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Why Do College Students Stay in Unhealthy Relationships and Why are Peers Hesitant to Intervene?

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A project based upon an independent investigation, Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Social Work.

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Abstract

This study focused on why college students remain in unhealthy relationships and why they may not intervene. Additionally, the study sought to determine student's perception of themselves and others using scales that measured their self-esteem, comfortability, and vulnerability. Sixty five students at a Catholic southern New England private college participated in this mixed method study. Results revealed that the definitions of relationships were gender based and students were aware of sexual abuse but remain neutral about reporting it and intervening. Implications from this study include the need for future research on reporting sexual abuse on college campuses and to gather data from a greater student sample who are currently in relationships.

Why Do College Students Stay in Unhealthy Relationships and Why are Peers Hesitant to Intervene?

Dating and relationships among couples in different age ranges is a prevalent topic in research, especially with college students. However, it is not a topic that is often acknowledged much by college students or peers, colleagues, or family members of college students. Many college students begin to embark in serious dating relationships while emerging into adulthood. Arnett (2000) describes emerging into adulthood as a "unique developmental period marked by volatility and identity formation and a time when many premarital relationships are in the budding stages and remain open to the strains of the developmental period" (p. 272).

When defining a relationship, a relationship can broadly be put into two categories: healthy and unhealthy. A healthy relationship can consist of various subcategories which helps define this type of relationship which are communication, respect, equity, care, effort, self- improvement, fun, no abuse and boundaries (Byrd, Bowdler & Hayes, 2009). An unhealthy relationship can consist of these various subcategories which are disrespect, inequity, lack of care, fear, lack of fulfillment, mental health issues, abuse, and lack of boundaries (Byrd, Bowdler, & Hayes, 2009). Using these categories can help a person evaluate what kind of relationship he or she may be in with their significant other. These labeled qualities of a relationship can also be utilized by a third person to evaluate if two people they know who may be in a relationship are in a healthy or unhealthy relationship. In relationships, there are always two people involved with two different personalities who can come from diverse backgrounds, which can often make the relationship complex. In research and in life, healthy and unhealthy relationship can mainly be defined using certain subcategories.

An unhealthy relationship can be defined as a relationship where a partner controls aspects of the other partner's life, and it can be abusive, in a psychological, physical or sexual way. In the relationship, the person who is getting abused or controlled can be described as the "victim." In an unhealthy relationship, there may be an absence of communication, there are lies being told between the two partners as well as excuses to others outside the relationship, the "victim" has to justify or tell the one controlling them where, when, and why he or she may be doing something or be at a place at a certain time on a frequent basis. One of the partners may not disclose information about their dating or sexual history to the other, the "victim" may be scared of their partner, a partner can neglect themselves and pay all their attention to the other partner, and one may feel pressure to meet the standards their partner may have for them.

According to the Providence College 2011 Annual Security and Fire Safety Report, it has been reported that from 2008-2010 there have been zero reported sex offenses on campus property or on public property. With all of the national statistics, it is questionable why a college campus hasn't had a report of a sexual offense or rape over a span of two years. However, through other research studies, news, and the media it is obvious that it is happening. This is relevant to the study since there are likely to be unhealthy or abusive relationships on the Providence College campus, but it hasn't been formally reported. The researcher wants to explore why college students fail to report abuse to the college. This study may contribute valuable information to the Providence College campus, specifically to the counseling center.

Social workers need to have knowledge of unhealthy or abusive relationships

when working with couples or individuals who are in an unhealthy or abusive relationships. This is especially imperative on college campuses where it is not addressed as frequently as it should be for how important of an issue it is. Emotional abuse, unlike physical abuse, can often be the most hard to detect because it does not leave visible scars on the victim. A social worker focuses on a person's emotional and mental health and can address any issues that may need to be worked with a client while using various practice approaches. A social worker can help a "victim" of an unhealthy relationship recognize factors or behaviors that may define the current relationship as an unhealthy relationship. A student must be able to evaluate their relationships and be able to see and decide for themselves that the relationship he or she may be involved in is unhealthy. This study is significant to the social work profession because consequences associated with dating violence, social workers should pay greater attention and awareness to dating violence when working with the given population. A social worker can also aid a student in finding resources to help get out of the relationship or getting further support. This study is focusing in on student's involvement in unhealthy relationships and why he or she may be staying in that unhealthy relationship if they have no obligations or strong commitment to their partner. Why would a student want to remain in this relationship if it is not a long term commitment and what factors play into the students staying in these relationships? This researcher also seeks to learn more about why observers or peers don't intervene, report, or even address instances of abuse between two people in a relationship.

