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# TEEN DATING RELATIONSHIPS: UNDERSTANDING AND COMPARING YOUTH AND ADULT CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

As teen dating violence (TDV) incidence has escalated substantially in recent years, a number of research, practice and policy efforts have been championed in response. One critical challenge in effectively addressing teen dating violence relates to the lack of research that directly considers how youth conceptualize teen dating in the first place, apart from specifically aggressive or violent relationships. Most work in this area is instead guided by professionals' assumptions of adolescents' dating experiences, with little sense of how well these assumptions align with teens' reality. The purpose of this study was to directly engage teens and young adults to better understand how youth conceptualize teen dating relationships, and the extent to which youth conceptualizations comport with those of adults in the field. Group concept mapping was used capture, compare, and visually represent perspectives of teen dating relationships across samples of teens ages 14-18, young adults ages 19-22, and adult professionals. Subsequent facilitated discussions with samples of these three groups augmented the concept map results with additional insight around the complexities and nuances of teen dating relationships, including implications for TDV research and prevention. A single concept map co-authored by youth and adults describe teen dating relationships using 100 ideas, 9 constructs, and 2 conceptual dimensions. Across groups, substantial agreement emerged on the characteristics of teen dating, the interrelationships among those characteristics, and participants' opinions on their frequency and desirability. Discussions confirmed the validity of the map content and organization, and emphasized the interaction of positive and negative behaviors, emotions, and cognitions in teen dating as highly relevant for TDV initiatives. Youth tend to conceptualize dating relationships as progressing through "stages," and note generally difficulties in maintaining self-awareness while in a romantic relationship. The salience of peer networks and the high school environment were also highly relevant to youth conceptualizations, while both youth and professionals observed a general disconnect in how youth and adults communicate around dating relationships. The results of this project strongly suggest that research and programming efforts focus on the confluence of positive and negative dating aspects in shaping youth's ability to recognize unhealthy dating characteristics, and embrace a more multidimensional, contextually and temporally sensitive approach to work in the field. The resultant framework provides a robust basis for ongoing work in this area that directly reflects the experiences and vernacular of teens and young adults.

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescent dating violence has surfaced as a significant public health issue. In recent national surveys, nearly ten percent of high school students reported being purposefully hit, slapped or physically injured by their partner within the past year (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey*). One in five women and one in seven men who ever experience rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner first experienced some form of partner violence between 11 and 17 years of age (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey*).

More recent studies also underscore the staggering prevalence of teen dating violence (TDV) prevalence among high school and college student populations. In a random sample of university students, over sixty percent retrospectively report having been victims of physical, sexual, or psychological abuse between the ages of 13 and 19, most of whom also reported multiple occurrences of abuse (Bonomi et al., 2012). In another national study of youth ages 12 through 17, all youth reporting TDV victimization also reported at least one other type of victimization, suggesting a close tie between TDV and forms of child maltreatment and polyvictimization (Finkelhor, Turner, & Hamby, 2012).

Beyond incidence, the field has also explored antecedents, outcomes, and the nature of teen dating violence from multiple perspectives. Researchers have studied the link between exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) and TDV, finding a significant positive association between IPV exposure and TDV victimization (Garrido & Taussig, 2013) and perpetration (Jouriles, Mueller, Rosenfield, McDonald, & Dodson, 2012). This line of research has also suggested that positive parenting practices and pro-social peers play a role in mitigating involvement in violent dating behavior. Other efforts have focused on understanding TDV in the context of socioeconomic status, racism, and high-risk neighborhoods (Henry & Zeytinoglu, 2012); associations with sexual risk-taking (Hipwell et al., 2013); virtual perpetration (Korchmaros, Ybarra, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Boyd, & Lenhart, 2013; Zweig, Lachman, Yahner, & Dank, 2013); youth beliefs about dating violence acceptability (Mueller, Jouriles, McDonald, & Rosenfield, 2013), and gender attitudes and behaviors as they relate to norms and perpetration of dating violence (Reed, Silverman, Raj, Decker, & Miller, 2011; McCauley et al., 2013).

The extent of this issue is widespread and complex. As researchers continue to expand the breadth and depth of understanding TDV, policy makers, practitioners, programmers and researchers have turned attention toward developing effective responses to stem future occurrence. Some of these initiatives, such as *Dating Matters*, are designed to explicitly address the co-occurrence of TDV with other adolescent risk behaviors and social influences that impact dating violence (Tharp, 2012). Other prevention and education initiatives such as the Youth Relationships Project (Wolfe et al., 2003, 2009), Shifting Boundaries (Taylor, Stein, Mumford, & Woods, 2013) and The Fourth R (Crooks, Chiodo, Zwarych, Hughes, & Wolfe, 2013; Wolfe et al., 2009) have been applied and evaluated to suggest positive behavioral and attitudinal changes from participants' baseline self-reports. Perhaps most extensively evaluated is the *Safe Dates* program, which has been shown to effectively change dating gender norms, improve peer support and conflict resolution skills, and decrease dating violence overall up to one year

after program participation (Foshee et al., 1996, 1998, 2000). Collectively, these research and programming efforts continue to advance our understanding of teens' experiences with dating violence and some of the contextual factors that may contribute to its occurrence and prevention.

Given that teen dating relationships are the context of teen dating violence, the accuracy and comprehensiveness of our understanding of teen dating violence necessarily depends on the accuracy and comprehensiveness of how we understand teen dating relationships. As such, it behooves the field to focus not only on concepts explicitly relevant to dating violence, but also those dimensions and constructs that describe their contexts and articulate the environment in which dating violence takes place.

Over the past two decades, theoretical and empirical studies have generated fundamental insight on adolescent dating relationships. There is general consensus that romantic relationships are regarded as desirable and sought out by adolescents, are of relatively short duration, and tend to emerge following the sequential development of same-sex and then mixed-sex friendships (Arnett, 2000; Karney, Beckett, Collins, & Shaw, 2007). Researchers have drawn on a number of well-founded approaches from developmental psychology to provide a theoretical basis for the field, most prominent of which is attachment theory (Bowlby, 1960, 1973, 1980; Giordano, 2003). Attachment theory posits that one's expectations of caregiving and intimate relationships are modeled after early infantile and childhood experiences with primary caregivers. Hence, the nature of interactions and emotional bonds in childhood may constrain or facilitate transitions to intimate relationships in adolescence (Collins & Sroufe, 1999).

The longitudinal impact of adolescents' experiences with romantic relationships is also theoretically acknowledged, suggesting the importance of this area in studying longer-term life outcomes including violence. Variations of lifestyle development perspectives consider how constraining relationship experiences in adolescence may shape romantic relationships and marital outcomes in adulthood (Caspi & Roberts, 2001; Caspi, 1987). A developmental-context perspective suggests that relationships change significantly over the course of life stages, and that these changes are fundamentally embedded in and shaped by the peer context (Brown, 1999). Other models such as the Development of Early Adult Romantic Relationships (DEARR) model specifically attends to family environment and kin relationships and their impact on adolescent relationship experiences, adult dating relationships and marriage (Bryant & Conger, 2002). Some empirical work has studied specific constructs within the developmental perspective. Marital conflict among parents, for example, has been found to impact conflict behavior in adolescent relationships (Cui, Fincham, & Pasley, 2008)

General consensus in the literature also points to an overall understanding of teen dating relationships as unfolding within a broader set of social, emotional, behavioral and environmental processes. Relationships with parents and peers are considered influential forces in an adolescent's romantic relationship, as adolescence marks a developmental period in which youth are navigating transitions from childhood to adulthood, and peers and become increasingly important models for dating relationships (Furman & Wehner, 1994). As such, interdependent relationships with peers and romantic partners become more salient than those with parents and family members (Collins, 2003).

More recent research offers other integrative models for specifically understanding the impact of components of adolescent relationships on healthy adult romantic relationships and marriage (Karney et

al., 2007). This model brings together elements of attachment theory, lifestyle development perspectives, and family environment models to propose how antecedent conditions and adolescent relationship experiences interact, in part for the purposes of suggesting effective interventions.

In response to the field's use of multiple theoretical explanations of adolescent dating behavior, Furman and Wehner (1994) put forth a more integrative approach to account for the simultaneous and interacting aspects of attachment, affiliative, caregiving, and sexual relations systems (Furman & Wehner, 1994). This perspective acknowledges the complex, multidimensional characteristics of adolescent romantic relationships, and urges the field to explicitly consider this type of comprehensive systems framework. Further, the emphasis on adolescent romantic relationship's changing and dynamic nature encourages researchers to sensitize their work to temporality, moving away from a static understanding of teen dating.

Within the field's focus on normative relationship characteristics, some work has also considered the role of adolescents' perspectives. As youth progress through initial dating relationships and gain experience, their views and perceptions are also likely to change (Furman & Wehner, 1997). For instance, emotions and cognitions around one's sense of security in the relationship are likely to increase with dating experience and age. In alignment with the dynamic conceptualization of adolescent relationships, different behavioral systems are likely to emerge with varying degrees of salience throughout different stages of adulthood and as adolescents acquire dating experience (Furman & Wehner, 1997).

Likewise, researchers have also developed theory specific to later adolescence, acknowledging that distinct characteristics of this development stage may uniquely impact expectations, experiences and behaviors in the context of romantic relationships. Emerging adulthood (ages 18-25) is often marked by youth leaving home, and consequently a greater focus on creating stable relationships that explore physical and emotional intimacy with their partners more openly than in adolescence (Arnett, 2000). As this life stage is often accompanied by many other personal explorations (career, education, life goals, etc.), emerging adults are also likely to explore novel relationships experiences in the context of a newly gained sense of autonomy. Within the realm of other important social relationships, emerging adults often also perceive increased support and decreased conflict with parents in transitioning from the high school to college environment (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992).

