyly, indicated that the chance of sexual gratification was a benefit some of them hope for. For example, when asked what ways guys gain from relationships, one Grade 11 boy joked, "well, their penises might gain", which was met by laughter by the other boys in the room.

The participants also mentioned their desire to avoid negative feelings in relationships. According to one Grade 11 participant, it's important for girls "not to be a drag to be around". The loss of the initial rewarding feelings (e.g., one boy referred to it as

the "honeymoon period) or experiencing problems, were identified as the primary reason that relationships ended.

Intimacy/Support. The boys also benefited by having "someone they could talk to and trust". One boy in Grade 11 said, "They can help each other morally like raise each other's spirit, you know, motivate them". An older boy discussed having someone to confide in:

> People confide in, when you're in a relationship, you want to be able to share your emotions….They want to be able to sit with the person say, "I feel insecure about maybe my job or my school, or our relationship, or my friends,"…it's good when you can find someone who wants to hear your problems. (Grade 12 boy)

Category 3: Managing Relationship Issues

Based on the boys' discussions, difficulties eventually arise in their relationships and usually cause their relationships to end. The participants described the need to manage the issues that start to arise after the "honeymoon period". Some strategies mentioned used to manage these issues included *Advice/Support, Managing Image, Avoidance/Lack of Communication*, and maintaining *Purposely Shallow Relationships*.

Advice/Support. There was a general consensus that many boys typically do not seek advice or support, although sometimes, they do seek advice from certain friends or family members. One Chinese participant stated that, for Asians, it is even more difficult to approach their parents for dating advice: "Oh, if it's Asian parents, don't even think about it [going to your parents for advice]."

 The primary reason these boys tended to not seek advice was the belief that, inherently, guys prefer to solve problems independently, reflecting their adoption of that traditional masculine norm: "Like for me, it's usually, just, I think about it and if it doesn't work then I think about it more" (Grade 11 boy). They also mentioned feeling vulnerable to

other people's opinions of them, a dislike of feeling insecure, and lack of confidence in asking for advice about certain topics in particular, such as sex. . These boys did mention seeking advice, particularly about sex, from the Internet, and believed that girls do also.

The participants stated that if they are unable to solve problems on their own, they might approach someone else they trust for advice. A group of Grade 10 and 11 participants stated that guys are more likely to confide in a very close, male friend (i.e., "a bro") regarding particularly burdensome problems:

Boys 1:   It depends on the problem.
Boy 2:   Yeah, it depends on like how big it was and how close they are. So like I
             don't think you can talk about this with a lot of friends
Boy 3:   Or like how close your friends are.
Boy 2:   Yeah, but I think like if there's like one close friend, and it's like a pretty
             big thing, where it's been happening a lot, they can sort of talk about it.
             It's like it's pretty stressful to like run away from it a long time and
             usually like a bro is like the easiest way to like get it off your chest.

Generally there was consensus that guys prefer to solve problems independently in contrast with girls who prefer to rely on others for advice. One Grade 11 boy said, "It's just like if there's a problem, guys want to fix it themselves and girls reach out to other people for their opinion". Primarily, the participants seemed to believe that the gender difference in advice-seeking is due to inherent gendered traits. As one Grade 11 boy said, "They're [girls are] just like that."

Managing Image. Participants managed issues in their dating relationships through conscious choices about their behaviour and words to create and maintain a desirable image of themselves. They manage their image through digital media (i.e., texting) and social media, and by avoiding damaged pride or looking insecure.

According to the participants, digital and social media are primary tools that teens are using to manage their image. They have time to think, plan, craft, and send or display

carefully thought-out messages and photos that depict themselves in a certain way. They also described how they use emoticons depending on the situation when texting or chatting online in order to present that they are feeling certain emotions (whether or not they actually are).

At the same time as presenting and managing their own image through social and digital media, teens are influenced by the online self-images that are being presented by others. A discussion among a group of Grade 10 and 11 boys revealed how they are being influenced by social media images and consequently feel the need to manage their own images online:

Boy 1:	It doesn't have to be like direct, oh like they're telling me to do this, but then it's kinda...
Boy 2:	Implied
Boy 1:	Yeah, it's not directly telling you stuff, but then it kinda implies that 'cause you know those Instagram pictures like cute couples and stuff? And they're doing stuff.
Boy 3:	(Laughs)
Boy 1:	It's not implying that like, "This is what a cute couple should look like", but then to some people, they're like, "Oh, maybe I should be like that 'cause if I'm like that then I'll be considered cute with my other person."

These boys also manage their image by ensuring their pride is not damaged and by avoiding looking insecure. Sometimes this is done by complying with traditional masculine norms, such as being the initiator of relationships and paying for dates. They also discussed needing to avoid talking about problems in order to maintain an image of looking right or looking "perfect or good". A group of Grade 11 boys had the following discussion:

Boy 1:	It's kinda tiring talking.
Boy 2:	Especially when you're in the wrong, or it's like something bad. It's pretty hard.
Boy 3:	Yeah, guys are scared of being wrong, of like intimacy.
Boy 1:	I think it's more like guys are scared of being in trouble.
Boy 2:	Yeah, we are scared of being rejected too.

During a discussion in which the participants mentioned that guys are more likely to communicate with actions rather than words, one Grade 10 boy stated that some males avoid talking with girls in order to protect their sense of pride:

> Talking actually makes you vulnerable cause like you tell them stuff and then like they know about it so then like if they were to do something against you they can use that against you. 'Cause like…guys tend to have a bit more pride.

Avoidance/Lack of Communication. One of the most discussed issues was how males tend to purposely avoid communicating with girls they are dating. Sexual desires and boundaries, expectations, and relationship status are considered particularly difficult to talk about. Reasons the participants gave that they avoided communication were to avoid discomfort and to reduce potential conflict. Ultimately, however, they were aware that avoidance and lack of communication leads to miscommunication in relationships and the potential for relationships to breakdown.

Avoiding discomfort was a primary reason cited for avoiding communicating with girls they are involved with. One Grade 11 boy said, "if it doesn't feel good to express it, [guys] just kinda don't express it". Another Grade 11 boy said that emotions are particularly uncomfortable for guys to talk about, leading guys to be more likely to physically, rather than verbally, fight. Sometimes that discomfort comes in the form of embarrassment, as described by this Grade 11 boy: "I feel like for guys for the most part, it's like they're kind of like not really embarrassed but sort of like embarrassed about bringing up problems".

Sometimes the discomfort they are trying to avoid is due to their anticipation of reactions from girls that they believe will be negative or hard to for them to deal with. One boy stated that girls' crying was particularly difficult to handle. These participants seemed

to believe that girls' reactions are sometimes excessive: "Sometimes girls just react a lot more sensitively to…minor actions" (Grade 10 boy).

The boys seemed to believe that avoiding communication was natural and inherent based on their male gender, rather than resulting from traditional masculine norms that stipulate that males should be less relationally communicative. A Grade 10 boy explained boys' inherent tendency to avoid communication as though it was a trait that males are born with: "The thing is that us boys are like creatures that um use our bodies to communicate." When the boys were asked to brainstorm words they associated with society's "normal " view of a man, very few traits related to communication skills, except for a boy who said men are "less communicatively sophisticated".

In general, the boys were aware that avoidance and lack of communication might lead to miscommunication and the breakdown of relationships. As described by one Grade 10 boy, lack of communication "…causes a lot of room for mistakes and a lot of assumptions to be made. So yeah, that's one problem that's pretty big." Another Grade 10 boy said, "…communication is a big part of a relationship and if there's a lack of that then it's just a lack of it. Like there is something lacking in the relationship itself so it could possibly lead to a break up."

Purposely Shallow Relationships. Boys also managed their relationships by purposely keeping their dating relationships shallow. The primary way that relationships are kept shallow is through the lack of deep communication, and this strategy was not necessarily only used by boys. One Grade 11 boy summarized it this way: "I mean like I know some of my friends…they just want to hang out or go shopping with their boyfriends or girlfriends. Like they don't want to go that deep. So they just won't have that much

communication" (Grade 11 boy). The participants seemed to believe that a lack of deep

communication leads to superficial, short-term relationships, while long-term relationships

with deeper communication were expected to develop later in life instead once they

become more mature.

> I think for like most of the teenagers, they just don't want to go that deep 'cause they're not that much mature and they're not too sure what they want. They might just like, like the feeling when they're holding hands like walking around the street and the yeah…They just maybe like the feeling together and maybe after like they live in different places or like they don't meet daily, they just die out. (Grade 11 boy)

The participants' relationships were also kept shallow through feelings of

ambivalence or indifference. A Grade 12 participant explained his belief that males are

indifferent and non-committal in relationships in high school:

> Indifference. I guess that's one thing about guys in high school. They feel that they need to be indifferent. Not really committed to the person or kinda distance themself just kinda staying in one place.

One of the boys used the phrase, "the chase is better than the reward" to describe how

some boys tend to pursue relationships with intensity only to lose interest once a deeper or

more serious relationship becomes possible after his interest is reciprocated. A boy in

Grade 10 described it this way: "…some guys they just get the girlfriend just to get the

girlfriend, not to like get like, love".

Category 4: Relationship Breakdown.

The main reasons given for relationships' ending were problems and negative

feelings, typically occurring after the "honeymoon period". One Grade 11 boy said, "as soon

as it stops being easy, it just kind of goes away." He went on to say the following:

> 'Cause, look at it this way, if you ask a girl out and then you start dating a few times, you're going to be feeling a lot of emotions pretty easily just basically by showing up for the date. And that's super easy and super fun, but then there's like a problem with the relationship for whatever reason then it's effort to resolve it to get this

feeling back. It's just a lot easier to end it. Maybe not the first problem, but I feel like problems are generally what causes things to end.

The participants also discussed the consequences of breakups, such as losing mutual friends. "…sometimes [it] can leave you with one less friend…sometimes…those connections you have with people, they are gone now because…they pick that side. With a breakup, sometimes people pick sides."

Breakups also have an extra layer of complexity due to the role of social media. Updating of social media statuses and the removal of photos or evidence of their relationship from online social media sites can make dealing with breakups more complicated.

Category 5: Communication

Participants' identified communication as an essential component of certain phases in the process of *getting experienced in dating* (i.e., during *Initiating Dating Relationships, Managing Relationship Issues*, and *Relationship Breakdown*). In particular, their discussions outlined a number of communication issues they face, including individual/gendered communication differences, males' discomfort with communication, miscommunication, and social/digital media communication.

Individual/Gendered Communication Differences. The participants believed in both individual communication differences and gendered communication differences. Comments about individual communication differences attributed variations in communication styles to individuals' personal characteristics rather than to characteristics associated with gender. For example, one Grade 12 participant said, "I don't think there's a big difference between guys and girls reading and sending messages [on social media]. I think it's more [about] personality types, people's perspectives."

Although the participants seemed aware that individuals vary in communication styles, there were five times as many comments about gendered communication differences than those regarding individual communication differences. These comments pointed to the participants' beliefs in inherent, biological gender differences, rather than acknowledgement that there are socialized communication differences between girls and guys. Most of the comments were either direct comparisons of males' versus females' communication styles or comments indicating how males and females typically communicate.

Males' Versus Females' Communication Styles. These boys believed that males and females communicate in opposite ways. The participants generally believed that males communicate directly while females communicate indirectly. The boys expressed frustration about girls' indirect style of communication. For example, one Grade 11 boy said, '…a lot of guys, like we need it kind of like straightforward right? But girls will try to like hint at it and then guys are… don't kinda get it".