Literature Review

Dating and having an interest in dating is an instrumental part of adolescence and merging into young adulthood. "Rising social expectations for heterosexual dating along

with increased biological motivations, socio-emotional intelligence, and cognitive maturity further encourage young people to engage in romance" (Cavanagh, Crissey & Raley, 2008). Romantic relationships do often occur in early adolescence, but usually at lower rates and in various ways. Romantic relationships among younger adolescents tend to operate more like friendships, are less emotionally intense, and are of shorter duration, whereas relationships among older teens tend to be more emotionally intense, with partners more enmeshed in each other's lives (Shulman & Scharf as cited in Cavanagh, Crissey& Raley, 2008). The latter can be applied to when college students begin to date one another and it can often be observed on college campuses, which is a major focus of this study. However, these relationships may start off in a honeymoon phase and issues or problems may occur between the two people as time goes on. The main focus of this study is to discover why students remain in unhealthy relationships and why observers or peers of the people in the relationships don't intervene.

Frequency of Unhealthy Relationships/Abuse

According to research, violence in dating relationships has increased rather significantly over the past several decades. In 1981, Makepeace published one of the first reports on dating violence, revealing that one in five college relationships was unhealthy. Since then, abusive relationships among teens and young adults have become more common. In 2001, Halpern et al found that about 30% of adolescents experience victimization during the transition into young adulthood. In 2002, statistics indicated that 20 to 47% of both males and females had been victims of violence from their partner in a dating relationship (Harned, 2002, & Katz, Kuffel, & Coblentz, 2002). These rates were confirmed in 2009, when another study found that nearly one in three teens had experienced the most serious forms of dating violence and abuse including sexual abuse,

or threats of physical harm to a partner or self (Teenage Research Unlimited, 2009). The rates of abuse are even more staggering when psychological abuse is the focus; according to more than one study, psychological abuse is found in as many as 88% of college students' dating relationships (Shook, Gerrity, Jurich & Segrist, 2000; White & Koss, 1991 as cited in Leahy, Roudsari & Walters, 2008). Clearly, abuse within young adult relationships is a growing problem.

This problem is especially damaging for young women. According to one local study, approximately one in five female students (20.2% in 1997 and 18.0% in 1999) reported being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner as an adolescent (Hathaway, Mucci, Raj & Silverman, 2001). However, at a national level, it is reported that women account for 85% of the victims of intimate partner violence while men only account for 15% (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003). Females between the ages of 16 and 24 experience the highest rates of intimate partner violence (Rennison & Welchans, 2000), and females between the ages of 20 and 24 are at the greatest risk of nonfatal intimate partner violence (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006). From these previous research findings, it is evident that females face the overwhelming majority of the abuse that exists within unhealthy relationships.

Lasting Effects of Unhealthy Relationships

Just as research has demonstrated increasing rates of abuse among young adults, so too has it documented the harmful, lasting consequences. According to one study, dating violence has been associated with depression, anxiety, and lowered self-esteem. (Ackard, Neumark-Sztaine & Hannan, 2003). Other consequences that have been linked to dating violence include eating disorders, substance abuse, somatization, suicidal

ideation, lowered academic performance, and other additional risky behaviors (Amar & Gennaro, 2005). Emotional abuse can often be the most hard to detect because it does not leave visible scars on the victim. Given the consequences associated with dating violence, greater attention to and greater awareness of dating violence are necessary for working with adolescents and young adults, especially in the college setting.

Why Stay in Unhealthy Relationships?

Given these lasting effects, one may question why anyone would remain in these unhealthy relationships. One reason people may stay in an unhealthy relationship is because they do not think they will get justice. “Sixty percent of rapes/sexual assaults are not reported to the police, according to a statistical average of the past 5 years. If a rape is reported, there is a 50.8% chance of an arrest. Factoring in unreported rapes, only about 6% of rapists ever serve a day in jail” (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006). If there are statistics such as this reported, it is very discouraging for a woman or man to report a rape. This is also evident in the annual reports issued by Providence College where zero incidents of sexual abuse have been reported over the past three years. It does happen, yet people fail to report it for various reasons.