In this regard, the field generally acknowledges the nuances of relationship experiences according to different development stages, and has broadly considered the dynamic quality of adolescent perceptions of romantic relationships. Nevertheless, few studies to date have directly investigated adolescents' perceptions of dating relationships. Most research, programming and policy are instead based on adults' assumptions, or have inferred youth perceptions using behavioral measures and scales developed by adults (Furman & Wehner, 1994) and based on adult professionals' assumptions of what relationship components should be measured (Sumter, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2013).

Little is known about how teens actually understand and experience romantic partnerships, including what they perceive as defining characteristics and how they value or judge those characteristics in the context of teen dating relationships in general. The extent to which professionals' assumptions comport with youth reality has yet to be explored in depth.

Indeed, a relatively small collection of research suggests that adolescents may in fact conceptualize certain aspects of their romantic relationships differently than adults. Teens, for example, tend to perceive controlling and jealous behaviors as signs of love (Levy, 1990), and “...do not perceive of dating aggression as deleterious to the relationship, nor do they view violence as a cause for ending the relationship” (O’Keefe, 2005). In other studies, researchers found that adolescent couples tended to work harder than adult couples to limit the intensity of negative exchanges (Galliher, Enno, & Wright, 2008), invested more in circumventing, minimizing and disowning the differences between them and their partner (Tuval-Mashiach & Shulman, 2006), and described their romantic relationships in mainly positive terms (Shulman & Kipnis, 2001).

As rates of TDV have remained relatively steady in recent national surveys, and sometimes even higher in studies of specific populations, the field may benefit from examining the precision of its assumptions about youth romantic relationships. Whereas teen dating relationships are the context of TDV, the capacity to address relationship violence will likely be enhanced through a more informed understanding of adolescents’ dating experience, their articulation of relationship dynamics, and conceptualizations of how aspects of the relationship and its social context interrelate. Further, the large variability in reported prevalence rates of adolescent dating violence is likely due in part to definitional ambiguity within the field as to what constitutes a teen dating relationship and what constitutes dating abuse.

Practically speaking, the question of how teens conceptualize adolescent romantic relationships has a number of important implications for research, prevention and intervention. From a research perspective, many of the measurement frameworks used to study teen dating violence incidence and related factors are rooted in adult conceptualizations of teen dating relationships and, consequently, adult vernacular. An explicit comparison among teen and adult understandings of adolescent relationships may confirm existing measurement tools, and/or suggest modifications that may enhance the extent to which adult-developed methods accurately comport with adolescent experience. Such modifications may allow researchers to more effectively access information most pertinent to studying and addressing the context of teen dating violence.

From a practice perspective, this inquiry can more fully identify and explicate some of the contextual factors that may influence program and policy effectiveness. Prior research already suggests some distinct temporal and social qualities of teen dating relationships. Their relatively short duration, varying levels of commitment (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012), receptivity to media influence (Chia & Gunther, 2006), use of technology (Widman, Nesi, Choukas-Bradley, & Prinstein, 2014), and extensive peer networks (Giordano, 2003) are just some of the characteristics of teen dating that likely have implications for program and policy design. A focused effort to uncover additional features of adolescent relationships may indicate key considerations to better align program structure and content with teen experiences. Without this information, planning and development may be limited in terms of appropriately targeting language and communications, intervention and responses, and measurement and data collection.

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of teen and adult conceptualizations of adolescent relationship characteristics to better inform teen dating violence research, practice and policy. This study attempted to address the general lack of knowledge around teens’ perceptions of relationship



characteristics by providing them with opportunity to describe these qualities in their own words. Further, to begin understanding the extent to which youth conceptualizations converge and diverge with those of adults, this study engaged a sample of adult professionals in the same inquires as youth. Information collection from both youth and adults in the field allowed for direct comparison of conceptualizations, while also eliciting rich information from youth on the dynamics and complexities of teen dating.

This report summarizes the planning, data collection processes, and outcomes of this study, as well as recommendations for future research and practice to advance and apply these initial findings.

## PROJECT TEAM

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This study was funded by the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and was led by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the Federal Interagency Workgroup on Teen Dating Violence. The Workgroup was established in 2006 and facilitates collaboration across 18 federal agencies on research, information sharing, and other resources that contribute to teen dating violence prevention and related policy (Mulford & Blachman-Demner, 2013).

The impetus for this project emerged from a 2006 Workgroup meeting, where participants identified the inclusion of youth voices as a gap in TDV research, specifically around the conceptual definition of dating relationships and abuse. The Workgroup noted the need to compare youth's articulation of dating relationships with that of adults to discover whether these groups think similarly about healthy and unhealthy relationship elements. Insights from this comparison would inform new research initiatives and proposals, and aide in more effectively targeting prevention and intervention efforts. It was also anticipated that the results would reveal conceptual variation even among youth participants, underscoring the need for programming to be designed in a way that effectively addresses the range of experiences, contexts and perspectives that shape adolescent relationships.

Project leaders at NIJ invited other professionals in the field to comprise the project Planning Group. Many of these individuals were also Workgroup members, representing federal offices such as the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), HHS Office of Women's Health (OWH), and Office of Adolescent Health (OAH). A practitioner at the national leadership level of a youth programming organization and a researcher in the area of teen dating violence were also included. Additionally, consultants from Concept Systems, Inc. were involved to assist with project management, data collection and analysis, results presentation and reporting.

The Planning Group served as the core research team overseeing all aspects of the study. The Group met by phone bi-weekly throughout the course of the project to ensure timely execution of tasks, plan all aspects of study design, assist with youth and adult participant recruitment, and make key strategic decisions to continuously ensure that the project aligned with its intended purpose. The Planning Group also assisted in the selection of a project Advisory Group, whose expertise was drawn upon for guidance on major methodological decisions, results interpretation, and dissemination guidance. The Advisory Group included university researchers in the areas of adolescent development and domestic violence,

leaders from national advocacy and youth development programs, and representatives from offices within DOJ and HHS. [Appendix I](#) lists all Planning and Advisory Group members.

## PROJECT STRUCTURE

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This project was structured as two complementary parts. The first part was intended to capture and compare youth and adult perspectives on the elements of teen dating relationships and their interrelatedness. The results would provide an initial understanding of areas of convergence and divergence in youth and adult conceptualizations. These conceptualizations would then serve as the basis for a series of discussions with youth and adults (Part 2 of the study) to probe and augment the validity of the results, and to consider the implications for advancing the field and future inquiries.

Concept mapping was selected as the optimal methodology for the conceptualization endeavor (Kane & Trochim, 2007; Trochim, 1989). This mixed methods approach includes a sequence of qualitative and quantitative participatory and analytic steps that produce visualizations of how a participant group perceives the interrelatedness among a set of ideas that define a topic or issue. As in the present case of teen dating relationships, concept mapping provides a systematic technique for collecting, integrating and representing diverse viewpoints of many individuals, including teens, young adults and adults from disparate locations, and in way that allows participants to interpret the results. The method allows for multiple perspectives to co-author a framework of the topic. All aspects of the resulting conceptualization reflect the input of participants, including the content (ideas), their spatial configuration, and the qualitative articulation of their meaning in the context of teen dating relationships.

Several reasons guided the Planning Group's decision to use concept mapping. First, the method engages participants in a relatively simple series of activities while yielding visual representations that capture the complexity of group wisdom. Despite the complexity inherent in the resultant maps, the visualizations retain sufficient simplicity for participants and stakeholder groups to meaningfully interpret them in the context of their worldview. As this study intentionally sought to include youth, the simplicity of concept mapping's process and results would encourage teens to fully take part in both authoring and extrapolating from an otherwise complex framework. Second, the process would allow the research team to compare youth and adult perspectives at multiple steps in the process and using multiple variables. As we detail in the Methods section, concept mapping allowed for comparison of participants' perspectives on the characteristics of dating relationships, their relationships to one another, their frequency and their desirability. In this regard, the process provided a window into youth and adult conceptualizations at many angles. The details of this conceptual framework, combined with insight from subsequent discussions, provide a comprehensive foundation to guide work in this area.