The participants indicated that boys prefer to avoid talking about uncomfortable topics with girls, whereas girls tend not to avoid awkward communication. When asked what boys tend to do when they feel awkward about communication, one Grade 11 boy answered, "try to run away from it".

The participants also believed that, in general, boys do not like to talk whereas girls like to talk a lot. A Grade 11 boy said that boys tend to speak with more of a purpose, whereas girls like talking about things more generally. They also viewed girls as more verbally skillful than boys. One Grade 10 boy said that girls, "know how to play their way". Another Grade 11 boy said: "Well a lot of times girls are one or two steps ahead of the guy.

Like they know what they're doing. When they're arguing they know what they're going to

say and stuff."

Miscommunication. Miscommunication was considered to be a significant issue

and largely attributed to an overall lack of communication that these participants saw as

typical of high school relationships. Miscommunication was also attributed to inherent

gender differences in communication, including girls' indirect style of communication. A

Grade 10 boy likened girls' thoughts almost as a no man's land that boys are not meant to

be able to understand: "I think we're not supposed to know…like what girls are

thinking…cause we just can't…'cause we're all boys. That's why." A Grade 10 boy stated his

dislike for girls' hinting behaviour due to the potential for miscommunication as follows:

"Personally, I don't like it. I'd rather, it's like, say it out loud like whatever you want to

say…I think it's wasting time and if you get the wrong hint…then…(everyone laughs)".

Social/Digital Media Communication. Participants discussed how

miscommunication arises through the use of social and digital media mostly from not being

able to hear the tones of voice or see facial expressions. They were grappling with the need

to make sense of online language, which often includes emoticons or other symbols meant

to convey emotions.

Category 6: Disengaging from Dating.

Throughout the discussions, it became clear that not all boys participate in dating,

whether by not beginning to date at all, or taking a break after they have already started.

Boys gave a number of reasons that they might not be dating, including expectations of

their parents. A Grade 9 boy stated that Asian parents in particular tend to not want their

children to date. He also mentioned that Asian parents sometimes indirectly keep their

teens from dating by keeping tight control of their time. Some boys disengage from dating due to the need to focus on other priorities, such as academics and increased academic pressure. Pressure to focus on academics was largely attributed to parents' expectations, and for the most part, these expectations were said to occur mostly in Asian families. Other boys choose not to get into relationships at all. According to one of the participants, some boys lack interest in dating because they are seen as requiring too much "work". This Grade 11 boy said, "I mean this can be girls too but I feel like, I feel like some people - it's like getting into a relationship is too much work, so they just kind of like don't".

However, a more concerning reason given for not engaging in dating was fear. One particular boy in Grade 11 refrained from dating altogether due to fear. He stated his preference was to immerse himself in video games rather than involve himself in the potentially "dangerous" world of dating:

> I can't understand human emotions because there... is no sort of logic behind human emotions. There's no calculation, there's no equation behind human emotion. So it's difficult for me to understand, so therefore every time I think of the word relationship, it's just one word. It's just purely dangerous...I just don't even jump into that zone, it's just off-limits-forbidden. (Grade 11 boy)

Contextual Conditions

Overview. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), contextual conditions are environmental factors that influence situations, circumstances, and problems. Individuals then respond to those conditions with various actions, interactions, and emotional reactions. For the purpose of this study, contextual conditions were identified that influence these participants' navigation of dating relationships. These influences were on a micro-level, through intra-individual processes (e.g., *struggling with confidence*) and social interactions (e.g., *peers' perceptions*), and a macro-level, which exert influence through

larger social and cultural dynamics (e.g., *masculine gender norms*). The effects of these contextual conditions are not mutually exclusive, but instead, form a complex and dynamic web of external factors. Data analysis found seven contextual conditions, which will be further explicated in the section below: *struggling to be confident, social/digital media culture, peers' perceptions, parents' expectations, multicultural context, female gender stereotypes*, and *masculine gender norms* (Figure 4).

Struggling to be Confident	• Due to Gender Norms and Expectations • Due to Expectation that Males Initiate Relationships • Confidence and Communication
Social/Digital Media Culture	• Positive aspects of social/digital media • Negative aspects of social/digital media • Sexting
Peers' Perceptions	• Being pressured by friends • Concerns about social status • Dealing with own and others' social image online
Parents' Expectations	• Types of expectations • Cultural and individual values
Multicultural Context	• Cultural composition of the school • Cultural composition of the sample
Female Gender Stereotypes	• Implying "crazy girls" • Attributing scheming to girls • "Overly attached girlfriend" • "Overly sensitive girlfriend: • Axiously anticipating girls' hard-to-hand reactions
Masculine Gender Norms	• Society's "normal" view of a man • Discomfort with communication • Males expected to initiate relationships • Males feeling expected to pay • Pressure to succeed and be a provider

Figure 4. Contextual Conditions and Associated Issues

Struggling to be Confident

Participants spoke frequently about confidence, sometimes directly, but also indirectly through related issues such as anxiety, fear of rejection, and insecurity. Through their discussions, these boys revealed that they are struggling to be confident, and that this struggle influences all aspects of their navigation of dating relationships. Their confidence is impacted by other people's perceptions of them, compounded by social media due to potential judgment of aspects of theirs and others' lives online. However, social media also increases confidence in communicating with people they are interested in. Lack of confidence in dating was attributed to lack of dating experience. Generally, most comments about their struggles with confidence were related to the impact of masculine gender norms, the expectation that guys initiate relationships, and communication.

The participants were keenly aware of masculine gender norms that stipulate that males should be confident. When asked to brainstorm traits that society expects men to have, the participants mentioned confidence, as well as many other traits typically associated with confidence, such as being "outspoken"," strong", "capable", and "able to deal with everything". One Grade 11 participant said that all traits they had mentioned, including being rich and muscular, implied that men should also be confident: "…it's kind of implied 'cause if you have all that stuff going for you, obviously you're confident. You're loaded and you're jacked." These boys also said that some males are too confident, which was associated with potential negative implications for some girlfriends.

Participants were dealing with the expectation that males initiate dating relationships. This expectation puts the onus on males to have the courage to approach girls and risk rejection, as well as make themselves vulnerable by being the first to admit

that they are romantically interested. One Grade 11 participant said: "…guys, they would mainly have insecurities because it's them chasing after the girl, right?"

They also believed that females find confidence attractive in males, further increasing the pressure to show confidence. For example, a Grade 9 boy said that some guys feign confidence because they believe girls find that attractive, however it can cause them to seem overconfident or somewhat aggressive:

> I'm sure girls are attracted to confidence. So guys try to show confidence, even if they aren't. And maybe that can come off as a little too… a little too like on the spot, like a little too I guess pushy on the guy's part.

Confidence and communication were seen as major issues these participants face in their dating relationships. One of the boys who was in Grade 11 said it this way:

> I feel like the big thing is more like confidence and communication and I feel like those two things, they're pretty complex, we talked about it for a couple of hours. I feel those are the big things that define like relationships in high school. And I think the other things are more like nuances that are more or less probably, depending on your situation, but I feel like the big like blank check to cover everyone is communication and confidence, 'cause they're both lacking.

Participants mentioned that they lacked confidence in communication due to feelings of vulnerability they associated with communicating about intimate thoughts and feelings. When discussing whether or not boys will talk to others for advice or support, one Grade 10 boy made a distinction between seeking support in a vulnerable way in which emotions are shared, versus telling friends about issues in a more nonchalant way. He said: "…well, you don't have a meeting of the feelings…something just motivates you to tell your friends."

Social/Digital Media Culture

The large role and impact of social media and texting (digital media) on teens' lives was apparent. A boy in Grade 10 said, "…right now, we're in a texting culture where we're

constantly texting in class, breaks or whatever so it's kinda like you want to constantly be

in touch with that person regardless of where you might be." In one discussion, when a boy

mentioned an issue related to communication, he made a hand gesture as though he was

texting, as though it was assumed that communication would be through an electronic

device. The following exchange occurred between the participant and the facilitator:

Boy: For me, when you mentioned communication, like for high school relationships I think it's just basically chatting for days and nights…chatting for hours…

Facilitator: I see you holding your hands like this. Do you…are you…I'm wondering… you're talking about chatting on a phone?

Boy: Yeah, on a phone…or on Facebook or other social media. Just chatting for hours….but not meaningful….yeah not really meaningful. It kinda wastes time.

Another participant who was in Grade 11 described the ubiquitous nature of social and

digital media for teens, and the connection between electronic communication and

confidence in the following way:

I think this generation, it's considered the Facebook generation so we tend to speak to each other electronically because generally I admit it, you know, actually we're all shy…so they express themselves over Facebook or they meet new people by texting because me personally, I can express myself better through writing or typing some words out rather than speaking. Because I'm never really a good speaker.

The participants' discussions revealed an enormous paradox that teens currently face in

the midst of the evolving social and digital media culture their generation is now a part of:

social and digital media connects individuals more than ever while at the same time

causing disconnection. The boys discussed this paradox by identifying positive and

negative aspects of social and digital media culture.

Generally, the benefits of social media and texting were related to decreased anxiety

in communication with people they were romantically interested in. They also appreciated

that social media provides an opportunity to learn more about a new person, facilitating

conversation with someone new. Rejection was seen as easier to handle when the message is sent online or through text. Additionally, electronic communication was discussed as a way to soften communication, for example, when angry or distressed, because an individual is able to think prior to responding or sending messages, allowing more control over the self-image a person is presenting.

A main concern about social and digital media was the potential for miscommunication and difficulties interpreting true emotions and intent of the person sending the message. Electronic communication was also thought to create a sense of disconnection from others through a lack of authentic communication. One participant in Grade 10 associated communicating electronically with "hiding" by saying the following: "Nowadays, yes. Because a lot of people hide behind the keyboard and say things they don't normally feel comfortable saying in person. " Participants also discussed negative aspects of managing their self-image online, such as during a break up.

Sexting. Although not discussed frequently, these participants mentioned the possibility of sending sexual messages and images through texting (i.e., "sexting"). When texting was first brought up, some of the boys immediately assumed the topic in question was sexting. The exchange among the Grade 10 boys and the facilitator was as follows:

Facilitator:	What about texting?
Boy 1:	Texting who?
Facilitator:	Your person. What role does texting play?
Boy 2:	(laughs quietly)
Facilitator:	You're laughing. Why are you laughing? (more laughter from the group)
Boy 2:	We're in a culture…like currently, like um, not currently, but since like the 21st century, I'm just guessing, after like texting was uh popularized, there came sexting. (some giggles)
Boy 2:	Instead of like calling them and impl-saying sexual ..uh things, it's much easier to…(chuckles)

Boy 3:	Sending nudes
Boy 2:	Yeah, exactly. Indirectly imply sexual meaning through text or even like directly imply sexual uh meaning. Cause like you don't either see them in person or hear their voice right?

Peers' Perceptions

The discussions at times revealed that the participants were influenced by their peers' perceptions of and "interferences" in the unfolding of their relationships. They also indicated that some guys are concerned about gaining social status through their dating activities. Social status, according to these participants, also involves social images online..

Some participants perceived pressure from their friends to get together with someone. Other participants were subjected to teasing and gossip about their dating interests and activities. For example, boys indicated that they received additional pressure from their male friends if they were involved in a relationship that the girl initiated, rather than him initiating. With regards to teasing, one Grade 10 participant said, "...usually when you have a girlfriend or a girl has a boyfriend, when you guys are walking in the hallway, basically everyone is like, "Oh, oh". All of those things…they always feel kind of shy. Like when other people say something." Another boy in Grade 10 said that, once in a relationship, friends' involvement can sometimes be a big issue.