Another reason why people may stay in an unhealthy relationship is that the victim often knows their abuser well and is reluctant to report this person and get this person in trouble. Most sexual assaults take place between people who know each other. A survey conducted on 32 colleges and universities found that 84% of women raped knew their attacker and 57% of the those rapes happened on dates (National Center for Policy Analysis, 1999). If there is no justice served or the process of prosecuting or identifying the rapist is emotionally traumatizing, it is extremely discouraging for the

victim to take action and report the rape or sexual abuse. Therefore it is an issue such as rape is not reported by victims, it can lead to negative thoughts for victims in unhealthy or abusive relationships to report their partner for any physical, psychological, emotional, or sexual abuse.

In addition to these factors, several others have been identified. Various college centers, including Iona College, provide information on unhealthy relationships to college students and according to these college centers, there are many factors that can contribute to a person remaining in an unhealthy relationship. Some listed factors are control and dominance, neglect as a child, previous exposure to unhealthy relationships, objectification of women in the media, cultural aspects such as male dominance, sexually/physically aggressive behavior and extensive use of drugs and alcohol. Students are often reluctant to confront others about aggressive or inappropriate behavior towards their partner. Couples can get caught up in the drama of an unhealthy and chaotic relationship, and sometimes unhealthy relationships aren't taken seriously enough to warrant professional help. These factors indicate reasons why students may stay in these relationships. However, not much research is present of why students continue to stay in these relationships and why other students don't intervene. Another major reason why students stay in abusive relationships is because their peers may fail to recognize the warning signs and report more subtle forms of abuse.

Gender Differences

While research has identified the reasons why people might stay, it has also found the reasons may vary according to gender. There are reported gender differences on why people who are involved in unhealthy relationships stay. These reported statistics

can explain the differences of why men or women may remain and not say anything or report their partners in these types of relationships. If acts of violence are acted out on women, they are said to experience greater amounts of fear, depression, helplessness, a need to have protection or protect themselves, shame, psychological and emotional pain, and fear that they were not loved (Makepeace 1986 as cited in Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991). Women may view these as reasons to just put up with the unhealthy relationships than to seek help. The gender differences exhibit how men may not take violence as seriously as women or how much more harmful it can be towards women than men. It seems that because of these effects, men may be more likely to stay in these relationships than women.

There are gender stereotypes that lead to discrimination against men who are abused. Males are the least likely to report a sexual assault, though they make up about 10% of all victims." (U.S. Department of Justice, 2003) Men appear to report fewer physical and emotional effects than women from any violence. Men often ignore physical force, want to retaliate, find it funny, become angry, or get sexually aroused when women are abusive, which still holds true til this day (Makepeace 1986 as cited in Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian, 1991). There were said to be certain stereotypes found with men being abused, "I knew a man being abused by his wife and when people found out, they ridiculed him and made terrible jokes about it. I think this should be addressed. Unfortunately, I don't think I am the only person with this stereotype" (Byrd, Bowdler, & Hayes, 2009, p.6). "Gender equality was noticed when participants would mention knowledge of equal prevalence for both genders" (Byrd, Bowdler, & Hayes, 2009, p.7). In most research about abuse in unhealthy relationships, focus is placed on

violence against women as a major public health concern, but not much research is conducted on violence against men in relationships. This type of violence may not be as prevalent, but it does exist and there are risks that result from this type of abuse. However, no matter how prevalent the abuse is, a majority of it still seems to go unreported and students still continue to remain in these relationships.