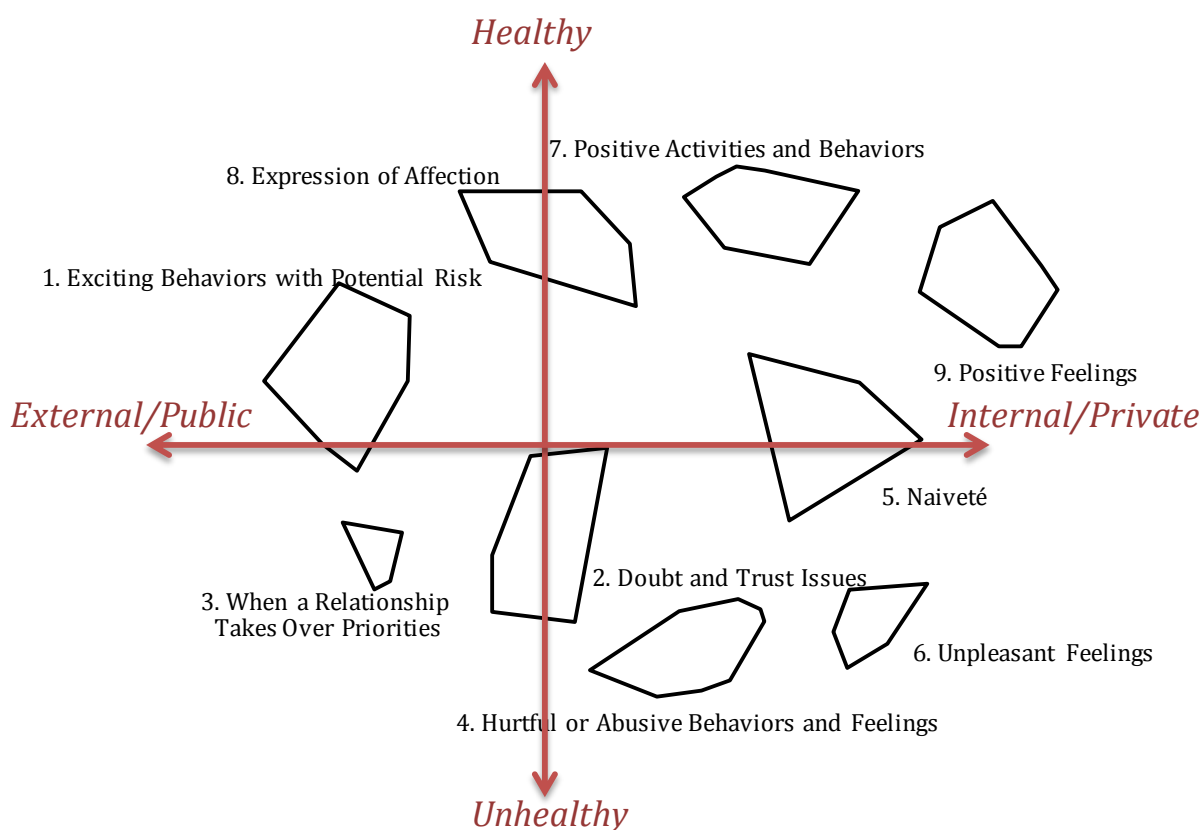
## PILOT STUDY

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Prior to conducting the study described in this report, the research team executed a small pilot of the full study design with a sample of approximately 50 youth ages 14-18. These participants completed all steps of the concept mapping process, and a subset took part in two facilitated discussions designed to elicit teens' interpretation of the concept mapping results. The main impetus for this pilot work was to test the ability of the concept mapping methodology to adequately capture and represent the conceptualizations of

adolescents, and to affirm the quality and importance of the results for advancing our understanding of teen dating relationships, specifically from the perspectives of youth.

Pilot participants were recruited from youth-serving organizations in Washington, DC and New York City. The project team conducted the recruitment process as initially outlined in the study Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) protocols, including parental consent and anonymity procedures, incentive distribution, and a combination of web-based and in-person data collection. The concept mapping process yielded a visual representation of 86 ideas provided by the youth in response to the focus prompt: *“A thought, action, feeling or behavior that teens in dating relationships might have or do is...”* By virtue of the analytic process (described in subsequent sections), the ideas were grouped into nine higher-order constructs, labeled according to youth suggestions, and arrayed along two emergent conceptual dimensions (Healthy/Unhealthy and External/Internal) ([Figure 1](#))



**Figure 1.** Pilot concept map, including 86 unique statements grouped into 9 clusters, and arranged along two emergent conceptual dimensions.

Facilitated discussions with approximately ten youth at each of the two pilot locations confirmed the robustness and meaningful interpretability of the concept mapping results. Youth generally felt that the map was a valid representation of their understanding of teen dating relationships, while also suggesting the need for more ideas related to technology (i.e., texting), social media (i.e., Facebook), and sex. Youth also discussed the contextual dependency of determining whether certain ideas are considered positive or

negative. This insight suggested that more in depth discussions with a broader sample in the full study might elicit even richer insights on youth experiences in dating relationships, using the conceptual framework as a basis for conversation.

The pilot study confirmed the project team's expectations that concept mapping was an appropriate and advantageous method for collecting and representing youth perspectives, and in a way that youth could easily understand and use to further interpret. Advisory Group members also noted similarity between the concept map results and insights from their own research, lending credence to the study outcomes for the field more broadly. Logistically, the pilot offered the research team an opportunity to refine the recruitment approach by learning optimal means for engaging organizational leaders and youth participants, communicating instructions, and in facilitating the completion of concept mapping activities to the extent possible. While confirming the ability of the project focus prompt to capture breadth and depth of content, the pilot map revealed the need for the research team to include clear and conceptually distinct ideas to comprise the map.

The pilot results also provided a basis for comparison with the full study's broader universe of youth and adult participants, allowing the research team to inquire as to whether similar ideas, constructs, dimensions and ratings emerged with a more diverse sample. Beyond the immediate value of the study, the pilot effort supported the full study's potential to better inform many ongoing research and practice initiatives, particularly around definitional ambiguity and methodological variations in how teen dating relationships and teen dating violence are understood.

## PART 1: CONCEPT MAPPING

### STUDY DESIGN

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#### PARTICIPANT SELECTION

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The project Planning Group identified three participant groups for study recruitment. Given that the topic of focus was specifically teen dating relationships, the research team decided that high-school aged youth would provide a current state understanding of adolescent relationships and their characteristics. This group, referred to as the “teens,” included youth ages 14 through 18. The research team also determined that a second, older youth group’s perspectives were significant to capture, particularly those who have likely recently left high school. Youth ages 19 through 22, referred to as the “young adults,” were included to better understand how perspectives around teen dating may be similar or different for individuals transitioning from teenagers to adults. Indeed, this phase of “emerging adulthood” has been studied as a distinct period when youth are navigating relationship commitment along with their own life plans and ambitions (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Relationships during preceding teen years greatly influence relationship formation in young adult years (Meier & Allen, 2009), making both teen and young adult participation in this study highly relevant.

For this initial conceptualization work, adult participants whose understanding of teen dating would be compared with youth included a sample of researchers, practitioners, advocates, teachers and federal employees with some degree of involvement in the field. These participants included professionals who are often involved in the creation and implementation of policy, practice and research programs based on their own perceptions of teen dating relationships. Given their leadership role in directing the field, combined with our lack of knowledge as to how well their perceptions align with those of youth, these professionals were considered a critical initial adult sample for this study.

The research team acknowledged that understanding the perspectives of adults more broadly was also important, particularly those of parents; however, given that a key objective of the study was to gauge the convergence of youth perspectives with those adults already seeking to advance responses to teen dating violence, and whose conceptual alignment with youth would be a key baseline, this participant group did not intentionally include a broader sample of adults.

#### PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

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Adult participants were selected and recruited individually through nominations by Planning and Advisory Group members. Invited adults included university researchers, youth outreach and advocacy organization representatives, healthcare professionals, school district representatives, legal professionals, and other individuals across the country with a professional relationship to the field.

Teen and young adult participants were recruited through organizations that had ongoing, regular contact—either virtual or face-to-face—with youth ages 14-22. The research team focused on two primary goals in seeking youth-serving organizations to assist in recruitment efforts: First, while complete national representation was not possible within the parameters of this initial study, researchers sought a

geographically diverse sample of youth. The team aimed specifically to include youth from both urban and rural locations. Second, researchers wanted to include a combination of youth-serving organizations that did and did not focus explicitly on healthy relationship development and/or teen dating violence prevention and advocacy. While the team anticipated that youth groups focused on healthy relationships would be readily interested in participating in the study, it was critical that the concept map also include perspectives of youth not as well versed on this topic. A key objective of this endeavor was to elicit conceptualizations of teens and young adults more broadly, such that research and programming could be better informed by the ideas of youth with less formal education on the topic.

With these recruitment goals in mind, project Planning and Advisory Group members assisted in developing a convenience sample of youth-serving organizations through contacts in their professional networks. The Federal Interagency Work Group on Youth Programs also circulated information about study participation opportunities through website announcements and listserves. Those groups that ultimately assisted with recruitment were those willing to distribute information about the study and participation process, collect parental permission slips from teens under 18, facilitate activity instructions, and ultimately serve as the liaison between the research team and participants. The resultant teen and young adult sample was recruited through a relatively geographically diverse collection of youth-serving organizations that also represented a range of organizational purposes. Groups ranged from Boys and Girls Clubs, to workforce training programs, theater ensembles, community centers, public libraries and many others, including some former Start Strong sites.<sup>1</sup> Locations also ranged from urban areas such as Boston, Indianapolis and New York City, to more rural parts of South Carolina, Vermont, upstate New York and New Hampshire. Within the parameters of this initial conceptualization study, the Planning Group sought to be as inclusive as possible of diverse participant groups, while still utilizing a convenience approach. As discussed in the Recommendations section, future inquiries might consider the same or similar study design with a more purposefully representative national sample of youth. See [Appendix II](#) for a complete list of youth groups that took part in the project. The next section describes how the concept mapping activities were facilitated with youth and adult participants.

## METHODS

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### IDEA GENERATION

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Also known as brainstorming, idea generation is the first participatory activity of concept mapping. Here, participants are asked to provide their ideas in response to a single open-ended sentence, also referred to as a focus prompt. In this study, teen, young adult and adult participants were all asked to provide as many ideas as they wanted to complete the focus prompt: *“A thought, action, feeling or behavior that teens in dating relationships might have or do is...”* Planning and Advisory group members initially

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<sup>1</sup> Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships (Start Strong) was a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) in collaboration with Blue Shield of California Foundation (BSCF) and Futures Without Violence. From 2008 to 2012, RWJF and BSCF invested \$18 million in 11 Start Strong sites across the country to promote healthy relationships among 11- to 14-year-olds and identify promising ways to prevent teen dating violence. <http://startstrong.futureswithoutviolence.org/>

crafted this prompt for the pilot study. Following the pilot, the Planning Group agreed that the prompt elicited a sufficient breadth and depth of characteristics that describe teen dating relationships. Confirmation on the map content validity from pilot discussions also supported the research team's decision that the focus prompt used in the pilot study would be effective in the full study.