> So much unnecessary drama in high school and you know usually stems back to both the guy and the girl's friends. Like if one of them doesn't like you, you know, just kinda like start so much drama. That is unfortunately unavoidable. So I mean you know after a while it's tiresome dealing with that every day.

Some guys date girls as a way to achieve social status or to try to "look cool". A Grade 9 participant described how dating an attractive girl increases other people's respect for him:

> I think it's also a bit of a social standing, like oh yeah, I'm dating this hot chick. It's kinda like a feeling of like, I mean, you'd respect someone more, from my point of

view, a guy who's like got a good catch basically, right? I mean, it's kind of a way to flaunt how handsome, how social, how like, you know, how cool you are basically. And I'm affected by that too.

Another Grade 10 participant talked about a friend of his who dates attractive girls to show off to his friends:

I know a person who likes to formu-like represent his relationships as types of trophies, which I find pretty annoying but apparently like each relationship he goes through he sees it as like I guess a medal that he gives to himself.

Parents' Expectations

Participants frequently discussed how parents' expectations of them influence their dating activities. Some parents expect that their children do not date at all. Other participants said that they experience pressure from their parents to get experienced in dating. A Chinese international student in Grade 10 said, "My parents agree me to dating early because they think you should try the sadness or happiness during you are teenager during high school". One Grade 11 boy described pressure from his parents that he "must continue the bloodline".

The boys also recognized that parents' tend to place more restrictions on their daughters' dating activities than on their sons'. One participant in Grade 10 stated:

I feel like parents would like, the girl would be more like protect[ed], at least in my, I have a sister. My parents are like way more protective of her than they are for me or my brother. I think that my parents would be totally fine with me and my brother dating, it's just I don't' know, they're not too keen on my sister dating.

Participants also believed that girls' parents tend to have higher expectations of their daughters' boyfriends than boys' parents have of their sons' girlfriends. When asked what types of expectations girls' parents have of their daughters' boyfriends, some boys in Grade 11 said the following:

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Boy 1:	...are you the right colour?
Boy 2:	Maturity. Are you logical?...um...
Boy 1:	Do you talk?
Boy 2:	Do you have common sense?
Boy 3:	Responsible
Boy 4:	But that being said, I think if you're like polite and have enough of a sense of humour and you have like decent table manners, you'll survive (laughter)...but table manners won't get you out of the door.

One Grade 11 participant described the following double standard in his parents'
expectations of his brother and sister's dating partners: "My brother got a White girlfriend
in university and my mom didn't really care about that, but when it came to my sister she
was like, only date Asians. Koreans. Koreans only". Expressing his anxiety over not meeting
his girlfriends' parents' expectations of him a Grade 10 participated stated:

Boy:	...they wouldn't want their daughter to be with me.
Facilitator:	Why might parents feel that way?
Boy:	Because I'm not the ideal husband or boyfriend.

Success in academics and prioritizing academics over dating were the primary
parental expectations discussed. According to a Grade 10 boy:

Boy 1:	For Asians, you're technically not supposed to date in high school because it apparently interferes with your study.
Facilitator:	And how do you feel about that?
Boy 1:	I think that's just BS.

Finally, according to participants, sometimes parents influence their children's
dating activities indirectly by not connecting emotionally with their children, causing their
children to seek out love they might be missing at home in dating partners:

It doesn't have to be like direct influencing. Like maybe your parents are always like not home 'cause of work or something and you just don't feel the love so then you go to other sources so then in a way they're like kind of influencing you because they're not directly influencing you, but then like you want that love so then you go elsewhere to look for it.

Sometimes participants' attributed parents' expectations to differences in parents' personalities and "strictness". For example, one Grade 9 boy said, "I mean depends on the parent's personality right? They might be protective or not that protective." However, the participants attributed parents' cultural values as the primary influence on teens' dating activities. For example, participants said that Asian families typically place high value on academic success. One participant in Grade 11 said it this way:

> I mean it's kinda of maybe cultural biased I think. But Chinese or Asian parents I mean when their children have a relationship with like some crazy girl or a girl that doesn't like to study, the parents get worried about their future so they try their best to stop them, like try everything they can do to break them apart.

Cultural influence, from the participants' perspectives, exists in varying degrees. For example, some parents' expectations are in line with traditional cultural beliefs. Participants also believed that some parents' expectations change based on whether or not they were born in Canada or how acculturated they are to Western values. One boy in Grade 10 indicated that his parents' relaxed expectations about his dating activities are the result of his parents being influenced by North American culture.

Multicultural Context

This study took place in a large, metropolitan city in Western Canada, and all three schools were culturally diverse. As previously discussed, parents' cultural expectations and values influence these boys' dating. Participants' are also impacted by the cultural composition of their schools. A few participants in Grade 11 stated that although their school is multicultural, the students tend to socialize within their own cultural groups:

Boy 1:   I mean, even in Grade 11, it's really easy to identify the number of, the people who separate themselves. Not being racist here, but there's this group of basically white people and then there's this group of Asians.

Boy 2:   Oh yeah.

Boy 1:	So that's how we split ourselves
Boy 2:	And there's like different Asians
Boy 1:	Yeah, exactly.
Boy 2:	Like CBC, international…
Facilitator:	Different types of Asian groups, you mean?
Boy 2:	Yeah. Korean, Japanese
Boy 1:	Chinese.

The participants were divided in their opinions about how often interracial dating occurred. Some students believed that cultural and language barriers decrease the likelihood of dating people from different cultural backgrounds, especially for international students who are new to Canada:

> Even some Asian groups are trained to always want other Asian groups. Like I'm not biased but for some CBC (Canadian born Chinese) groups or other Asian groups, they just don't want to talk with some international student in Chinese. It's like they just isolate themselves from them. That always happens.

Female Gender Stereotypes

Throughout the discussions, participants made many comments indicating negative beliefs about females in general. These beliefs revolved around the negative stereotype that females are or can be "crazy", as they are sometimes referred to in casual discourse or popular culture. Additionally, the boys perpetuated these stereotypes through the ways in which they discussed their attitudes and experiences with each other, which presumably represents how they discuss these issues outside of the research setting. A number of negative attributions about females were identified in their discussions that referenced the idea of "crazy girls", including expectations of girls being "overly attached" or "overly sensitive girlfriends". They also attributed scheming to girls, as though scheming is a common tactic most females tend to use when dealing with males. Finally, participants often expressed anxiety and anticipation that, when their expectations are not met, girls' reactions will be overwhelming and difficult for males to handle.

Participants relayed stories and explanations about girls' behaviour that seemed to imply that girls, in general, are "crazy" in a stereotypical sense. "Crazy girls" were often seen to be "overly attached" or "overly sensitive". One boy in Grade 10 made the assumption explicit during the following exchange:

Boy 1:   Like a lot of times even if the girl was doing something bad and like the guy confronted her about it she would make it about him instead of her. Kinda like the guy was the guilty one….

Facilitator: Can you give an example?

Boy 1:   I am gonna say my friend got cheated on and then the girl got mad at him 'cause he didn't get mad enough because she thought that meant he didn't care about her or something. And she was the one that cheated on him!

Boy 2:   It's hard to comprehend.

Facilitator: And what was the rationale behind that?

Boy 3:   They're crazy….

Boy 1:   I don't really know what they are thinking right? I don't know their rationale behind that.

Boy 4:   They know how to play their way.

One trait associated with "crazy girls" was clinginess. Some participants indicated that some girls want to be more attached to the relationship than males think is appropriate. When discussing the difficulties boys face juggling academics and dating, and the need to cancel a date with a girlfriend, another participant in Grade 9 said, "…the girl will kind of be like disappointed and she might think that studying is more important than her, because you know in free time, the girl would rather have the guys to hang out with her than something else. I think that's one of the problems." In the follow up discussions, when the participants were asked what comes to mind when they think of a "crazy girl", a few Grade 10 boys immediately replied as follows:

Boy 1:   I think crazy is associated with clinginess.

Facilitator: Clinginess?

Boy 1:   Maybe like a week ago my brother's having an argument with his girlfriend. She called him, like he's turned his phone off 'cause he's pissed off. She called him like 20 times or whatever and I think a lot

would deem that crazy. But you know it just kinda like coincides with
the term clingy.

Boy 2: I think clingy is one of [the terms] for crazy…

The participants also talked about their belief that girls, in general, are overly sensitive, and this trait was also deemed to be a potential reason that girls might be considered as "crazy". One Grade 11 participant commented about how girls react about things their boyfriends have done that have upset them:

I'm gonna think really stereotypically biased. Um let's see… Females keep screaming "Oh my god. He did this. They did this." That's what I hear all the time in all my classes. And then they swing out their phones and… and then go on the zen mode of texting. They're like crazy.

One participant in Grade 10 described overly sensitive girlfriends this way: "…[girls] get suspicious even if you didn't do anything." Another group of Grade 11 participants had the following exchange in which they revealed their belief that girls are typically overly sensitive about minor issues:

Boy 1: It's pretty hard to understand girls when they don't talk to you.
Boy 2: Get mad at you for some reason.
Boy 3: 'Cause they're not talking to you.
Boy 1: Yeah.
Boy 3: Small issues.
Boy 1: And when they are upset with you and they play the game of like "I'm not going to tell you how I'm feeling cause I want you to figure out how I'm feeling", but you have no idea how they are feeling… That's like really common and really annoying, at least from the guy's point of view, 'cause we usually have no idea why and we can make it worse by not knowing why. And they're not telling us why.

Another way that these participants perpetuated negative stereotypes about girls was through assumptions that girls are scheming or being manipulative. A Grade 9 boy brought it up this way: "Usually what I see is girls like I dunno, (laughs) scheming a little, like they text someone, they don't just confront the guy and say, 'Why are you talking to

her?' Right?" A few participants discussed how girls sometimes cry to manipulate guys into

feeling like the "bad guy":

Boy 1:	And when you are, say, mad at someone, they start crying, you just kinda like feel the anger drain. You know what I mean?
Boy 2:	(Laughs)
Boy 3:	Yeah. Always.
Boy 1:	Yeah. And then you turn out to be the bad guy 'cause…
Boy 3:	Yeah, yeah.
Boy 1:	…you know what I mean?
	(Laughter)
Boy 3:	All the time. 200%.

When a participant in Grade 12 relayed his knowledge of, what he believed to be, deceptive

mating behaviour of women of a certain culture, it was reminiscent of folklore warning of

the dangers of 'feminine wiles':

> There's a culture I know where the women will use a condom and they will puncture the condom so that when they give it to the guy they will get pregnant, and then the guy will have to be with her.

> The participants often expressed beliefs that girls' reactions to them are negative,

overwhelming, and difficult for them to handle. Additionally, their comments implied that

girls' reactions were more extreme than boys would deem appropriate.

Boy 1:	Well…let's say if everything's nice in the beginning… as the relationship continues she will get disappointed….
Boy 2:	Oh my goodness.
Boy 1:	You know what I mean, right? Like if you go to a restaurant like oh you get her a napkin and stuff, if I don't do that a few years later, she'll be like why don't you do that to me anymore?
Boy 2:	Oh my goodness. Yeah.
Facilitator:	So we'll just say that's like setting up um expectations.
Boy 1:	Yeah.
Facilitator:	And failing to achieve those…
Boy 2:	That's why you don't start big at first.
Boy 1:	Yeah.
Boy 2:	You get bigger as you go.