Warning Signs of an Unhealthy Relationship

Peers of college students in unhealthy relationships may need guidance or need to be informed of what warning signs they should look for. These warning signs include isolation, control, escalation, intergenerational nature of dating violence, personal changes, self-respect, anger, and rationalization (Byrd, Bowdler & Hayes, 2009). Isolation is defined as seclusion from friends, low communication levels, and body language that is displayed to observers. The isolated person distances herself from everyone but her dating partner. Control can be defined as having power over another person and managing their time or schedule, which can lead to isolation and personal changes. According to Felson and Outlaw (2007), individuals who are controlling of their partners are much more likely to also be physically abusive, and this holds equally for both male and female perpetrators in this situation. Escalation occurs when small warning signs start to escalate and become much larger problems. Intergenerational nature of dating violence relates to unhealthy relationships that occur within the home. This often consists of witnessing domestic violence throughout generations in the home. In other words, children exposed to unhealthy parental interactions learn and come to accept that aggression is a normal part of romantic relationships. As adults, these children are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior when interacting with a dating partner. Research in family violence finds that there is a positive relationship between parent–

child violence and exuding violent behaviors their partner while dating (Chapple, 2003). It seems this learning takes place through a modeling process where children exposed to harsh parenting are provided with perceptions that later encourage and assist aggressive behavior against their dating partner. This information can help in this study to trace the roots of why unhealthy relationships or abuse may be constantly present in some people's relationships.

Personal changes refer to alterations in one's personality or appearance. Personal changes could involve a partner dressing very conservatively if her partner doesn't want her to be attractive to any members of the opposing sex. Low self-esteem and low self-respect can be exemplified through a person staying in these relationships considering the violent partner already has done enough physical or emotional damage to that person. Low self-esteem and low self-respect can also lead the people to believe that they may deserve how their partner is treating them in the relationship or that they don't deserve better treatment. Anger can be shown through one's temper and can exhibit aggression by throwing inanimate objects or punching walls. Rationalization is when the abused makes excuses for the abuser's behavior to those outside of the occurring relationship. Having boundaries is also essential when observing the difference between a healthy and an unhealthy relationship. Without acknowledging these warning signs and letting them go ignored, the victim of the unhealthy relationship may face serious lasting effects of being in this type of relationship. Without knowledge of these warning signs, peers may not be in the position to recognize or report abuse. This study seeks, in part, to learn more about how well aware witnesses of abuse are of the warning signs.

Why are Unhealthy Relationships among College Students not Researched More?

It is apparent that academic and social work practice populations agree that violence in relationships among adolescents and young adults is a social issue but research approaches to examine this issue have certainly varied. The types of violence these studies seem to incorporate or study are physical violence, emotional abuse, psychological abuse, or sexual violence. If there is research on these types of violence and the effects it has on the victims, why hasn't there been programs or information released through college campuses on how to recognize if there is an unhealthy relationship between two people? Research has been conducted on the types of violence that may occur in these relationships, mostly physical, but there is very limited research on the phenomena of why adolescents and young adults within a college setting remain in these unhealthy relationships. This study is building on to the research of unhealthy relationships among college students, but adding more to the focus of why these students are staying in these relationships. This study is also building on why people don't intervene in these types of relationships and often fail to report abuse as well. In addition, the researcher aims to confirm these reasons and to find what other reasons students remain in unhealthy relationships and why others fails to report or acknowledge abuse. This study is being researched through a mixed exploratory study designed to measure certain aspects of unhealthy relationships and failure to report abuse.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was a mixed exploratory designed to gather data on why college students remain in unhealthy relationships. This study also investigated peers' failure to report abuse as one of the reasons why college students remain in these relationships.

Sample

A convenience sample of participants was drawn from a medium sized private college in southern New England. Students did not necessarily have to be involved in an unhealthy relationship to participate in this survey; they could also have been an observer of an unhealthy relationship. All students on the college campus had an opportunity to respond to this survey.

Data Gathering

Surveys were distributed via hard copy to get a variety of samples from the college population. Surveys were distributed through convenience in populated areas of the campus including the dining hall and student community center (See Appendix B). The consent form was provided with the survey instrument (See Appendix A). The consent form was separated and handed in before filling out the survey to assure anonymity of the participants.

Data Analysis

After data and information was gathered from the surveys, it was inputted into SPSS. The data was analyzed and reviewed in terms of unhealthy relationships and those who may have been involved and those who have observed these relationships. After the data was inputted, results were compared by gender and by “abuse categories” of those students who are involved in an unhealthy relationship, those who have been involved in an unhealthy relationship in the past; and those who have witnessed unhealthy relationships. Conclusions were drawn from correlations and analysis of the data obtained from the measurements of self esteem, vulnerability, and comfortability of those involved

in these unhealthy relationships. Scales such as the Rosenberg scale were used in these surveys to measure these variables of unhealthy relationships. The researcher analyzed data collected from the interviews conducted after the survey and applied this information to the findings.