Idea generation took place entirely remotely, and in most cases participants used dedicated project websites<sup>2</sup> that allowed for anonymous response. Separate brainstorming websites were created for teens, young adults and adults to help ensure that youth participation was not influenced by more sophisticated and/or seemingly confusing contributions from adults. Separate websites for teens and young adults also helped to ease concerns about younger participants being exposed to potentially explicit ideas from older youth.

Adult participants were invited by email to anonymously contribute their responses to the focus prompt via the project website. Youth-serving organization leaders distributed printed flyers with the website to interested youth, and in some cases circulated the flyer electronically. In addition to the websites, the research team offered two other means for youth to contribute ideas. For youth groups that met in person, the research team provided the group with post cards that included the focus prompt and spaces for participants to write their ideas. Organization leaders then collected and returned the post cards by mail to the research team. Organizations also had the option to circulate a flyer that included the focus prompt and a dedicated project phone number for participants to anonymously text their responses to the research team. Both of these options were offered to encourage and facilitate youth participation in spite of potential barriers or logistical challenges in accessing the project website. In most cases youth participated via the website or post cards, with fewer respondents utilizing the text messaging option. Post cards were an advantageous means of data collection for those youth groups that regularly met in-person and for which the group leader chose to use the idea generation activity as an organized part of the meeting agenda. The website was advantageous for those groups that connected virtually, as organizational leaders could post the link on the group's Facebook page and/or circulate the website among participants via email.

## IDEA SYNTHESIS

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Idea generation was conducted between July and September 2013. Within this timeframe, the participant group as a whole contributed over six hundred ideas in response to the focus prompt. Two hundred and twelve of these ideas were generated by teen participants; one hundred and twenty-one were generated by young adults; and two hundred and eighty-eight by adults. In its entirety, the idea set contained considerable redundancy, including several nuanced variations of the same ideas or concepts. In many cases, participants provided ideas that were more specific examples of a broader statement also included in the statement set, e.g. “dancing together,” “going shopping together,” “going to concerts together,” as more specific activities encompassed by the statement “spending time together.” This redundancy and

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<sup>2</sup> The Concept System® Global MAX™ (Build 2012.243.13) [Web-based Platform]. (2014). Ithaca, NY. Available at: <http://www.conceptsystemsglobal.com>.



spectrum of specificity, coupled with the need to reduce the large set of ideas to a more manageable number for participants to feasibly sort and rate, led the Planning Group to systematically synthesize the initial six hundred ideas to a final set of one hundred.

The idea synthesis process included a review of all generated ideas, considering similar ideas and near redundant ideas simultaneously. First, two members of the research team organized the original set of 600 ideas through a key-wording and code-wording process. Each statement was assigned one or two keywords that represented the core content of the idea. Statements with related keywords were then grouped into broader groups of thematically similar codewords. The six-hundred ideas were then arranged into worksheets by codeword. These worksheets then provided the basis for the Planning Group's in-person discussion, whereby the Group as a whole reviewed the ideas in each codeword and then discussed which of the statements within the codeword should be included in the final statement set. A codeword's content was discussed until the Group reached a consensus decision on which items to include in the final set, or a decision was made to proceed and return to the codeword after reviewing subsequent worksheets. The target number of ideas per codeword to be included in the final set was based in part of the overall proportion of the codeword's representation in the original set. By attempting to preserve to the extent reasonable the original proportion of thematically similar ideas in the final statement set, the Planning Group was able to preserve participants' original saturation of the content.

This review facilitated the research team's decision making about which ideas best represented the depth and breadth of the full original set. In addition to content representation, the team also emphasized inclusion of those ideas contributed by both youth and adult participants. The Planning Group also noted which ideas were also generated during the pilot study. In some cases, this insight was used to suggest a key characteristic of teen dating, having appeared in both rounds of data collection and therefore underscoring the need to include the idea in the final statement set, i.e., being deceitful/cheating/sneaking around (86), hitting/slapping/shoving (99). In other cases, the Planning Group noted the reoccurrence of ideas that pilot participants found to be vague or non-specific (i.e., "using their partner"). Other ideas were so similar that they would likely cluster closely on the map and add little to the breadth of characteristics in the framework (i.e., "having sex" and "rushing into sex"). In this scenario, the Planning Group selected one of the statements (having sex, 95) to represent more specific nuances of the construct.

After the Planning Group's initial discussion of each codeword, a few brief iterations of additional review allowed the Group to ensure that decisions made about the content in later codewords was not redundant with decisions made about the codewords discussed earlier in the process. The final 100 ideas therefore represented the Planning Group's consensus understanding of the breadth, depth and saturation of the items originally generated by teen, young adult and adult participants. Each idea in the final set was assigned a number (1 through 100) which served as its unique reference throughout the course of remaining data collection, representation, interpretation and reporting.

## SORTING AND RATING



After finalizing the brainstormed ideas to a set of one hundred, the research team engaged teen, young adult and adult participants in a second round of data collection: the sorting and rating activities. In the sorting activity, participants were asked to individually group the one hundred final ideas into piles based on how they see the ideas as similar or related in meaning. The sort is unstructured, allowing participants to sort the ideas into however many piles and in whatever arrangement they feel best represents their understanding of the relationships within the content. Participants are asked to label each pile in a way that describes how they perceive the commonality among ideas.

In the rating activity, participants were asked to rate each idea on two 4-point Likert scales. Along the Frequency scale, participants were asked to indicate how frequent or common they thought each idea to be in teen dating relationships, where 1= Very uncommon; never occurs, 2= Somewhat uncommon, 3= Somewhat common, and 4= Very common; almost always occurs. Along the Desirability scale, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they would want or desire each idea in a teen dating relationship, where 1= Not at all, 2= Not very much, 3=Some, and 4= A lot.

As with idea generation, a dedicated project website was created for participants to virtually complete sorting and rating. Adult participation was entirely web-based and participants received the instructions and website link via email. The majority of teen and young adult participants also completed these activities using the project website. The research team provided youth-serving organization leaders with flyers that included the website for distribution to interested youth, as well as a list of usernames and passwords to assign to youth participants. Youth participants received a \$10 or \$15 gift card depending on whether they completed one or both of the activities, and the usernames allowed the research team to track individual completion status without knowing participant identity. In some instances, a member of the research team traveled to teen locations to facilitate the sorting and rating activities in person using paper-based cards and ratings forms. Most groups participated virtually, as the website allowed participants to save their progress and return to complete the activities on their own time and at their convenience. For a few groups of teens that regularly met face-to-face, the in-person sorting and rating activities were incorporated as part of their regular meetings to allow all members to take part regardless of web access and availability to complete the tasks outside of the group setting.

In addition to sorting and rating the statements, youth and adults were also asked a number of demographic questions at this phase of data collection. These questions allowed the research team to gauge the diversity of the sample along certain dimensions, and to compare results among participant sub-groups in later ratings analyses. All participants were asked to indicate their age, sex, race and ethnicity. Age was the general cut off used to determine whether a youth participant was considered a teen or young adult. In some cases however, enough information was known about the organizations that recruited the sample to determine whether an 18 year old should be analyzed within the teen or young adult group. For example, in a few cases where recruitment was conducted through college campus organizations, an 18 year old was coded as a young adult for analysis given that it was known that they were no longer in high school. In other cases, job training organizations informed the research team that certain 18-year-old participants had already graduated high school. In these few instances, the participant's social environment (high school vs. graduated high school) was used to make a coding decision (teen vs. young

adult). This decision to favor social environment is supported by the study results, which emphasize the impact of the high school environment on conceptualizations of teen dating relationships. In any instance where no contextual information was provided for an 18 year old, the participant was coded as a teen. As a result, it is possible that some 18 year olds included in the teen sample were out of high school. Youth participants were also asked to provide their zip code and how much experience they have in dating relationships (choices included none, some and a lot). Adult participants were also asked to indicate their professional orientation (choices included advocate, practitioner, research and teacher), as well as whether they were a parent of a teen (14-18 year old) or young adult (19-22 year old) at the time of the study. No other demographic data was collected from participants.

[Appendix III](#) summarizes participant responses to these questions. All sorting, rating and respondent question data was collected between October 2013 and January 2014.