Masculine Gender Norms

Many issues participants face in their relationship navigation were mentioned in relation to masculine gender norms. Some participants' indicated they were trying not to relate to gender norms. However, most participants' indicated compliance with gender norms. Males' need to build confidence, for example, was a frequent topic and related to the participants' beliefs that males are expected to be the initiator of romantic relationships. Participants also believed that males are expected to pay for dates, and indicated that they perceived pressure to eventually become successful in obtaining wealth and a good career to be able to be a provider for a family.

Society's "normal" view of a man was a topic mentioned by one of the Grade 10 boys who expressed his belief that males typically do not talk about emotions or relationships easily because they want to be "like a normal guy that society thinks":

Boy:	I feel like it's because of societies, videos like oh it's okay if girls are talking about it, but it's not okay for guys. But then the guys don't wanna talk about it because they wanna be like a normal guy that society thinks
Facilitator:	What a normal guy that society thinks?
Boy:	...like, society thinks that talking about like feelings and stuff is more like feminine or being open about feelings or relationships

To further explore their perceptions of masculine gender norms, in the follow up discussions, participants were asked to brainstorm words they associated with a society's normal view of a man, and words they associated with society's view of a gentleman. The majority of the traits they identified were particular to either a "normal man" or a gentleman, with only a small number of traits identified as common to both. The traits participants identified can be found in Table 4.

Table 2

Traits Participants Associated with a "Normal" Man and a "Gentleman"

Traits Associated with Society's "Normal" View of a Man	Traits Associated with a Gentleman
• Provider for the family	• Opening doors
• Hardworking	• Carrying an umbrella for the woman
• Takes care of the girl he's dating	• Hold the door for anybody
• Pays	• Well-mannered
• Honest	• Not necessarily muscular
• "Kind of dumb" about "non-explicit communication"	• Don't swear
• Tall	• Put the lady first
• Less communicatively sophisticated	• Be the lead driver
• Independent	• Being well-dressed
• Capable	• Hat
• Confident	• British style
• Hide their feelings	• Good manners
• Having a stable job	• Being respectful
• Big loads of cash	• Not rude
• Outspoken	• Being a "suck up"
• Do everything a woman can't	• Very mature
• Fixing things	• Knowing when to speak up and when not to
• Muscles, 6 packs	• Wise
• Heterosexual	• More "socially aware and communicative" than a "normal guy"
• Being strong emotionally	• Polite
• Able to deal with everything	• Having enough money
--	• Taking care of your image
• *Intelligent[1]*	• Being able to compromise
• *Manners*	• Not being stubborn
• *Chivalrous*	• Not selfish
• *Gentleman*	• Considerate
• *Responsible*	• Thoughtful
• *Taking off his coat if it's cold, pulling out a chair*	• Generous
	• Making a girl his priority
	• Making time for a girl

[1] Traits in italics are common with traits of a "gentleman"

A number of traits the participants associated with society's "normal" view of a man

indicated that they believe males are not supposed to be relationally communicative (i.e.,

being less communicatively sophisticated, "kind of dumb" about "non-explicit"

communication, hide their feelings, being strong emotionally). Interestingly, many of the traits the boys associated with a gentleman were associated with stronger communication and relationship skills (i.e., being respectful, knowing when to speak up and when not to, being more socially aware and communicative than a "normal guy", being able to compromise, not being stubborn or selfish, and being considerate). These participants' conceptualizations of a gentleman are consistent with the positive aspects of the reconstruction of masculinity as proposed by Levant (1992) and Parks Deloz (2011).

Participants expected to be the initiator of dating relationships based on traditional gender norms. They also believed that girls continue to hold this expectation of them as males and indicated their struggles with this expectation. On one hand, they want to fulfill the stipulations of their masculine gender role, but on the other hand, they feel that these expectations are unfair. A few of the Grade 10 boys demonstrated these conflicting beliefs in the following exchange:

Facilitator: So do you think guys should do that? Take initiative?
Boy 1:   They should. They should.
Facilitator: Why do you say that?
Boy 1:   Oh 'cause the girls expect it.
Boy 2:   I think to a certain extent. But like if the guys takes all the initiative, it's like they're the ones that are trying to sustain the relationship while the girls are just receiving, receiving, and receiving...it's not really healthy if you take all the initiative.
Boy 3:   Guys love it when girls take initiative.

Feeling expected to be the initiator of relationships seemed to compound the pressure to be confident. In addition to feeling the need to be confident due to masculine gender expectations, the boys also talked about needing to be confident enough to approach girls they are romantically interested in.

Participants also perceived an expectation to pay on dates. Reasons they gave for paying on dates included the need to impress the girl, the belief that "nice guys" are "chivalrous", and the recognition that the expectation that males pay is a societal gender norm. For example, one boy stated, "I think society has shaped it so that the guys are the ones that pay, and the ones that take initiatives, and then the girls just like receive." Participants stated that the gender norm that males pay exists in Asian cultures as well:

Boy 1:   I think it's fine, I mean, I think a guy should pay for the first date, especially if he's the one asking the girl out. Because I think, I feel like still girls don't ask guys out as much. It is usually the guy asking the girl out and so whoever asks that person out should probably pay so. Yeah I think guys should pay.

Boy 2:   In Asian culture if you do like half-half it will be consider like the man is very very mean.

Similar to their conflicting feelings about initiating relationships, the participants indicated their acceptance and desire to fulfill the expectation to pay, as well as beliefs that the expectation is unfair and should be negotiated with a dating partner.

Some of the participants expressed somewhat stereotypical beliefs that males need to have a good salary and career to provide for their family. One Grade 9 boy with an Asian cultural background said the following:

Uh you know, 'cause guys actually have to work. And most girls, I'm not like trying to be sexist here, but uh, most girls don't work and…just house, housework… So the girl might think that, you know, "I don't have to work because you know, if I, if I meet a good boyfriend and marry him right? Uh then I would live happily, I would actually be in love and you know, that's not that bad of a life.

However another boy in the group, who was biracial, expressed his view that society is moving away from such rigid stereotypes:

…more and more girls are going to university, more than previous generations. More and more girls are getting jobs and not being solely dependent on the man.

Another Grade 9 Chinese boy in the group believed that if he eventually had a well-earning career, he would find a relationship easily: " ...get a high salary job, you don't need to worry about. They [girls] will come and find you." He went on to explain how his cultural background influenced his views about men being the provider for the family:

> ...because Chinese men, we, men must be have a higher salary than woman, otherwise men will get shame. They [ask] other people when they have a party, 'what's your salary?' Other people say, oh this man, ah, you're not good at all. Not work hard, like...a low society in China.

Conclusion and Summary

One purpose of the study was to determine the psychosocial processes in boys' navigation of dating relationships. Detailed analysis revealed these processes to be the categories outlined in the emerging grounded theory: *getting experienced in dating, initiating dating relationships, benefiting/"gaining" from relationships, managing relationship issues, managing relationship breakdowns, communication,* and *disengaging from dating*. The study also determined how boys' perception of gender norms related to their navigation of dating relationships. *Masculine gender norms* were determined to exert significant influence on boys' relationship navigation. Other contextual conditions identified that influence boys' relationship navigation, which are also impacted by gender norms, were their *struggling to be confident, social/digital media culture, peers' perceptions, parents' expectations, the multicultural context,* and *negative female gender stereotypes*. The next chapter will discuss the findings in relation to extant literature and relevance to school psychology practice.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Overview

Using the methodology proposed by Corbin & Strauss (2008) and Charmaz (2014), a grounded theory was developed of adolescent boys' navigation of dating relationships. The central phenomenon identified was boys' *Getting Experienced in Dating,* with "*short-term gain*" identified as their primary goal. These results are similar to Feiring's (1996) findings that adolescent relationships are characterized by brief but intense fascination, being described by one boy as "like a candle in the wind". (p. 192) The boys in the current study identified a long-term expectation that males commit to relationships in the future, once they are mature and established. Six further categories were determined as the primary psychosocial processes that occur during their relationship navigation: *Initiating Dating Relationships, Benefiting/Gaining from Relationships, Managing Relationship Issues, Relationship Breakdown, Communication,* and *Disengaging from Dating*. Seven contextual factors were identified as influencing these boys' relationship navigation: *Struggling to be Confident, Social/Digital Media Culture, Peers' Perceptions, Parents' Expectations, Female Gender Stereotypes,* and *Masculine Gender Norms.*

In this chapter the grounded theory that has been developed is compared and contrasted with related literature. The relationship between the current grounded theory and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci; 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Goelman & Guhn, 2011) is explored in addition to contributions to developmental theory. A discussion of the implications of the findings for practicing school psychologists, and a summary of the limitations and strengths of the study follows. Finally, potential future directions for further research are proposed.

Though the emerging theory contained many insights as to these boys' psychosocial relationship processes and related contextual factors, only key aspects are discussed. In particular, aspects of the psychosocial processes that pertain to the role of masculine gender norms and salient aspects of contextual factors are explored.

The Role of Gender Norms in Boys' "Getting Experienced in Dating"

An understanding of boys' unique dating experiences must take into account their struggles with gender expectations (Dmytro et al., 2013; Luft et al., 2012), as masculinity is a central issue for boys during adolescence (Pollack, 1999; 2000; Way 2011; 2013). Traditional masculine gender norms have been associated with a number of unhealthy attitudes and behaviours for males, including resistance to help seeking (Möller-Leimkühler, 2002; Wimer & Levant, 2011; Yousaf, Popat, & Hunter, 2015), suicide ideation (Coleman, 2015; Möller-Leimkühler, 2003), violence (Feder, Levant, & Dean 2007; Garbarino, 1999), Pollack 1999; 2000), and alexithymia (Levant & Wong, 2013; Karakis & Levant, 2012). Traditional masculinity is associated with negative outcomes in romantic relationships, including reduced relationship satisfaction (Burn & Ward, 2005; Wade & Donis, 2007), casual or risky sexual activity (Danube, Vescio, & Davis, 2015; Pleck et al., 1993), and dating violence (Good, Heppner, Hillenbrand-Gunn, & Wang, 1995; Reed et al., 2011). Relational difficulties within intimate relationships also impact boys' and girls' social, emotional, and academic wellbeing (Collibee & Furman, 2015; Viejo, Ortega-Ruiz, & Sanchez, 2015). Considering the importance of developmental trajectories in romantic relationships from adolescence into adulthood, it is important to explore the strengths and skill gaps that adolescent boys have related to romantic relationship navigation (Connolly et al., 2000; Meier & Allen, 2009).

Getting Experienced in Dating was identified as the primary psychosocial process involved in these boys' approach to dating relationships in high school. The findings suggest that males have an unfair advantage over females in the dating arena consistent with Luft et al. (2012) who found that girls' in their study believed that "society is still in a sense sort of ruled by men…men have nothing to worry about…they don't have to worry about getting pregnant…about going to do pap tests…it's just not fair in a way." (p. 265). Males in the current study, for example, said they were encouraged by their parents to get experienced in dating, whereas traditionally, similar behaviour from girls' is typically discouraged. Getting experienced, from these boys' perspective, includes obtaining sexual experience in the context of less serious or uncommitted relationships, consistent with Levant et al.'s (1992) norm, Non-Relational Attitude Towards Sexuality and Mahalik's (2003) norm, Playboy. These findings suggest a gender imbalance currently exists which allows males more freedom in the dating arena than females.

Boys in the current study believed that they would become involved in "serious", committed relationships at some point in the future once they are mature and established. Instead, many of the boys described pursuing academic, financial and career goals, exemplifying the masculine gender norms of Achievement/Status, Self-Reliance (Levant et al., 1992), Primacy of Work, and Pursuit of Status (Mahalik et al., 2003). From a strengths-based approach, these boys' perception of the need to get experienced assists them in one day managing their future relationships more expertly, reflecting self-awareness of their need for relational skills development.