Findings

This study focused on why college students remain in unhealthy relationships and why they may not intervene. Additionally, the study sought to determine student's perception of themselves and others using scales that measured their self-esteem, comfortability, and vulnerability. Fifteen questions were to be answered using a Likert scale and there were five open ended questions to be answered including the participants defining what a relationship is. A total of sixty-five surveys were collected.

Demographics

The gender difference was distributed equally with 53.8% of the participants being female and 46.2% of the participants male. 92.3% of the participants identified themselves as white or Caucasian, 6.2% of the participants identified themselves as Hispanic, and 1.5% of the participants identified themselves as African American. The mean age of participants in this study was 20.61 years old. 43.1% of the participants were seniors, 40% of the participants were juniors, 13.8% of the participants were sophomores, and 3.1% were freshmen in college. Of all participants, 27.7% identified themselves as being in a relationship and 72.3% identified themselves as not being in a relationship. 98.5% identified themselves as being in or preferring a heterosexual relationship, and 1.5% identified themselves as being in or preferring a homosexual relationship. Out of all participants, 27% identified themselves as being in a relationship.

Defining a Relationship

When reviewing the participants definitions of a "relationship," there seemed to be similar definitions for the same gender but differences in definitions between the genders and the mention of intimacy and sexual attraction between two people was a common theme in answers for males. The mention of friendship, respect, and exclusivity were common themes in answers among the female participants. One male defined a relationship as an "intimate interaction that occurs often between two loving parties," whereas a female defined a relationship as "a friendship between two people who mutually respect each other physically, mentally, and emotionally." Another female defined a relationship as "a friendship that is a consensual agreement to be exclusively sexual with each other." However, more of the older participants, the twenty-one and twenty-two year olds, included intimacy and sex in their definitions than the younger participants.

Alcohol

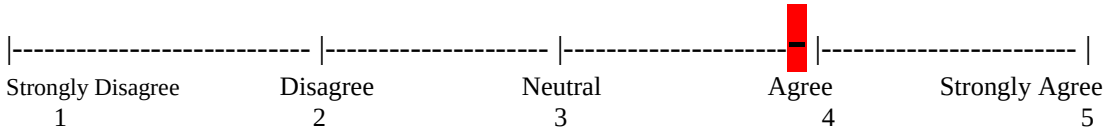
Fifty-three out of sixty-five participants answered the open ended question of how alcohol affects their relationships. This variable addressed how alcohol affected a participant's relationship. A female participant disclosed, "usually when alcohol is involved, we have an excellent time, but there have been a couple instances where misunderstandings have led to a fight." Other participants claimed that drinking consistently affected their relationship in terms of making it more unhealthy or abusive than when alcohol wasn't involved. However, females seemed to find alcohol as one participant noted as a "destructive factor" in relationships, whereas males seemed neutral to alcohol having any effect on their relationships. One participant answered, "I don't

have a partner but for some people it makes things better, and for others worse. It depends on the amount both people are drinking and who is involved." As seen in literature from various college centers throughout the United States, when alcohol is involved, it can lead to sexual abuse between two people who may or may not be in a relationship. (Counseling Center Guide)

Intervening

This variable addressed how students would intervene or if they are aware of instances of intervention on campus. Figure 1 illustrates the mean score for Question 10 on the survey which asked if students were aware on an incident of sexual abuse that wasn't reported on campus.

Figure 1: I am aware of an instance where there has been some sort of sexual abuse that has not been reported on this campus.