## ANALYSIS

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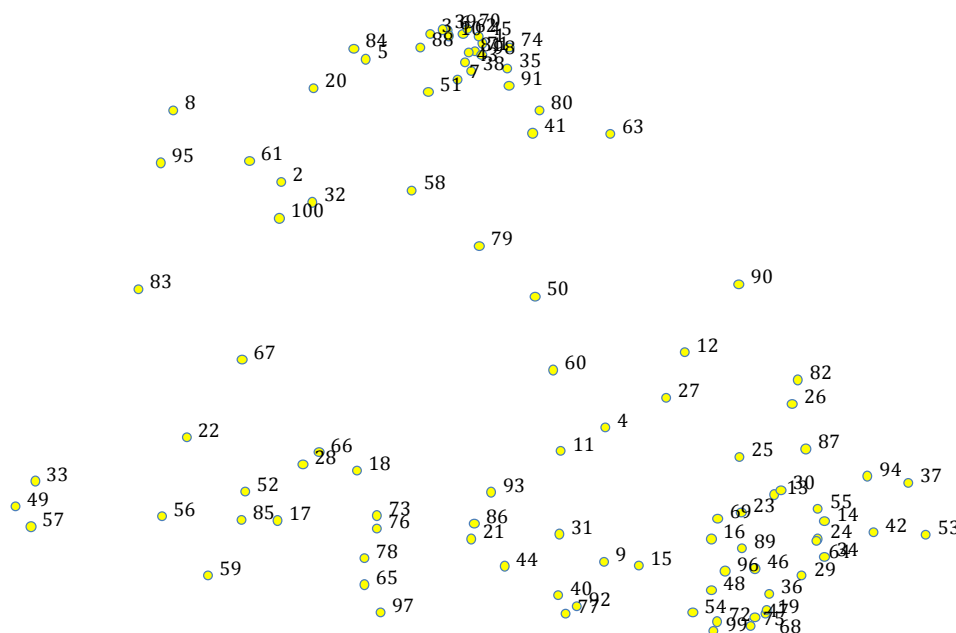
Following data collection, each participant's sorting and rating data was reviewed for completeness and accordance with the activity instructions. From the teen participant group, 50 individual sorts, 147 Frequency ratings, and 122 Desirability ratings were included in the analysis; 41 sorts, 81 Frequency ratings and 74 Desirability ratings were included from the young adult participant group; and 48 sorts, 76 Frequency ratings and 68 Desirability ratings were included from the adult participant group. In concept mapping, it is typical that fewer participants complete the sorting activity than the ratings activities. The sorting activity can be considerably time intensive, taking some participants an hour to complete, and requires deliberate focus on each idea in the context of the entire statement set. Ratings activities are often completed in much less time (20-30 minutes), and require participants to consider each idea independently. Given the greater participant burden of the sorting activity, the discrepant sorting and rating participation rates of this study are consistent with what is typically seen in concept mapping projects. Nevertheless, a pooled analysis of concept mapping projects suggests that a minimum threshold of twenty-five sorting participants is sufficient to develop reliable map results. These sample sizes used in this study, both as a whole and for each of the three groups separately, are well above this threshold, allowing the research team to infer that the sample data provides adequate power to produce meaningful results (Rosas & Kane, 2012).

The research team conducted all concept mapping analyses using the CS Global Max web-based program, which computes the analyses and produces visual representations of the results consistent with the concept mapping process (Kane & Trochim, 2007). We summarize the sequence of multivariate statistics below.

*Analysis of sorting data.* Each individual's sort data is represented as a binary 100 x 100 similarity matrix, where each row and column represents one of the 100 ideas in the final statement set. If a participant sorted ideas 2 and 17 together, a '1' is placed in  $X_{2,17}$ ; if the participant did not sort ideas 2 and 17 together, a '0' is placed in  $X_{2,17}$ . For the present inquiry, a binary 100 x 100 similarity matrix represented the sort data of each participant. These individual matrices were then summed, resulting in a total

similarity matrix. The number in each cell of the total similarity matrix represents the total number of respondents that sorted those two ideas together. The largest possible number in the total similarity matrix is the total number of participants (i.e., all participants sorted those two statements together), and the lowest number is zero (i.e., none of the participants sorted those two statements together). The total similarity matrix therefore represents the extent to which participants as a group collectively agreed that two ideas are related or similar in the context of the research question.

Next, the total similarity matrix was subjected to non-metric multidimensional scaling (MDS). The resultant point map ([Figure 2a](#)) displays each of the 100 ideas in two-dimensional (x, y) space. The stress value produced by MDS is often used diagnostically to assess the goodness-of-fit of a point map, i.e., the extent to which the point map yields a close approximation of the original total similarity matrix. A lower stress value indicates a stronger overall fit (Kruskal, 1964). The stress value of this point map was 0.195, which is well within the range of what is typically considered valid or interpretable in concept mapping (0.17 – 0.34) (Rosas & Kane, 2012). The point map was then subjected to hierarchical cluster analysis, by which statements were grouped together into non-overlapping clusters based on their spatial proximity, allowing the research team to consider the relatively large list of 100 statements within a smaller set of higher-order themes.



**Figure 2a.** This point map displays each of the one hundred statements in two-dimensional space, as a result of the aggregation of all participants' sorting data subjected to multi-dimensional scaling. Each point represents one of the one hundred ideas. Statements that appear closer together on this map tend to be thought of as more conceptually similar by sorting participants than those statements that appear farther apart.

*Analysis of ratings data.* Analysis of the ratings data follows analysis of the sort data so that participants' opinions about the relative frequency and desirability of each of the 100 ideas can be considered in the framework of the resultant cluster map. Ratings data is typically analyzed at two levels: at the cluster level, and at the statement level within a particular cluster. At the cluster level, participants' ratings on the statements within a particular cluster are first averaged for each statement in that cluster. Those statement averages are then averaged with the other statement averages in its cluster. Cluster level averages are calculated for each cluster of a map and along each ratings scale used, in this case Frequency and Desirability. At the statement level, participants' ratings of each statement are averaged and then compared with one another in the context of each statement's cluster. Both statement and cluster level ratings can be used to compare participant opinions along multiple rating scales, and/or to compare the opinions of participant subgroups of interest along a single rating scale. In the Results section below, we demonstrate the representation of ratings' analyses at the cluster and statement levels, as well as the results of sub-group comparisons of interest.

## RESULTS

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The Planning Group conducted a preliminary interpretation of the concept map results on February 5, 2014. This meeting included review of participation, the concept map and ratings analyses, and planning discussions around the logistics and objectives of the subsequent facilitated discussions.

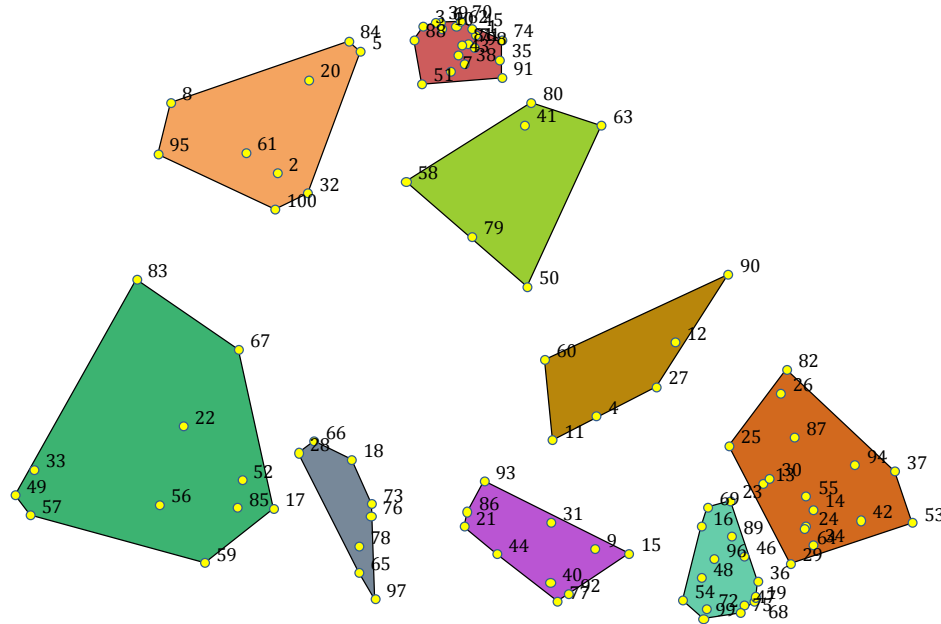
### CLUSTER MAP

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The Planning Group considered multiple cluster arrangements produced by the hierarchical cluster analysis before deciding that a nine cluster solution was optimal for meaningfully interpreting the results ([Figure 2b](#)). Hierarchical clustering of ideas in concept mapping is conducted using Ward's method (Johnson, 1967), which groups together points in an agglomerative process based on their spatial (x,y) proximity. This proximity results from the application of multidimensional scaling to the sort similarity matrix (the prior analytic step). The clustering procedure can provide many different cluster solutions, ranging from considering each statement as its own cluster to considering all of the statements as a single cluster. It is the task of the project team to determine the most interpretable solution for grouping the ideas into a smaller set of themes in a way that is meaningful to the purpose of the project. While nine cluster solutions tend to be the average number of groupings in concept mapping (Rosas & Kane, 2012), the final cluster solution of a given map is highly contextualized and content specific. There are no objective criteria for an optimal solution beyond what project leaders determine best fits the emergent thematic categories of the data.

The research team examined the grouping of the map content across various solutions, beginning with a twenty cluster solution and reviewing the arrangement of the content in a subsequently smaller number of clusters. At each descending stage, the research team considered whether the successive merging of ideas seemed coherent and logical in the context of the project, and ultimately presented to the Planning Group three solutions for consideration and discussion: an 8, 9 and 10 cluster solution. (It was decided that a seven cluster solution or lower combined ideas into shared clusters that seemed to carry important conceptual distinctiveness) Through careful examination of which ideas clustered together differently in

these three solutions, the Planning Group ultimately decided that a nine cluster solution was the most meaningfully interpretable representation of the content, to the extent that each of the nine clusters was qualitatively discernible from one another and seemed to best reflect the collective conceptualization of participants. The Group also compared the point and cluster arrangements of the sort data when analyzed for teens only, young adults only, adults only, and teens and young adults combined. Quantitatively, the sort data (total similarity matrices) across all three groups was highly correlated (**Table 1**).