While boys in this study valued short-term relationships in the pursuit of experience, maturity, and personal gain, previous studies suggest that girls may have

different relationship goals. For example, Palchykov, Kaski, Kertesz, Barabas, & Dunbar's, (2012) study of over two billion mobile phone communications found that females communicate with a primary partner of the opposite sex more than males do across the majority of the life span.. These findings may reflect the male norm of Self-Reliance (Mahalik et al., 2003), or males may communicate less with partners due to placing less emphasis on their relationships than females do. Girls tend to expect that they will be married or become parents earlier than boys expect to (Crockett & Beal, 2012). Dmytro et al. (2013) found that male participants' priority during adolescence was to take responsibility first and foremost for themselves, which contrasted with the females' tendency to take responsibility and make sacrifices for their partner. This discrepancy between boys' and girls' intimate relationships goals contributes to the complexity of their relationship navigation, even more so if either gender is unaware of or unsympathetic to the other's needs.

Initiating Relationships. The participants identified external factors, such as media, culture, and tradition as some of the reasons why they feel expected to initiate relationships. Eryilmaz and Atak (2011) found that individuals with higher masculinity scores on the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) were more likely to initiate relationships. Similarly, Clark, Shaver, and Abrahams (1999) found that women were less direct, less motivated, and less likely to initiate relationships than men. The authors refer to the evolutionary perspective, which suggests that women are more discriminating about mates than men due to the heavy investment required of them if they become pregnant.

Tarzia (2015) described how the evolutionary perspective of relationships promotes gender inequality and is rife in pop-culture self-help literature. This advice often

insists that males and females should conform to behaviours, which the authors state are biologically determined, to ensure more satisfying relationships. For example, Tarzia described how best-selling self-help books such as *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* suggest that females should be unintimidating and surrender to her man, in order to make him feel knowledgeable and fulfill his primitive needs to be a protector and provider. While Tarzia places blame on self-help authors for perpetuating invalid gender stereotypes, it may also be true that public consumption of such material confirms that readers are experiencing negative effects of their own and their partners' adoption of traditional gender norms in their relationships and are seeking ways to manage this.

Boys in the current study indicated the need to be confident in their initiation of relationships, and the convenience and comfort of digital or online methods of relationship initiation, such as texting and Facebook. Fox, Warber, and Makstaller (2013) also found that Facebook plays a "crucial" role in dating relationships. Participants reported a typical relationship trajectory: they meet a romantic interest off-line, gather online information about the person, become Facebook friends, chat online, and progress to texting, prior to the relationship intensifying. Rappleyea, Taylor, and Fang (2014) found that males reported talking on cell phones less than females during the initial phase of a relationship. The authors attributed this to males' higher comfort level with technology and females' socialized relational qualities. It may be, however, than these results illustrate that males resort to digital communication to ameliorate the lack of confidence they feel in their communication with partners.

Benefiting from Relationships. A review of the current literature indicates a need to better understand how teen boys' perceive getting experienced in dating and the

benefits of doing so during adolescence. However, many studies have indicated that boys

lack confidence in dating relationship navigation (Dmytro et al. 2013; Giordano et al. 2006;

Giordano et al. 2010; Rose et al. 2012). Masculine norm expectations that males should be

self-reliant, take risks, and pursue achievement, status, and dominance, may illustrate boys'

desire to become confident through the knowledge gained from experience rather than

shying away. Indeed, getting experienced in dating was the primary benefit that these boys'

described they received from engaging in dating, suggesting that ameliorating their lack of

confidence is of primary concern to them. Other benefits, such as experiencing feelings of

physical and sexual attraction, fun, and emotional intimacy were mentioned, similar to

results of previous research. The majority of previous studies have found that boys

primarily have relational motives for pursuing dating, especially older boys (Feiring, 1996;

Giordano et al. 2006; Giordano et al. 2010; Shulman & Kipnis, 2001; Smiler, 2008; Tolman

et al. 2004).

Results of the current and previous studies suggest that boys' pursue both agentive

and relational goals in dating. If boys conform to masculine norms such as dominance,

achievement and status, they may be more likely to engage in dating to obtain experience,

and consequently achieve higher levels of confidence. Pursuit of emotional intimacy, on the

other hand, is contrary to traditional masculine ideology. Further research is needed to

determine the relationship between agentive and relational goals and conformity to

masculine ideology.

Managing Relationship Issues. Boys in the current study used a number of

strategies to manage relationship issues. One way is by managing their image by presenting

themselves in desirable ways, such as by complying with masculine gender expectations

that males initiate relationships and pay for dates. The most common relationship management strategy discussed, avoiding communication, also relates to managing image in that not talking about relationship problems was attributed to wanting to protect their pride and to look "perfect or good". These motivations are in line with masculine norms such as achievement and status. Bosson and Vandello (2011) assert that masculinity is precarious, and that males tend to respond with aggression to perceived threats to their manhood in an attempt to restore their sense of masculinity. These findings have implications for research and intervention related to teen dating aggression and violence.

Sinn (1997) found that conformity to traditional masculinity was associated with less self-disclosure, supporting the results of the current study that males are less likely to discuss their thoughts, opinions, and problem-solve within the context of their romantic relationships. Participants in the current study stated that they tended to avoid communication about relationship issues in order to reduce conflict, which is likely associated with lack of confidence in communication and feelings of awkwardness (Giordano et al. 2006; Giordano et al. 2010; Rose et al., 2012).

Participants in the current study were reluctant to communicate not only within their romantic relationships, but also with their friends and family. Generally, participants indicated that they would not approach friends or family for support or advice, though a few boys indicated that they might talk to one or two close, trusted friends (i.e., "a bro"). Way (2011; 2013) attributes boys' loss of ability to connect with others to increasing pressure to endorse gender norm expectations that males are self-reliant, independent, and emotionally stoic, and she stresses the implications for boys' social and emotional well-being. These themes are prevalent in the current findings, with participants' expressing

anxiety, insecurity, and low confidence in their relationship communications yet

simultaneously reporting low likelihood of seeking relationship support or advice. These

findings support implementation of teen interventions that target males' difficulties with

psychological, health, and academic help-seeking (Vogel & Heath, 2016; Yousaf, Grunfeld, &

Hunter, 2015).

Other Contextual Factors Influencing Boys' Relationship Navigation

The participants' identified a number of contextual factors that influenced their

relationship navigation ranging from intra-individual (i.e., their internal *Struggling to be*

Confident), to macro-level influences (i.e., *Social/Digital Media Culture, Peers' Perceptions,*

Parents' Expectations, Female Gender Stereotypes, and *Masculine Gender Norms*). In the next

section, social media, female stereotypes, and the multicultural context in which these

teens reside will be discussed as these were the issues that were discussed the most by

participants.

Social Media. In 2010, 73% of teens reported using social media websites, the most

common of which is Facebook (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Facebook plays

an important role in managing romantic relationships (Fox et al 2013). Additionally, young

people are more likely to expect fast response times online and through text, and more

likely to experience break ups through text messages (Forgays, Hyman, & Schreiber, 2014).

Coyne et al. (2011) found that 25% of participants reported using text messaging to discuss

serious issues with an intimate partner, suggesting that many individuals sacrifice face-to-

face communicative intimacy with partners for the less intimidating method provided

online and through text messaging. Additionally, technology facilitates behaviours such as

verbal and emotional abuse, harassment, embarrassment, and sexual coercion (Stonard, Bowen, Lawrence, & Price, 2014).

Participants mentioned sexting as an aspect of their intimate relationships. Studies have found that sexting in adolescence can involve sexual pressure, coercion, bullying, and harassment (Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone, & Harvey, 2012). The study found that girls were affected more negatively than boys by sexting due to the double standard that tends to view girls' sexuality negatively while boys are admired for similar behaviour. Additionally, males with an avoidant attachment style have been found to be more likely to send both sex texts and sex pictures (Drouin and Landgraff', 2011). The authors suggest that avoidant men use sexuality as a way to keep relationships from becoming emotionally intimate. Given the ease with which involvement in sexting may be hidden from others, teens may experience negative effects of such interactions without the knowledge of educators or caregivers. Psychoeducational programmes that increase teens' ability to communicate in healthy ways using social and digital technology are warranted.

Negative Female Stereotypes. A somewhat surprising finding of the current study was the pervasive undercurrent of the boys' stereotypical negative impressions of girls' emotionality. They seemed to perpetuate and validate these stereotypes amongst themselves as they relayed their negative experiences. The participants depicted girls as overly sensitive and overly attached, and talked about "crazy girls", which generally seemed to be girls that were emotionally volatile. Participants' stereotypes of female's emotionality are supported in previous research findings that males and females believe that females experience and express emotions such as love, sadness, and fear more than males do (Fabes & Martin, 1991; Fischbach, Lichtenthaler, & Horstmann, 2015; Plant, Hyde,

Keltner, & Devine, 2000). Indeed, negative stereotypes of females' emotionality are seen as far back in history as 1900BC in Egyptian manuscripts that contain the first descriptions of what is now known as *hysteria*: a mental disorder attributed to females' emotional volatility (Tasca, Rapetti, Carta, & Fadda, 2012). In spite of the perpetuation of gender stereotypes about emotions, scientific evidence that brain-based, biological gender differences in emotional processing is lacking (Bluhm, 2013).

These participants' discomfort with girls' emotionality may be due to gender socialization that expects males' to disconnect from their emotions. Boys' emotionally shunning may reflect a lack of emotional intelligence. Salovey and Mayer (1990) describe emotional intelligence as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189). Masculine gender norms that limit boys' experience, familiarity, and freedom to embrace their own and others emotions understandably could affect boys' confidence in their ability to skillfully handle interactions with girls in which emotions might run high.

Multicultural Context. The current research took place in an urban, multicultural community, and the influence of culture on these participants' navigation of dating relationships was prominent. In the words of the participants, the cultural diversity of their schools was described as "50% Asian and 50% White". Furthermore, participants described multiple Asian minority groups, such as Canadian-born Chinese (CBC), international students, Korean, and Vietnamese. Foreign born students are likely to be acculturated to Western norms to varying degrees, as would their parents be, further complicating the cultural dynamics among students.

Multiculturalism and acculturation influence teens' navigation of dating relationships through their relationships with their parents and with dating partners. Varying degrees of acculturation may cause conflict or disconnection between parents and teens such as Canadian-born Chinese (CBC) who describe feeling as though they are straddling and negotiating two cultures (Kobayashi & Preston, 2014). In mixed cultural groups, dating values and beliefs between adolescent partners may be congruent or may clash. For example, Chinese adolescents have been found to be less involved in romantic relationships than European Canadians (Li, Connolly, Depeng, Pepler, & Craig, 2010). There are also cultural variations in timelines for expected transitions into marriage and parenthood (East, 1998).

Masculine gender norms are also influenced by culture. For example, Levant and Wong (2013) found that alexithymia, which is the inability to identify or describe emotions, was more strongly related to traditional masculine ideology for White men than racial minority men. Levant and Wong proposed that White males receive more benefits than racial minority men if they subscribe to traditional masculine ideology therefore resulting in the stronger link between alexithymia and traditional masculine ideology for them.