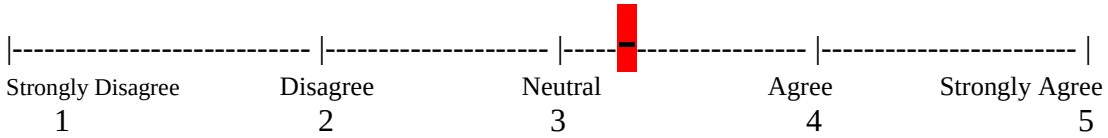


The mean score for this question was a 3.9 which is closest to agree. This means that most participants agreed that they are aware of an instance about sexual abuse that hasn't been reported. An open ended question was asked of the participants about why the incident was not reported. General themes that emerged included participants not feeling comfortable about reporting an instance because it involved one or two friends or that alcohol or other substances were involved and they didn't want to get their friends in trouble. One participant answered, "small things like people being too drunk to fully know and agree to what is going on. In the college atmosphere it seems that when alcohol is involved, this behavior is accepted or overlooked." This parallels the literature that a reason why people may stay in an unhealthy relationship is that the victim often knows

their abuser well and is reluctant to report this person and get this person in trouble. (Byrd, Bowdler & Hayes, 2009). Most sexual assaults take place between people who know each other. A survey conducted on 32 colleges and universities found that 84% of women raped knew their attacker and 57% of the those rapes happened on dates (National Center for Policy Analysis, 1999).

Figure 2 illustrates the mean score for Question 5 questioning if a friend was in an abusive or unhealthy relationship, the mean score was neutral on whether the participants would report it to a higher authority.

Figure 2: If a friend was in an abusive or unhealthy relationship, I would report it to a higher authority.



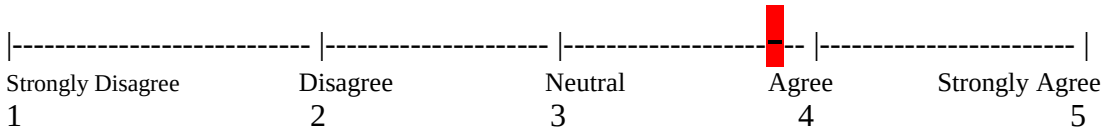
The average mean for this question was 3.35, which is closest to neutral. Most participants concluded that they would discuss or talk about the relationship with their friend before talking to a higher authority. One participant answered, “depends on the situation – I would most likely talk to the friend and get her or him to report it or end the relationship. If the friend was not doing anything about ending it or afraid, then, yes, I would definitely report it.”

Vulnerability

The variable measures how vulnerable a participant would be to engage in an unhealthy relationship. Vulnerability was measured using questions 6, 9, and 15. (See Appendix B). It seemed that many participants scored high on the vulnerability scale. The mean score for having friends and family approve of partners in the past was a 2.8, which

is closest to neutral. In Figure 3, the mean score for Question 15 for having witnessed an abusive relationship or unhealthy relationship while growing up was a 3.8, which is closest to agree.

Figure 3: Growing up, I have witnessed an abusive or unhealthy relationship.

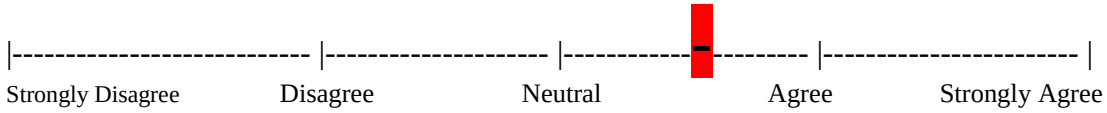


According to Chapple (2003), intergenerational nature of dating violence relates to unhealthy relationships that occur within the home. This often consists of witnessing domestic violence throughout generations in the home. In other words, children exposed to unhealthy parental interactions learn and come to accept that aggression is a normal part of romantic relationships. As adults, these children are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior when interacting with a dating partner. Research in family violence finds that there is a positive relationship between parent–child violence and expressing violent behaviors their partner while dating (Chapple, 2003).

Comfortability

This variable measures how comfortable a participant is with their partner in a relationship and his or her comfortability level in that relationship. Comfortability was measured using questions 3, 8, 13, and 14 (See Appendix B). In Figure 4, the participants were asked whether they remained in a relationship because they were comfortable with that person.

Figure 4: I have stayed in a relationship just because I was comfortable with that person.

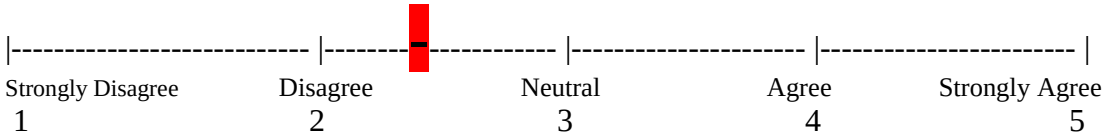


Most participants feel that they have remained in a relationship just because they were comfortable with that person and didn't want that relationship to end. This correlates with a person having low self-esteem and remaining in these relationships as well. This can cause the person to rationalize how he or she is treated by their partner. Most participants also agreed that they would rather be in a relationship than be single.