**Figure 2b.** Following generation of the point map (2a), hierarchical cluster analysis is used to partition the space on the map into non-overlapping territories of conceptual similarity or relatedness. In this case, the Planning Group determined that this nine-cluster solution was the most meaningfully interpretable arrangement of the map content into higher-order themes or constructs.

|              | Teens | Young Adults | Adults |
|--------------|-------|--------------|--------|
| Teens        | 1.000 | 0.902        | 0.871  |
| Young Adults | 0.902 | 1.000        | 0.892  |
| Adults       | 0.871 | 0.892        | 1.000  |

**Table 1.** Correlations of total similarity matrices among participant groups.

Qualitatively, Planning Group members agreed that no significantly meaningful differences were detectable in examining distinct point and cluster maps for each of the three groups. In all scenarios, participants clearly distinguished between the relatively positive and negative ideas, and each statement tended to appear in the same general territory of the map in all three instances. A nine cluster solution produced relatively similar groupings of the ideas in each case, while observed nuances tended to group nearly adjacent points in different clusters. The most notable distinction was in the teen and young adult maps, where ideas in the center of the map tended to cluster with either the more positive or negative

areas of the map more so than they did with one another. When the Planning Group reviewed the labels that youth sorters used to name the piles that included these centrally located ideas, common labels included "it depends," "could be good, could be bad," and other titles that articulated a sense of uncertainty as to whether these ideas clearly belonged with other piles without more information about the context. When the research team reviewed how these ideas were sorted across the map, there was an almost even split among participants who sorted these ideas with the more positive ideas in the northern territory of the map and the more negative ideas in the southern territory of the map. The Planning Group predicted that this theme of context dependency would manifest in more detail during the youth facilitated discussions. (As we discuss in Part II, this theme resonated across youth discussion groups.)

Given the strong degree of similarity across all scenarios of participants' concept maps, the Planning Group agreed that the nine cluster solution that included all participants' sort data would serve as the final representation of the concept map going forward. This nine cluster solution included a centrally located cluster of the ideas that tended to carry a notion of context dependency (especially Cluster 6, *Intense Focus on the Relationship*), such that the structural depiction of this cluster as a cohesive group could also reflect participants' consensus that these ideas may not necessarily belong with other areas of the map.

### LABELED CLUSTER MAP

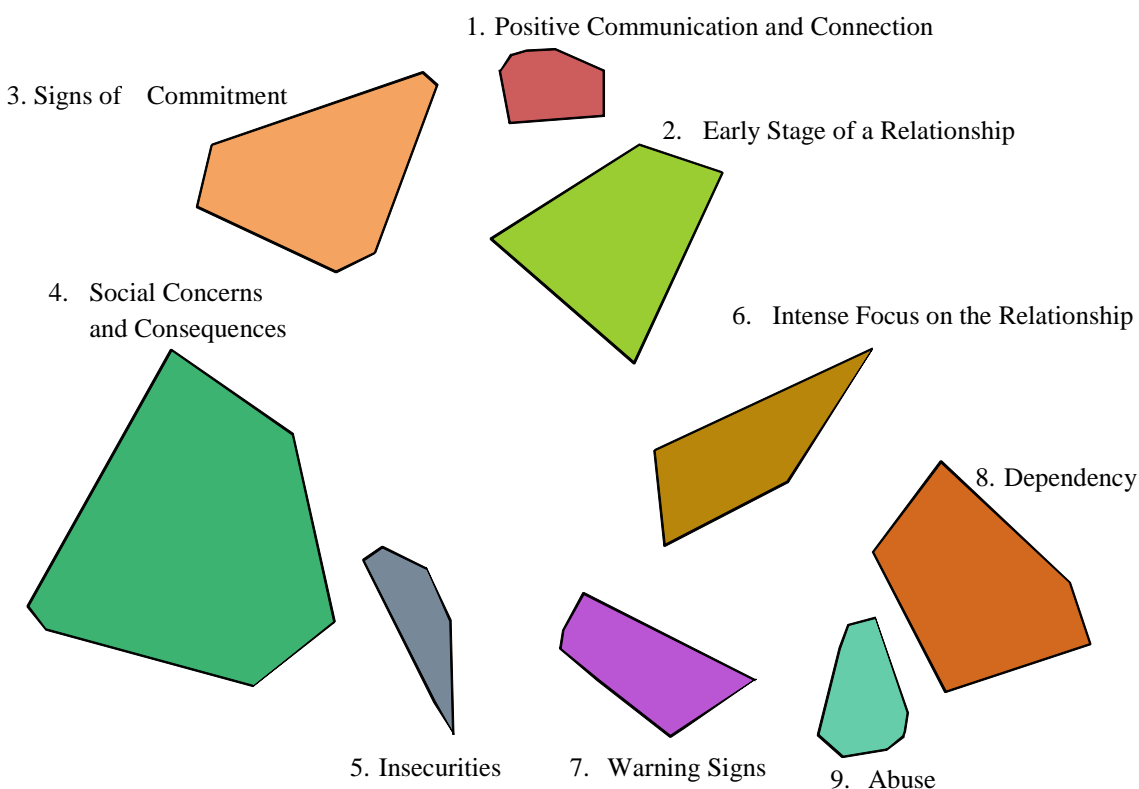
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After agreeing on a nine cluster solution, the Planning Group labeled each cluster so that the detailed interrelationships underpinning the map could be articulated logically as a smaller set of higher-order themes. Each label summarized the emergent theme that Planning Group members identified for each cluster, based on the specific statements in each grouping and the pile labels participants provided in their sorts. These cluster labels served as temporary names only, as the Planning Group used the subsequent youth and practitioner facilitated discussions in part to gather feedback on adolescent perspectives of appropriate labels, based on their understanding of each cluster's distinctive meaning and in the context of teen dating relationships. The Planning Group labels were presented with the concept map results as part of the Advisory Group interpretation webinars and adult facilitated discussions. The Planning Group labels and final map labels that followed from the discussions are shown in **Table 2**. Appendix IV includes a list of statements in each cluster, and [Figure 3](#) displays the final labeled cluster map. The process for arriving at the final labels is discussed in more detail in Part II: Facilitated Discussions.

| Cluster | Planning Group Label          | Final Label                           |
|---------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1       | Communication and Connection  | Positive Communication and Connection |
| 2       | Positive Feelings             | Early Stage of a Relationship         |
| 3       | Signs of Commitment           | Signs of Commitment                   |
| 4       | Judgments                     | Social Concerns and Consequences      |
| 5       | Social and Emotional Stresses | Insecurities                          |
| 6       | Intense Relational Emotions   | Intense Focus on the Relationship     |
| 7       | Warning Signs                 | Warning Signs                         |
| 8       | Dependency                    | Dependency                            |

|   |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|
| 9 | Abuse | Abuse |
|---|-------|-------|

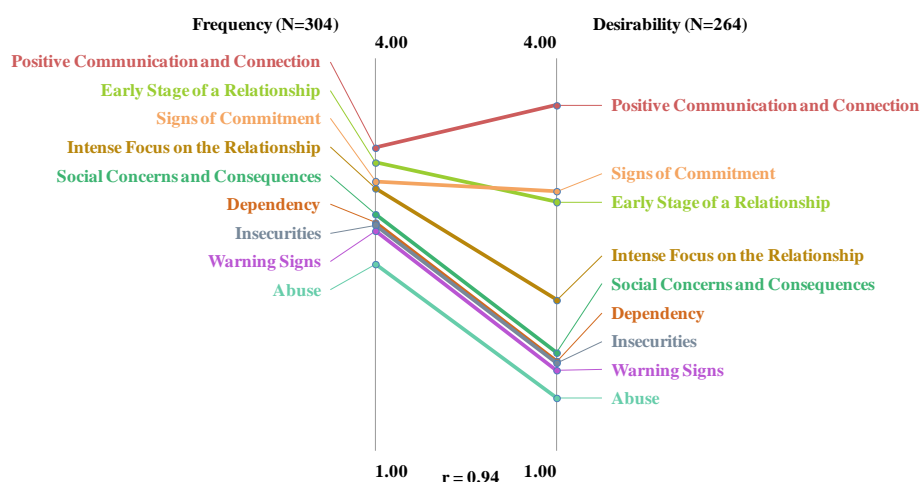
**Table 2.** Cluster labels.



**Figure 3.** This cluster map displays the nine emergent constructs, each labeled based on consensus from teen, young adult and practitioner facilitated discussions as to its meaning, based in its constituent statements and in relation to all other constructs of the map.

#### CLUSTER LEVEL RATINGS: PATTERN MATCHES

At the cluster level, all participants' ratings data was used to compare the average cluster ratings on frequency with those of desirability. The results of cluster-level ratings analyses are represented in a Pattern Match diagram, where the cluster labels are arranged in vertical order on either axis according to highest to lowest average cluster ratings for the given scale (variable) and participant group represented. For example, in [Figure 4a](#) the left axis represents average cluster ratings on the Frequency scale using all participants' ratings data, and the right axis represents average cluster ratings on the Desirability scale also using all participants' ratings data. The cluster *Positive Communication and Connection* appears at the top on both axes, indicating that participants rated the items in this cluster on average as highest on both frequency and desirability relative to the average ratings of the items in the other eight clusters on these scales.