Relevance to Extant Theory

Although previous research into theories of adolescent relationship development has focused on behavioural systems theory (Furman & Wehner, 1994) and developmental contextual theory (Brown, 1999; Connolly et al., 2004: Connolly & McIsaac, 2011), analysis of the current data revealed the significance of the bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

The following section provides a brief summary of the features of Bronfenbrenner's

bioecological model that are most relevant to the current emerging grounded theory.

The Bioecological Model of Development. The bioecological model asserts that

development occurs progressively through mutual accommodations by the individual and

others within his or her immediate environments and through external social forces

(Bronfenbrenner, 1977). These spheres of influence are conceptualized as systems that

range from the micro-context, directly influencing an individual, extending outwards in

spheres of increasingly distant macro-influence. Development occurs through interactions

within and between each sphere and transition throughout the course of time, which is

referred to as the chronosystem.

The microsystem is the sphere in which the developing person is influenced by

direct interactions referred to as proximal processes. In relation to the current emerging

theory, participants expressed being directly influenced by their partners or potential

partners, by their parents, and by their peers. Communication is a primary proximal

process, occurring with partners in the initiation of relationships, management of

relationship issues, and in relationship breakdown. Communication with peers includes

reactions to peers' comments and questions, getting support and advice, the perpetuation

of negative female stereotypes, and the policing of gender norms. Parents' and sons also

communicate about dating or sons might ask for support or advice. As Bronfenbrenner

suggests, these interactions are influenced by each individual's dispositions and

characteristics. As an example, boys that strongly endorse masculine gender norms may be

less likely to deal with emotions and relationship issues in an open, egalitarian manner.

This in turn, may influence their partners' reactions and communication styles, and

mutually affect each other's development of attitudes, behaviours, and communication in their current and subsequent relationships.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) describes a mesosystem as a system of interacting microsystems. Although participants in the current study did not talk directly about issues pertaining to the mesosystem, interactions, or the potential for interaction, among participants' families and peer groups can be inferred. For example, how do parents' and sons' interactions influence interactions within their sons' peer group? Connolly et al. (2004) describe how dating emerges during the teen years first through teens' increasing engagement in mixed sex peer groups. Parents' may seek to impart certain values or teach skills that their sons may exhibit when interacting with peers and potential partners in the community or at school. Conversely, values of peer groups may indirectly influence sons' relationships with their parents, as might be the case when youth become involved in maladaptive behaviours such as frequent substance use.

The exosystem refers to external spheres and structures that influence the developing person, but the individual is not directly contained within these settings. These structures include mass media, commercial industry, neighbourhoods, and institutions such as schools. For example, participants in the current study were influenced by negative female stereotypes. Participants also outlined very specific traits they associated with "society's normal view of a man". Stereotypes and societal gender expectations are communicated in the exosystem through mass media. Furthermore, consumer products are often associated with image, status, and values. For example, Axe body care advertising perpetuates traditional masculine ideology by typifying "real men" as those who objectify women. Conversely, advertising can be used to promote healthier values, such as Dove's

recent *Real Strength* campaign that depicts modern males as proud and involved fathers, stating that showing care is what makes a man stronger.

Norms and values are placed within the macrosystem, which Bronfenbrenner describes as "prototypes" or "blueprints" of informal, implicit ideologies. Gender norms and expectations exist in the realm of the macrosystem and vary by culture. For example, participants believed that sons are encouraged or free to date during high school, whereas they believed that parents tend to restrict or prevent their daughters from dating. According to participants, this may be more commonly true for "Westernized" families, but Asian families are more likely to restrict both sons' and daughters' dating and prioritize their children's academics.

A new and emerging subsystem of Bronfenbrenner's model, called the techno-subsystem, has been proposed as a dimension of the microsystem that mediates a developing person's interactions with others through the use of technology, specifically through the Internet, cell phones, and social media (Johnson, 2010; Johnson & Puplampu, 2008). Johnson asserts that the techno-subsystem provides a framework through which the impact of technology on children and youth's development can be explored. This framework is particularly relevant to current study, as participants reported that their communications largely occur through text messaging and online. The influx of social and digital media culture, according to participants, has brought a host of positive and negative consequences that both complicate and support communication, forming a type of paradox. These findings lend support to Johnson and Puplampu's conceptualization of the techno-subsystem as a relevant dimension that has significant implications on the development of teens and their relationship navigation.

Contributions to Developmental Theory. The current findings are consistent with the stage theories of adolescent relationships, such as developmental contextual theory (Brown, 1999; Connolly et al., 2004; Connolly & McIsaac, 2011), in that participants expressed desire for casual, short-term relationships and expected more committed and established relationships when they are older. Based on these findings, one hypothesis that may warrant exploration in context of stage theory is that some males' development through relationship stages becomes stalled in early stages, limiting their ability to progress to more committed dyadic bonds.

The findings also point to a gap in current developmental theory related to adolescent romantic relationships. While developmental contextual theory and behavioural systems theory (Furman & Wehner, 1994) provide a framework for understanding adolescent development within the context of evolving romantic engagement, they carry the assumption that gender is irrelevant. While broad theories such as these elucidate typical and general developmental trajectories, understanding of the complexities and variation in teens' relationship navigation is further enhanced by mid-range theories such as the grounded theory outlined in the current study. Current findings support the development of broad theories that take into account the role of gender norms in adolescent development in the context of intimate relationships.

Implications for School Psychologists

Currently and historically, school psychologists have been viewed primarily as providers of psycho-educational evaluations. From this perspective, findings of the current study are relevant to school psychologists in aiding their understanding of the social and emotional wellbeing of adolescent boys, which may be reflected on measures of boys'

social, emotional, and behavioural functioning in assessments. While boys' experiences

navigating dating relationships may influence their wellbeing, even more ubiquitous are

boys' difficulties with communication (face to face and digitally), advice and support

seeking, and confidence, which are embedded in the process of transitioning into

adulthood while negotiating their masculinity strivings.

The role of school psychologists, however, is changing to reflect their skills in

providing social-emotional learning interventions and psycho-education for students,

parents, and other educators. Additionally, school psychologists are regarded as

experienced and critical consumers of research and have an important knowledge-sharing

role within their school community. Their expertise affords them a unique position to

influence systems level change that has wide-ranging impact, beginning within their

school-based teams (Burns, Warmbold-Brann, & Zaslofsky, 2015). School psychologists can

advocate for opportunities to utilize their training in mental health service and social-

emotional learning to the benefit of the individuals they serve (Eklund, Vaillancourt, &

Pedley, 2013; Harrison, 2009; Hass, 2013; Ross Powell, & Elias, 2002).

To adequately address the unique social and emotional needs of boys, needs that

also relate to their negotiation of masculinity, an awareness and understanding of gender

socialization in the school context is necessary. West and Zimmerman (1987) describe how

individuals "do gender", not through expressing inherent gendered traits as many study

participants thought, but through social interactions and "gender displays". Gender

socialization and policing of gender norms occurs through interactions throughout

development, including interactions within classrooms. Gender socialization in the

classroom is impacted by teachers' endorsement or perpetuation of unhealthy gender

norms, and through mediums such as children's books, games, and activities (Diekman &

Murnen, 2004; Gray & Leith, 2004; Pennycook, 2011). The White Ribbon Society, an

organization of men and boys who advocate for positive masculinity, gender equity, and

healthy relationships, recommend "lifecycle interventions" for males of all ages using a

strengths-based approach (Minerson, Carolo, Dinner, & Jones, 2011). Recommended

strategies include educating professionals and service providers and changing

organizational practices, in addition to building boys' skills and awareness. School

psychologists, in collaboration with their school-based teams, are in a position to support

and implement these recommendations, especially through the promotion of social-

emotional learning (SEL) interventions and strategies.

Findings of the current study reveal the importance of supporting boys' knowledge

and skills development in a number of key areas. Boys' skills development can be

accomplished through the universal adoption of SEL programs in schools (Way, 2013),

such as those supported by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

(CASEL), a leading organization advancing evidence-based social and emotional

competence in children and youth. CASEL's model of social-emotional learning involves five

core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills,

and responsible decision-making ("Social and emotional learning competencies", 2015). To

enable educators to foster these skills in their students, CASEL also provides guides for the

implementation of evidence-based SEL programs in preschool, elementary, middle, and

high school. Many evidence-based programs such as Second Step, PATHS, and Mind Up

provide pre-made lessons targeting social skills, emotional awareness and regulation, and

empathy building specific to various age groups. Lessons are easily implemented within a

three-tiered system of support, involving universal, small group, and targeted individual intervention.

Participants identified communication skills in particular as a primary area for needed support, consistent with findings of previous studies (Dmytro et al., 2013; Luft et al., 2012). Participants identified confidence, especially in relation to communicating face-to-face, as another significant area in which they struggle. Programs that increase boys' belief in their competence communicating are essential to increase boys' feelings of confidence and to ensure they put the skills they learn into action. However, the rise of the digital age has lead children and youth to spend an unprecedented amount of time engaged in communication through text messaging and social media online, signaling the need for specialized attention by educators. Participants in this study identified their use of social media and texting as a way to ameliorate communication anxiety, lending support to the need for programs to increase boys' feelings of competence with face-to-face communication. Additionally, incorporating activities such as role playing and critical thinking about the positive and negative impact of digital communication on their relationships could help students learn to make strategic choices about how and when to engage in digital forms of communication.

Boys in the current study were grappling with whether or not to seek advice or support, and from whom, consistent with previous research of males' tendency to forego seeking help (Vogel & Heath, 2016; Yousaf et al., 2015). Building boys' relational skills and their ability to self-disclose can empower them to self-advocate during times they need support. Additionally, providing alternative methods of seeking support that are more appealing to males may be another strategy, such as Bro-Talk, an online and telephone

support service specific to teenage males. Bro-talk advertises support in various areas, including relationships and dating, sex, school, and fitting in. Participants' in the current study identified a 'bro' as someone in whom they would feel comfortable confiding, lending support to Bro-Talk as a relevant forum that may appeal to teen boys. Additionally, many cities are beginning to provide support through texting and online chat, which may be easier for some boys to access.

This study took place in an urban, multicultural community, and the impact of culture was prevalent. Results identified that support is needed for students who are navigating two cultures: that of their parents and that of the mainstream culture in which they reside. Additionally, given participants' indications that students often segregate themselves into culturally similar peer groups (e.g., Chinese-born Canadians and international students) and may hold stereotypical beliefs about other cultural groups, students in multicultural communities may benefit from strategies that promote respect and understanding of diversity and decrease stereotypes. These strategies may help support students' efforts when faced with cross-cultural communication and relationship negotiations.

Findings of the current study also support O'Neil and Lujan's (2009) "call to action" for the development of preventative psycho-educational programs that support boys' relational skills development. Although SEL programs do teach skills that boys need, the large majority fail to specifically address the unique role that gender norms and the negotiation of masculinity has in developing boys' lives. There is a benefit to engaging boys in open discussions about the role of masculinity expectations in their lives. One potential avenue is through discussions of related videos such as " The Mask you Live in," which is a

documentary that highlights much of the key research in the area while emphasizing the importance of male mentors that promote positive masculinity for boys.

O'Neil and Lujan (2009), echoing Garbarino (2000) state that issues such as the restriction of emotions, power, powerlessness, emasculation and humiliation were all identified as precursors to many school shootings in the United States, yet there failed to be an inquiry into the effects and role of masculinity in those boys' lives, leading up to the events. Although extreme, these examples highlight the need to support boys' development of positive masculinity and to discuss masculinity openly. O'Neil and Lujan identify a large gap in curriculum and administrative support to teach boys about negotiating positive masculinity, and propose preventative universal programming that focuses on 27 thematic areas they would like referred to as "boy's life skills". The types of SEL interventions that currently exist fail to address boys' healthy negotiation of masculinity. Organizations that promote social and emotional learning, such as CASEL, could profoundly affect development and research in this area if they were to provide support.