Self – Esteem

Self-esteem scale was composed of five questions from Rosenberg's scale of self-esteem to evaluate the participant's current self-esteem. This variable was measured using questions 1, 2, 4, 7, and 12 (See Appendix B). When reviewing each scale individually, it is shown that most participants agreed to view themselves on at least an equal plane with others and have a positive attitude toward themselves. The same was seen when asked the participants if they feel they have a number of good qualities. The mean score was agree. However, in Figure 5, when asked if participants feel useless at times, the mean score was 2.6, which is in the middle of disagree and neutral.

Figure 5: I feel useless at times.



Low self-esteem and low self-respect are important predictors of a person staying in these relationships even if the violent partner has already done enough physical or emotional damage to that person. Low self-esteem and low self-respect can also lead the people to believe that they may deserve how their partner is treating them in the relationship or that they don't deserve better treatment (Byrd, Bowdler & Hayes, 2009).

This can lead to why certain participants may feel useless at times both in and out of relationships.

Summary and Implications

This study aimed to find why students remain in unhealthy relationships and why students don't intervene in unhealthy relationships they may witness. This study also focused on self-esteem, comfortability, and vulnerability as factors in an unhealthy relationship. The researcher wanted to see if their was a direct link between these factors and why students remained in these relationships.

According to the Providence College Annual Security and Fire Safety Report, no instances of sexual abuse were reported on campus from 2010-2012. That doesn't support the data reported where the mean score revealed that most participants agreed that they were aware of an instance of sexual abuse that wasn't necessarily reported to the college or a higher authority. This is consistent with the literature pertaining to unhealthy relationships on college campuses (Counseling Center Guide). College students in relationships and peers of college students in unhealthy relationships need guidance or need to be informed of what warning signs they should look for. These warning signs include isolation, control, escalation, intergenerational nature of dating violence, personal changes, self-respect, anger, and rationalization (Byrd, Bowdler & Hayes, 2009). This can be why students may also not be reporting abuse, because students may not necessarily know what to look for in peers' relationships. This can be useful to possibly develop future programs for students by the counseling centers in order inform students what to be aware of in others relationships as well as their own. These programs can also be run in the dormitories by the resident assistants so students can be informed as early as

their freshmen year.

When considering the factors of alcohol and other substances in terms of sexual abuse, it can be easily overlooked, especially within a college setting. It sadly becomes a norm or may be viewed as a “drunken hookup” and not discussed again between the two partners after it has happened. However, it should be taken more seriously than it currently is on this campus as well as other college campuses nationwide. Awareness needs to be spread more throughout college campuses as well as knowledge about dating violence, abuse, unhealthy relationships, and how peers can support and confront this issue with their peers. Information should also be available throughout college campuses on how to report any abuse and which sources to report it to so the right action can be taken for all people involved within the relationship.

In respect to the variable measuring self-esteem, it seemed as if students answered mostly from agree to strongly agree for all questions except for the one about feeling useless at times. The researcher should have added a question to inquire why students feel useless at times to aid future research and to have a better idea of what causes students to feel this way.

Most participants agreed that they remained in relationships because they were comfortable with their partner and comfortable with their partners making decisions for them. This leads to the question of what kind of decisions these partners were making for the participants and how healthy their relationship really could’ve been. In terms of vulnerability, it was interesting to see how high the number was for those who have witnessed an abusive or unhealthy relationship growing up. As mentioned previously in the

findings and literature, witnessing these relationships can be linked to remaining in an unhealthy relationship (Chapple, 2003).

Limitations

Limitations include a larger sample from the college population because the results cannot be generalized. It would be valuable to have more participants who are currently in relationships as well as a more diverse population relating to ethnicity and types of relationships. Gathering further information from these populations would benefit research and make it more applicable to various college populations. I think this research and future research would benefit the college that was surveyed as well as counseling services on campuses throughout the nation.