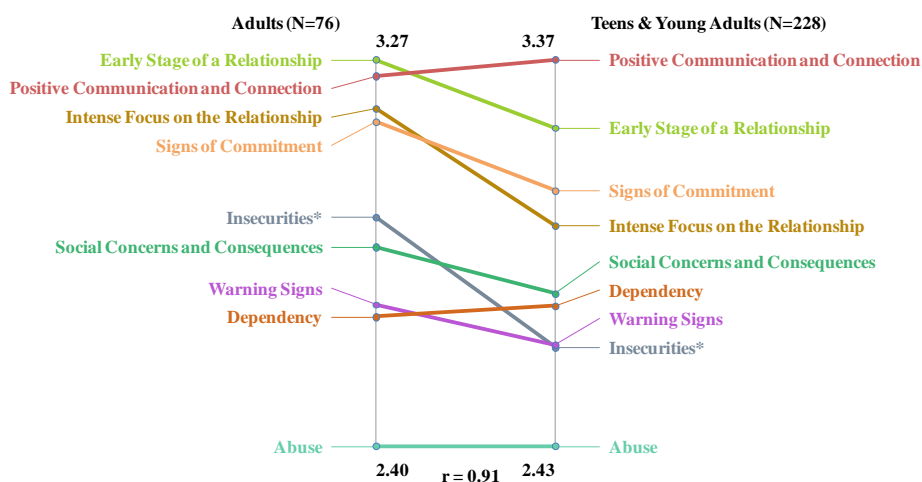


**Fig. 4a.** Pattern match comparing all participants' ratings on frequency compared to desirability at the cluster level.

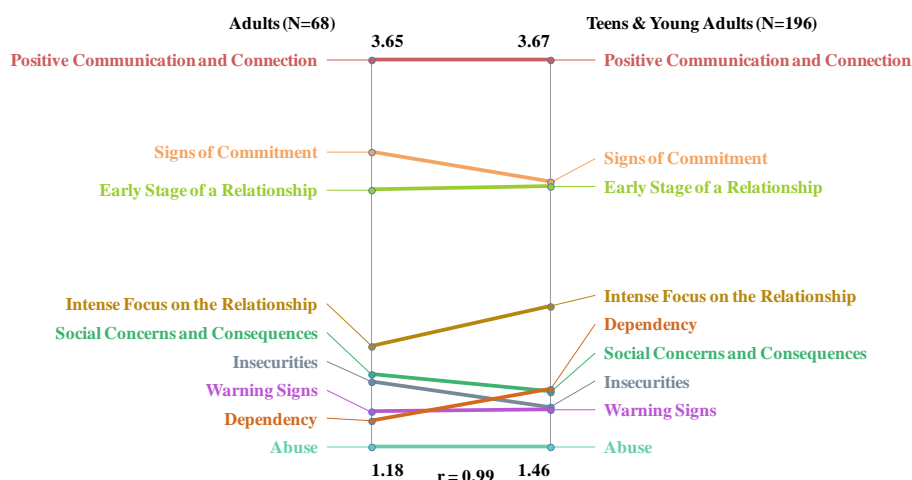
The r-value is a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient ranging from -1.00 to 1.00, which indicates the extent to which the participant perspectives represented on either axis are predictably aligned with one another. In [Figure 4a](#), the r-value 0.94 suggests that participants' perceptions of frequency- at the cluster level- are highly predictably aligned with their opinions of the desirability of the same constructs. In later facilitated discussions, some researchers remarked that the strength of this alignment was consistent with research on social norms, whereby the more common a behavior or attitude, the less of a social violation (undesirable) it is considered. Some youth discussion participants also suggested that the strong correlation may reflect some response bias, particularly among youth, who may have rated the items according to how they *should* perceive the characteristics of teen dating, rather than how common or desirable they *actually* consider them.

Regardless of potential explanations from youth and adults as to why the frequency and desirability alignment was so strong, adult and youth perspectives on each of these scales were also strongly aligned. As Pattern Matches are often used to compare the opinions of participant sub-groups, [Figure 4b](#) shows the comparison of the frequency ratings of adults to those of teens and young adults. Here, we observe another strong correlation ( $r=0.91$ ) indicating overall agreement between adults and youth on the commonality of these items as grouped into these clusters. Nonetheless, we observe a statistically significant difference between adult and youth opinions of the frequency of the items in the cluster *Insecurities* ( $p<0.005$ ), where adults perceive these items as more common than youth. Youth and adult opinions on desirability at the cluster level are even more strongly aligned ( $r=0.99$ ) ([Figure 4c](#)).





**Fig. 4b.** Pattern match comparing adult and youth ratings on frequency at the cluster level.



**Fig. 4c.** Pattern match comparing adult and youth ratings on desirability at the cluster level.

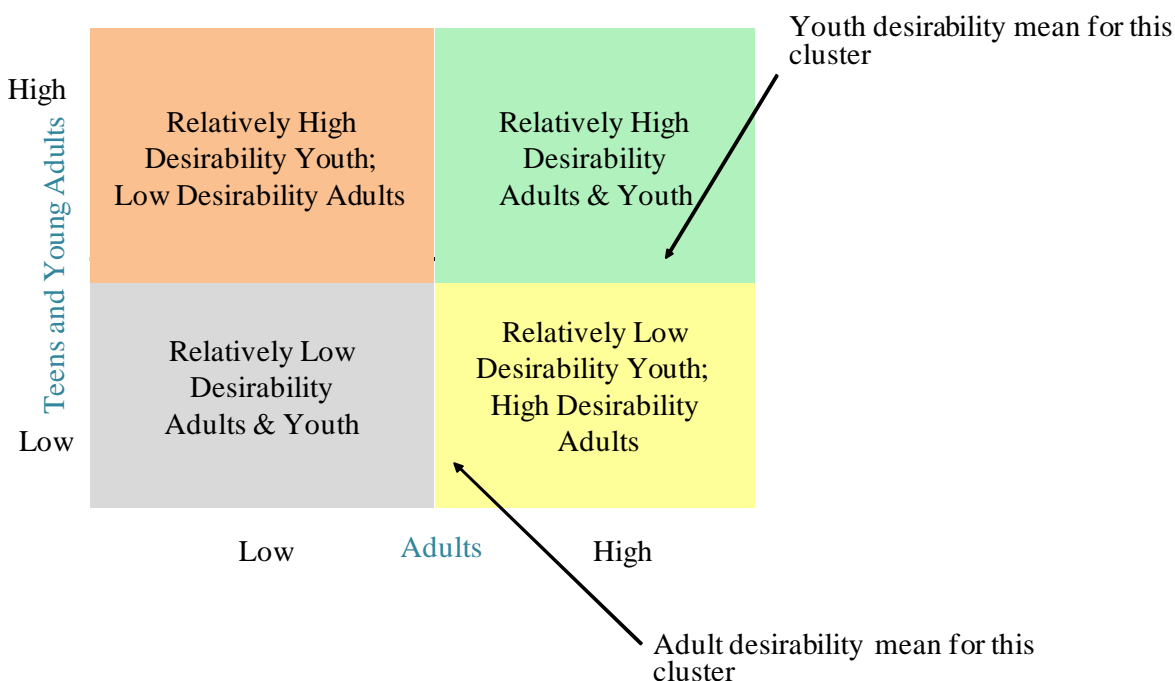
The research team conducted Pattern Match analyses of the cluster level ratings to compare the opinions among various other sub-groups of interest. Overall, the Pattern Match results indicated a high level of agreement across participant sub-groups on both the frequency and desirability of the nine constructs, as all cluster-level correlations were higher than 0.90.

## STATEMENT LEVEL RATINGS: BIVARIATE SCATTERPLOTS

At the statement level, participant opinions of particular ideas are typically averaged and compared within a given cluster. The results of these comparisons are represented as bivariate scatter plots. For the purposes of this project, the research team was particularly interested in comparing opinions of adults to youth (teens and young adults). Given that the correlation was relatively high between all participants'

opinions on frequency and desirability of the map items (0.94 at the cluster level, 0.78 at the statement level), the Planning Group chose to use scatterplots comparing adult and youth opinions on the desirability of the ideas in each cluster in presenting the project results. Whereas opinions on frequency were to some degree a result of knowledge or familiarity with teen dating relationships, opinions on desirability may suggest potential differences in values of certain dating characteristics that may be particularly informative for shaping prevention and education efforts. Statement level ratings analyses also revealed relatively strong agreement among youth and adults, with ratings correlations of 0.83 and 0.95 on frequency and desirability, respectively.

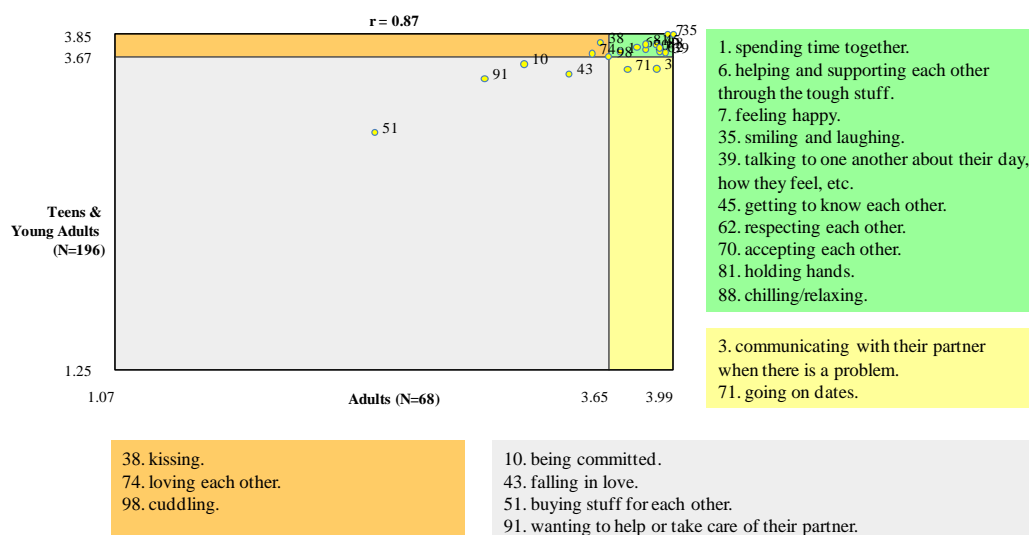
The diagram below illustrates how the bivariate scatterplots visually represents the comparison of youth and adult opinions on the desirability of the statements in a particular cluster. Adult ratings are represented along the x-axis and youth opinions along the y-axis. The x and y axes of each scatterplot are anchored by the highest and lowest average statement ratings on desirability across the entire map for each of the two participant groups (adults along the x-axis and youth along the y-axis.) Quadrants are formed by the intersecting lines, each of which represents the respective participant group's average desirability rating for the particular cluster represented by the scatterplot.