Limitations of the Study

The current study has a number of limitations that must be considered when interpreting the findings. Most of the participants were recruited from high school psychology classes. Boys who elect to study psychology, and volunteers for a study of this type in general, may not necessarily be representative of the majority of teen boys. The sample size was small, and future studies would benefit from exploring similar issues with more participants. Also, due to the qualitative methodology, results of the study are not generalizable to all teen males, although the findings do provide insight into valuable future research directions. Additionally, focus discussion groups with their peers may have

influenced some respondents towards biased self-representations. Individual interviews or written responses may have allowed participants to discuss their thoughts and experiences more freely, providing richer data.

A final limitation of the study is its failure to address the role of the sexual orientation of participants, and the heteronormative way in which the topics were often discussed. The majority of participants were heterosexual, with one participant identifying as bisexual, and another who was questioning his sexual orientation. In spite of being told that the study included dating relationships regardless of sexual orientation, discussions primarily occurred in the context of heterosexual relationships. Students with orientations other than heterosexual may have been discouraged from sharing their own experiences and views, which may have impacted the type of data that was collected. Although previous research has found that traditional masculinity has been associated with negative outcomes in homosexual as well as heterosexual relationships, (Wade & Donis, 2007) further research is necessary to determine whether or not the current findings are applicable to bisexual and homosexual males.

Strengths of the Study

A number of strengths can be identified in the current study. First, this study was conducted in a Canadian urban, multicultural community. There is currently a paucity of research into the unique experiences of youth in this part of Canada, especially regarding Asian adolescents' romantic relationships. Discussions about the influence of Asian cultural values, parental expectations, and cultural influences on masculine gender norms offer unique contributions to the literature. Secondly, although most participants were psychology students, this might not necessarily have been a limiting factor. Due to the

nature of the discipline, psychology students may be more attuned, curious, and able to discuss to human behaviour, meaning that participants may have been in the position to communicate issues boys face better than other boys. Additionally, there is very little research relating to traditional masculine gender norms in adolescent boys' relationship navigation and the current study confirms that, even in the age of growing gender equality, traditional masculine ideology still influences boys' relational development. Finally, insights given through this research provide valuable information about areas for future research, especially supporting the importance of social-emotional learning initiatives that explicitly focus on boys' negotiation of masculine gender norms.

Future Directions

The results of the current study suggest that future research is needed in a number of key areas. Conducting a similar study with more teen boys in the same part of Canada, and using the data to confirm, disconfirm or expand the grounded theory that was developed would be beneficial. Additionally, studies of girls' navigation of dating relationships to compare and contrast girls processes with that of boys could provide relevant insight into the ways to support teens' relational skills development. Given the current findings that lack of confidence and communication skills are significant issues that these teen boys face, quantitative studies investigating the relationship between endorsement of various masculine norms, communication and confidence is also indicated. Future studies that investigate the types of messages and conversations sent through text messaging and online between dating partners could help to build appropriate interventions specific to teens' needs. Studies that investigate the applicability of the current findings and the provide insight into the unique experiences of bisexual and

homosexual teen boys is also necessary. Additionally, further investigation of the specific

issues adolescent boys' face in their negotiation of masculinity is also warranted.

In conclusion, the words of Way (2013) provide perspective into the far-reaching

effects of investment in boys' social-emotional learning in the context of their negotiation

of masculinity:

> What would it mean for us to let boys be boys by fostering their natural empathic abilities and their intimate friendships? What would it mean to define maturity as being independent and having emotionally supportive relationships? What would it mean to value the very skills that have been stereotypically associated with girls, women, and gay boys? Social and natural science research has already given us the answers. If we were to value a full range of relationships—a biodiversity of sorts—and that being emotionally literate and invested in relationships is not a "girl thing" or a "gay thing" or even a "childish thing" but an inherent part of being human—we would, according to the research, have better psychological and physical health, better academic outcomes, less bullying in and out of schools, less violence, better marriages, better friendships, stronger communities, and longer lives. (p.211)

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Appendix A
Teen Guys Making Sense of Dating Relationships
A UBC Research Study
Information for Parents and Consent

Principal investigator: Laurie Ford Ph.D.	**Phone:** (xxx) xxx-xxxx; **Email**: XXXX@xxx.xx
Co-Investigators: Catherine Ann Cameron, Ph.D.	**Phone:** (xxx) xxx-xxxx; **Email:**XXXX.xxx.xx
Dana Dmytro, B.A.	**Phone:** (xxx) xxx-xxxx; **Email:** XXXX@xxxx.xxx

Dear Parent(s);

We are writing to ask your permission for your son to take part in a University of British Columbia (UBC) research study.

I.   What is the study about?

This study aims to understand more about how boys in Grades 9 through 12 view dating relationships and is part of a larger study of teen boys' and girls' dating relationships, led by Dr. Catherine Ann Cameron. The results will be a part of Dana Dmytro's Masters thesis, titled 'The Role of Gender Norms in Adolescent Boys' Navigation of Romantic Relationships'. GOOD

II.   What is involved?

Your son would join a small discussion with up to 7 other boys from his class during class time. Two students from the UBC will put on a short skit about dating relationships and will then ask the boys to discuss their ideas about teens' dating relationships. The discussions will last about one hour, will be audio recorded, and recordings will be kept in a locked place only available to the researchers in this project. We will ask your son to provide background information about their age, cultural, and dating experience. All information will be kept private. If your son is interested, he will be invited to take part in a second discussion that will occur during lunch hour or after school a month or two after the first interview. Your son's name will be entered into a draw for a $25 gift card.

III.   How will your privacy be respected?

- All information about your son and your consent form will private, only seen by the researchers, and kept in locked cabinets at UBC
- Those who take part in the discussions will be asked to keep all information discussed private
- We encourage participants not to discuss the content of the focus group to people outside the group, however, we can't control what participants do discuss with others
- At any point in the study, if a risk of harm to your son or someone else is made clear, or if the information is requested by a court of law, the researcher must, by law, report this information to the appropriate authorities

IV.   What are the benefits and risks if your son takes part?

We hope that the information we learn from the study will help create programs that aim to support teens' relationship skills development. We believe that the risks in this study are minimal. Your son might feel uncomfortable about one of the topics discussed, but we will ask those taking part not to discuss anything that makes them uncomfortable. They will be able to stop taking part at any time, and we will be available if they have any concerns. Our experience is that students find these types of discussions to be rewarding, educational and enjoyable.

V.   Who do you contact if you have any questions?

If you have any concerns or questions about the study, please contact Dana Dmytro, as listed at the top of this letter. If you have any questions regarding your son's treatment or rights as a research participant, please contact the Director of Research Services at the University of British Columbia at (604) 822-8598.

VI.   How do I give my consent?

We hope that your son will take part in this study, but it is your choice. If you consent for him to take part, please:

1. Complete the consent form on the next page. You may keep this letter for your records.
2. Have your child return the consent form to their teacher by (date)
3. If you do not want your son to take part, please return the form so we know that you got our letter.

THANK-YOU

Laurie Ford   *Catherine Ann Cameron*   *Dana Dmytro*

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM
****PLEASE RETURN PAGE TO SCHOOL****

TEEN GUYS MAKING SENSE OF DATING RELATIONSHIPS
Investigators: Laurie Ford, Catherine Ann Cameron, and Dana Dmytro, University of British Columbia

1. *CONSENT:* I have read and understand the information about this project, "Teen Guys Making Sense of Dating Relationships". I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary. My son may stop at any time.

2. Please check one:

    ☐ **No,** I do not consent to my son taking part in this study.

    ☐ **Yes,** I consent to my son taking part in this study.

3. **Please fill out the following and sign below:**

    _____
    Your Son's Name – PRINT

    _____
    Parent/Guardian Name – PRINT

    _____
    Parent/Guardian Signature   (date)

Appendix B
Teen Guys Making Sense of Dating Relationships
A UBC Research Study
Information for Students

Principal investigator: Laurie Ford Ph.D.		**Phone:** (xxx) xxx-xxxx; Email: XXXX@xxx.xx
Co-Investigators:	Catherine Ann Cameron, Ph.D.	**Phone:** (xxx) xxx-xxxx; **Email:** XXXX@xxxxxx.xx
	Dana Dmytro, B.A.	**Phone:** (xxx) xxx-xxxx; **Email:** XXXX@xxxx.xxx

I.   What is a study? What is this all about?

We're doing a study. This means that we are trying to find out more about teenagers like you. We want to know more about how teen guys make sense of dating relationships.

II.   Who are we asking for help? Do you have to do this?

We are asking guys like you in Grades 9 through 12 to take part in our study. Whether or not you do this study, it's up to you. If your parents decide that it's ok for you to take part, they will have to sign the study permission form. You have to give the signed form back to your teacher. We hope that you will want to take part in the study, but if you don't want to, it's ok.

III.   What happens if you do the study?

You will have a conversation about dating relationships with up to 7 other guys from your class during class time for an entire class period. The conversation will be audio recorded, and the recordings will be kept locked up in a cabinet at the UBC.

III.   Why might you want to take part in this study?

It would be great if you would like to take part and help use understand more about how teen guys make sense of dating relationships. Your ideas and opinions will help create programs for schools and youth groups. Most guys enjoy taking part in studies like this. Everyone who returns the parent permission form will be entered into a draw for a $25 gift card to say thank you for your help.

IV.   Are your answers private?

Everything you tell us will be kept private, and we will never tell others your name or if you took part in the study unless there is a risk or harm to you, someone else, or if it is requested by la court of law. We will encourage everyone not to discuss the content of the focus group to people outside the group. However, we can't control what they discuss with others.

V.   Who can I talk to about the study?

If you have any questions, you can talk to me, Dana Dmytro, or to your parents, who have my phone number and email.

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT ASSENT FORM
****PLEASE RETURN PAGE TO SCHOOL****

TEEN GUYS MAKING SENSE OF DATING RELATIONSHIPS
Investigators: Laurie Ford, Catherine Ann Cameron, and Dana Dmytro, University of British Columbia

1. *CONSENT:* I have read and understand the information about this project, "Teen Guys Making Sense of Dating Relationships". I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary, and that I may stop at any time.

2. Please check one:

☐ **No,** I do not consent to taking part in this study.

☐ **Yes,** I consent to taking part in this study.

3. **Please fill out the following and sign below:**

_____
Your Name and Grade – PRINT

_____
Your Signature (date)

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Appendix C

TEEN GUYS MAKING SENSE OF
DATING RELATIONSHIPS- Second Discussion Session
A UBC Research Study

Principal investigator: Laurie Ford Ph.D.   **Phone:** (xxx) xxx-xxxx; Email: XXXX@xxx.xx
Co-Investigators: Catherine Ann Cameron, Ph.D. **Phone:** (xxx) xxx-xxxx; **Email:** XXXX@xxxxx.xx
                       Dana Dmytro, B.A.   **Phone:** (xxx) xxx-xxxx; **Email:** XXXX@xxxx.xxx

Dear Students:

Thank you for taking part in the first half of the 'Teen Guys Making Sense of Dating Relationships" study. We hope that you enjoyed your discussion today and would like to invite you to take part in a follow up discussion within the next 4-8 weeks. Please complete the following student assent form and return it to the researchers or your classroom teacher.

1.   *CONSENT:*   I have read and understand the information about this project, "Teen Guys Making Sense of Dating Relationships". I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary, and that I may stop at any time.