This research could also benefit safety and security offices of college campuses to help bring awareness to the issue of sexual abuse that may be occurring on and off campus. Students should also be more informed throughout college campuses about reporting these unhealthy relationships and the consequences an abuser may have to face if reported. This information gathered from participants can assist the security office to take more action and possibly develop future programs and policies to promote safety on and off campus concerning sexual abuse and how to effectively report a case of sexual abuse and who to report it to. This office should take the initiative to make students feel comfortable to report these issues because from the information gathered it seems that students are hesitant to report these instances. This study explored the issue of unhealthy relationships on a college campus and helped to gather more information on why there is such little intervention in these types of relationships. Hopefully action will be taken to improve awareness and policies on college campuses pertaining to unhealthy relationships as well as sexual abuse.

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Appendix A

Dear Potential Participant:

I am a social work major at Providence College, inviting you to participate in a study to explore why college students stay in unhealthy relationships and why peers fail to report abuse. Data gathered in this study will be reported in a thesis paper in a social work capstone course at Providence College. It will also be added to the Providence College digital commons database.

The survey time should not exceed 15-20 minutes. If a student chooses to partake in an interview with the researcher, the interview time should not exceed 30-40 minutes. The interviews will be recorded using an audio recorder and the tapes will be destroyed once the data is transcribed. There are no anticipated significant risks associated with involvement in this research. There is always the possibility that uncomfortable or stressful memories or emotions may arise while thinking about these past experiences. Participants are free to stop participation in the study at any time until identifying information is removed from the responses. The researcher, if necessary, will also provide referral resources for psychological support.

Benefits of participating in this study include helping researchers to formulate a better understanding of why students remain in these unhealthy relationships and why peers don't intervene in order to potentially improve future practice.

Confidentiality will be protected by storing signed consent forms separately from data obtained in the study. Once the data are obtained, all identifying information linking the participant to his or her response will be destroyed so that responses can no longer be identified with individuals. Data will be reported by making generalizations of all of the data that has been gathered. Brief excerpts of individual responses may be quoted without any personal identifying information.

Participation in this study is voluntary. A decision to decline to participate will not have any negative effects for you. You may withdraw from the study at any time up until Thursday, March 24th when the researchers will finalize the data.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Thank you for participating in this study.

Melissa DeVito , Social Work Student, 347-728-9863

_____ _____

(Name) (Date)
PLEASE KEEP A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS

Appendix B

Age ____
Gender _____
Ethnicity _____
Class Year _____
How do you define a "relationship"?
_____
_____
_____
Are you in a relationship? Yes No
Are you in a heterosexual or homosexual relationship? _____

Please circle your answer to the Following questions:

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

|---------- |---------- |---------- |---------- |
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

2. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

|---------- |---------- |---------- |---------- |
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

3. In the past, friends and family have approved of my partners.

|---------- |---------- |---------- |---------- |
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

4. I feel useless at times.

|---------- |---------- |---------- |---------- |
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

5. If a friend was in an abusive or unhealthy relationship, I would report it to a higher authority.

|---------- |---------- |---------- |---------- |

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

If you would report it, who would you report it to?:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

6. In a romantic relationship, I usually feel that I am being controlled.

|---------- |---------- |---------- |---------- |

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

7. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

|---------- |---------- |---------- |---------- |

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

8. I am comfortable with my partner making most decisions for me.

|---------- |---------- |---------- |---------- |

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

9. If I drink with my partner, our relationship takes a turn for the worst.

|---------- |---------- |---------- |---------- |

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Please explain how:

_____
_____
_____
_____

10. I am aware of an instance where there has been some sort of sexual abuse that has not been reported on this campus.

|---------- |---------- |---------- |---------- |
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Why was it not reported?:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

11. If a friend was in an abusive or unhealthy relationship, I would intervene.

|---------- |---------- |---------- |---------- |
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Please explain why or why not:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

12. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

|---------- |---------- |---------- |---------- |
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

13. I would rather be in a relationship than be single.

|---------- |---------- |---------- |---------- |
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

14. I have stayed in a relationship just because I was comfortable with that person.

|---------- |---------- |---------- |---------- |
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

15. Growing up, I have witnessed an abusive or unhealthy relationship.

|---------- |---------- |---------- |---------- |
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

THANK YOU!