2.   Please check one:

<div style="border:1px solid black">

☐ **No,** I do not consent to taking part in the second discussion in this study.

☐ **Yes,** I consent to taking part in the second discussion in this study.

</div>

3.   **Please fill out the following and sign below:**

_____
     Your Name and Grade – PRINT

_____
     Your Signature (date)

Teen Guys Making Sense of Dating Relationships *A UBC Research Study* **Background Information Form**

Thank you for taking part in our study. Please provide the following background information. Your answers will not be shared with others outside of the research team.

1. What is the highest Grade that you've <u>completed</u>?

_____Grade 8

_____Grade 9

_____Grade 10

_____Grade 11

2. Would you describe yourself as:

_____Straight

_____Gay/Lesbian

_____Bisexual

_____Unsure

_____Other (please specify) _____

3. Is religion:

_____Very/fairly important to you

_____Fairly unimportant/Not important

4. What racial, cultural, or ethnic group do you most identify with?

_____

5. What is your general dating history?

_____I currently have, or have had, a steady boyfriend/girlfriend for *more* than 6 months

_____I currently have, or have had, a steady boyfriend/girlfriend for *less* than 6 months

_____I have been on romantic dates (or hung out with someone who may have become a

boyfriend/girlfriend) *more than 10 times* in one month.

_____I have been on romantic dates (or hung out with someone who may have become a

boyfriend/girlfriend), *but not more than 10 times* in one month.

_____I have *never* been on a romantic date (or hung out with someone who may become

a boyfriend/girlfriend).

Appendix E
Teen Guys Making Sense of Dating Relationships

Facilitator Training

Discuss the purpose of the discussions is to answer the following research questions:

1. What are adolescent boys' psychosocial processes of navigating dating

    relationships during adolescence?

2. How are these psychosocial processes influenced by gender norms?

    a. What gender norms do boys indicate exert an influence on

        their navigation of dating relationships during adolescence?

    b. How do boys describe the way in which gender norms influence

        their navigation of dating relationships?

Train for first focus group discussion by discussing:

1. Introduction

- Pull students from class in small groups of 6-8 participants based on consultation

    with the classroom teacher

- Get seated in a circle in another room (prepare room in advance)

- First state our names, that we are students at the University of British Columbia, and

    say something interesting about ourselves and ask everyone in the group to do the

    same

- State the purpose of the research:

    o "We're here to understand more about how guys in high school deal with

        issues that come up in their dating relationships."

- State what we mean by "dating relationships":

- o "this includes dating, hanging out with someone who may become your boyfriend/girlfriend, as well as 'boyfriend/girlfriend' relationships, regardless of the gender of the person"

- Have students write pseudonyms on their nametags and stick their tag on their shirt. Female facilitator should get very familiar with their names to assist in transcribing.

2. Determine Guidelines for the Discussion

- Ask group to suggest potential guidelines for the discussion, write the ideas on the white board if everyone is in agreement. If no one suggests the ideas below, suggest them to the group for brief discussion:

  - o All participants' responses are valuable, and there are no right or wrong answers.

  - o Participation is voluntary.

  - o Respectful listening and speaking is key, however agreeing and disagreeing with each other's viewpoints is accepted and encouraged.

  - o Topics discussed should remain confidential after leaving the room.

  - o Speaking about personal experiences in the third person is encouraged (in order to help maintain participants' comfort level during personal disclosures, confidentiality and anonymity).

- Let students know that if a sensitive topic arises, facilitators are available after the discussion to provide additional support.

- Remind students that we know they are the experts, and that they have information to share, even if they have not had dating experience, we are interested in their ideas of their friends' and family members' experiences as well.

3. Skit

- Practice the skit together

    o Girl: I saw you talking with Lisa earlier for a really long time. What was that all about?

    o Boy: Whatever. I talked to her for like a second or two.

    o Girl: No you didn't. I saw you. It was for like half an hour, and you were laughing and touched her arm.

    o Boy: Whatever. You don't know what you're talking about. Her and I are just friends. (trying to walk away)

    o Girl: Don't walk away from me.

4. Discussion Questions Role Play

Review the "do's" and "don'ts" of interviewing based on Charmaz (2014):

- Listen intently (use your body language) and use reflective statements (i.e., "It sounds like you…."; "So you think that…")

- Try to understand participants' experiences, thoughts and feelings from their point of view, not your own

- Ask participants to elaborate, clarify or give examples

- Ask open questions, rather than closed questions

- Leave participants feeling positive about the discussion and express thanks

- Don't interrupt, correct or confront the participants, or offer your own view

- Don't ask "why" questions or leading or loaded questions (i.e., questions that limit the responses of the participant or make assumptions regarding their answers)

- Don't take an authoritarian stance, but build rapport as a collaborator with the participants

Using the guidebook (Appendix H), role play using the discussion questions:

- Easy, non-threatening questions (approximately 20-25 min)
  - "Tell me about a conflict that you or a guy you know has gone through in a dating relationship?"
    - Probes: "What was that like?"; "What do you think" (directed towards someone new)
  - "What other sorts of issues are common for guys you know in dating relationships?"
    - Probes: "Give me an example"; "What happened?"; 'What do you think he was thinking/feeling?"; "What did you/he do?"

- More challenging questions (approximately 20-25 min)
  - "Early you described that X (i.e., a particular issue that guys have had) is fairly common for guys in their dating relationships. How do you think guys should handle it when this happens?
    - Probes: "Tell me more about that."; "What about you, how do you think guys should handle that?"; "Do you think other guys think they should do that?"
  - "How do you think most guys would handle X?"

- Probes: "Would you handle it the same way? Tell me about your reasons for that."
  - "How do you think guys handle X compared to how girls handle X?"
    - Probes: "What do you think that's all about?"; "How is that different from the way boys/girls handle X?"

5. Discuss inviting participants back for the second discussion session. Hand out student assent form and collect them from students once they have signed them. Also hand out the background questionnaire.

Train for the second focus group discussion

- Will occur with all participants at once who have agreed to be contacted to participate in future research

- Will occur during class time, lunch hour, or after school, depending on arrangements made with the school (if during lunch hour, the students may eat)

- Have students wear name tags with a pseudonym and Grade (female facilitator should get very clear on who each person is in order to facilitate transcription)

Appendix F

Teen Guys Making Sense of Dating Relationships

Facilitator Guidebook for the Guys' Dating Discussions

First Focus Group Discussion

1. Prepare room as per teachers' instructions

2. Pull students out in small groups of up to 8 guys as per teachers instructions

3. Introductions, purpose of research, define dating relationships, name tags, discuss guidelines and write the on whiteboard

4. Opening skit by facilitators

5. Short discussion regarding skit: (approximately 5 min)

    a. "What was happening in the skit that we just saw?"

6. Restate the purpose of the discussion:

    a. "We're here to understand how guys in high school deal with issues that come up in their dating relationships."

7. Easy, non-threatening questions (approximately 20-25 min)

    a. "Tell me about a conflict that you or a guy you know has gone through in a dating relationship?"

        i. <u>Probes</u>: "What was that like?"; "What do you think" (directed towards someone new)

    b. "What other sorts of issues are common for guys you know in dating relationships?"

        i. <u>Probes</u>: "Give me an example"; "What happened?"; 'What do you think he was thinking/feeling?"; "What did you/he do?"

8. More challenging questions (approximately 20-25 min)

    a. "Early you described that X (i.e., a particular issue that guys have had) is fairly common for guys in their dating relationships. How do you think guys <u>should</u> handle it when this happens?

        i. <u>Probes:</u> "Tell me more about that."; "What about you, how do you think guys <u>should</u> handle that?"; "Do you think other guys think they <u>should</u> do that?"

    b. "How do you think most guys would handle X?"

        i. <u>Probes:</u> "Would you handle it in the same way? Tell me about your reasons for that."

    c. "How do you think guys handle X compared to how girls handle X?"

        i. <u>Probes:</u> "What do you think that's all about?"; "How is that different from the way boys/girls handle X?"

9. Wrap-Up and Closing

    a. Let participants know it's time to wrap up

    b. Ask if there are any other issues that someone wanted to mention or if there are any questions.

    c. Discuss inviting participants back for the second discussion session. Hand out student assent form and collect them from students once they have signed them. Also hand out the background questionnaire.

    d. Thank the participants for their participation

Second Focus Group Discussion

1. Introduction of the facilitators and participants (approximately 5 min.)

    a. Briefly state our names and a casual interest or hobby in order to build

       rapport

    b. Ask students to state their name and something interesting about themselves

2. State the purpose of the discussion (approximately 1-2 min)

3. Mutually determine guidelines in the same was as first discussion

4. Easy, non-threatening questions emanating from the original data (approximately 10-25 min)

5. More challenging questions based on original data (10-25 min)

6. Wrap up and Closing (2-3 min)

Appendix G
Teen Guys Making Sense of Dating Relationships
Follow Up Discussion Questions

"We have talked with quite a few guys around Vancouver, and now we want to confirm what most of you have been saying, so we have a few topics we'd like to ask you about."

Communication

"So we hear that communication is a big issue in relationships during high school. Tell us more about that."

If needed, probe:

- Lack ("What about lack of communication?")
- Miscommunication ("What about miscommunication?")
- Guys avoid ("Do some people avoid communicating?")
- Difference in style between guys and girls ("What about 'hinting'?")

Parents' expectations

"We also heard that some parents influence relationships in high school. Tell us about that.")

If needed, probe:

- To focus primarily on Grades ("What about parents' views on dating and school work?")
- Girls' parents have more expectations about dating than guys' ("What about the girls' parents' expectations of girls compared to those of boys?")
- Ideal girlfriend/boyfriend or wife/husband ("What about girls' parents' expectations of you guys?" "What about guys' parents' expectations of your girlfriends?")
- Cultural context ("Do you think parents' expectations have anything to do with culture?")

<u>Girls' hard to handle reactions</u>

"We also heard that girls can be a little tough to handle sometimes. Tell us more about that."

If needed, probe:
- ▪ What about 'crazy girls' ("What about the term "crazy girls"?")
- ▪ What about 'scheming'? ("What about the term 'scheming'?)

<u>Guys interested mostly in 'short-term gain'</u>

"Someone said that relationships in high school are about short-term gain. Do you agree with this? Tell us more about that."
- Looks of primary importance ("What usually attracts you to girls?")
- Relationships often end at first signs of problems ("What usually causes guys to lose interest or break up?)

<u>Guys expected to:</u>
- Have money to: ("What about this idea of the guy having to pay/ provide / initiate things? Does this happen? What do you guys think of that?)
  - o Pay for dates
  - o Eventually be a provider in relationships
- Initiate relationships
- Be 'society's normal view of a man' ("What would you say is society's normal view of a man?"
- Views of a gentleman ("and how does the term 'gentleman' compare to what you just described?)

<u>Confidence</u>

"We also heard that confidence is an issue in relationships in high school. Tell us more about that."
- Expected to be, but actually is difficult ("Is it tough to be confident?)

- Relationship to communication (e.g., about issues, sex) ("How does confidence relate to communication in high school relationships?)

Support/Guidance about relationships

"Where do guys usually get advice about relationships in high school?"
- Don't talk with parents
- Sometimes talk with one friend
- More likely to talk to female friends

Time

"What about time for dating? Is it easy or tough to find the time? Tell us more about that."
- Difficulties balancing school/sports and dating
- Hard to make enough time for girls

Social Media

"What role does social media play in relationships?"
"Tell us what are the best things about dating during high school? What are the best things for guys in particular?"