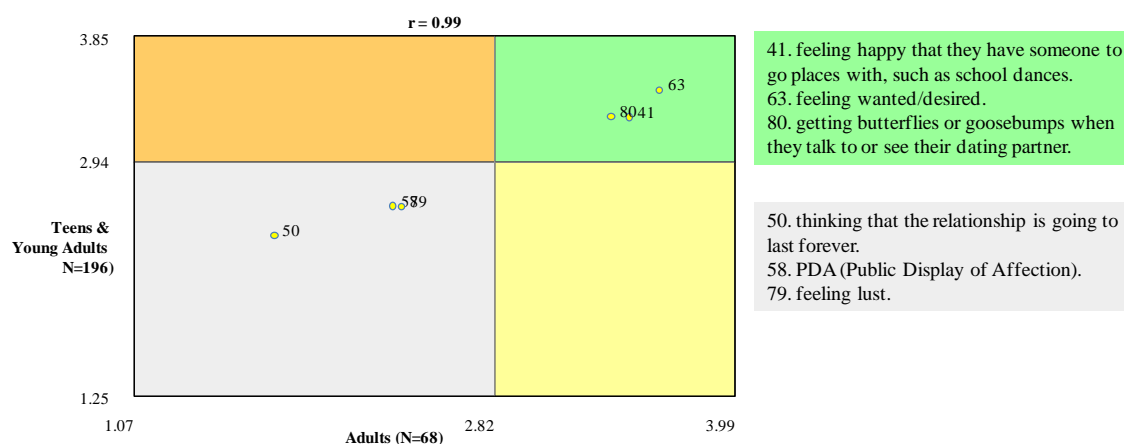
Statements that appear in the green quadrant are those rated above each participant group's respective desirability average for that cluster. Hence, these are statements that both adults and youth perceive as relatively more desirable compared to their perceptions of the other statements in that cluster. Statements in the grey quadrant are those that both youth and adults perceived as relatively less desirable compared to the other statements in that cluster. The orange and yellow quadrants represent areas of differing opinions. Items in the orange quadrant are those that youth perceived as above average and adults as

below average, relative to the desirability means for that cluster; items in the yellow quadrant were rated as above average on desirability by adults but below average by youth. Readers are cautioned, however, to recognize that these quadrant descriptions are based entirely on the means for that cluster, and that oftentimes statements will appear close to the average lines. For those clusters rated relatively high or low on desirability overall, one should also note a statement's position in a scatterplot relative to the entire ratings range (i.e., where it is located along each axis), as items in a highly desirable cluster, for example, may appear in the grey quadrant by virtue of the intersecting lines, but nevertheless be one of the highest rated statements on the map.

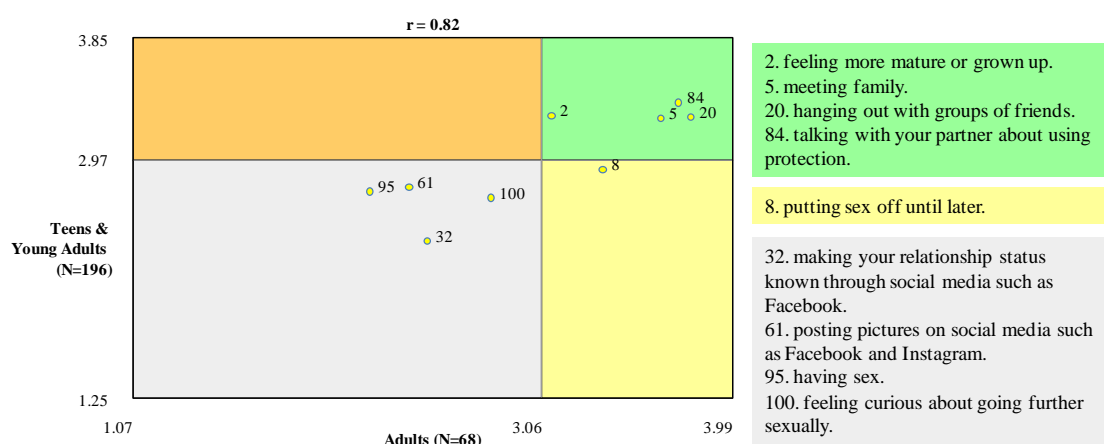
[Figures 5a-i](#) include the bivariate scatterplots comparing youth and adult opinions on the desirability of the items in each of the nine clusters. The Pearson's product correlations ( $r$ ) of most scatterplots indicate moderate to strong alignment among youth (teen and young adult) and adult opinions on the desirability of the statements in each cluster. As such, most statements appear in the green and grey quadrants, indicating agreement among both groups on the relative desirability of the items. Cluster 7, *Warning Signs*, and 8, *Dependency*, (Figures 5g and 5h) are exceptions to this pattern, suggesting some variation in how youth and adults perceive the items in these clusters. Nevertheless, close examination of these two scatterplots reveals that all items are clustered densely around the intersections of cluster means, indicating that the items are in fact rated similarly to one another despite some statements falling in the quadrants indicating relative disagreement on desirability. In this case, the correlations may be low, but the actual closeness in how adults and youth rated these items does not seem to suggest a practically significant misalignment among perspectives.



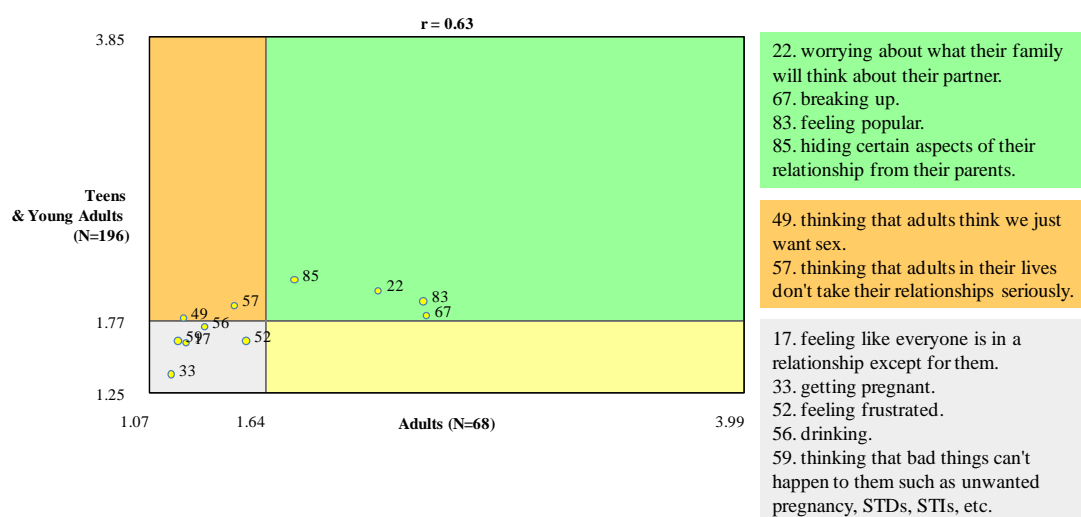
**Fig. 5a.** Scatterplot cluster 1, *Positive Communication and Connection*, Adults compared to Youth on desirability.



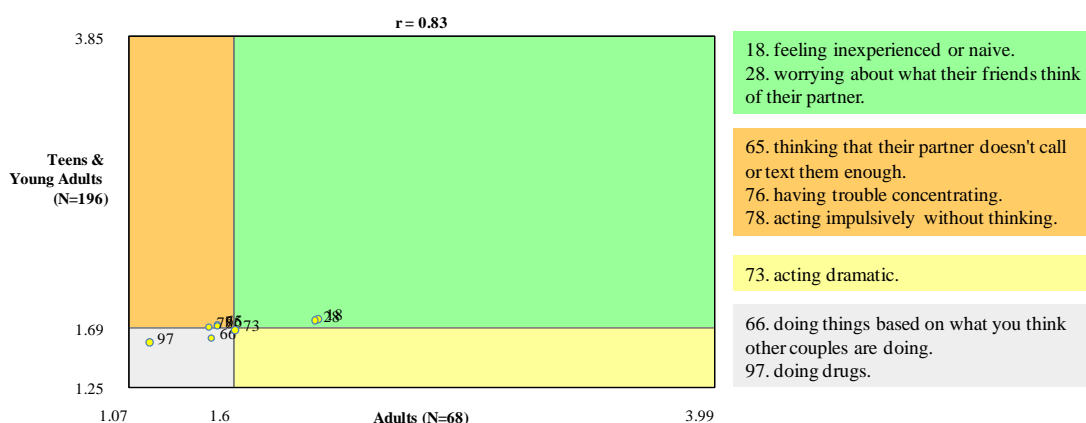
**Fig. 5b.** Scatterplot cluster 2, *Early Stage of a Relationship*, Adults compared to Youth on desirability.



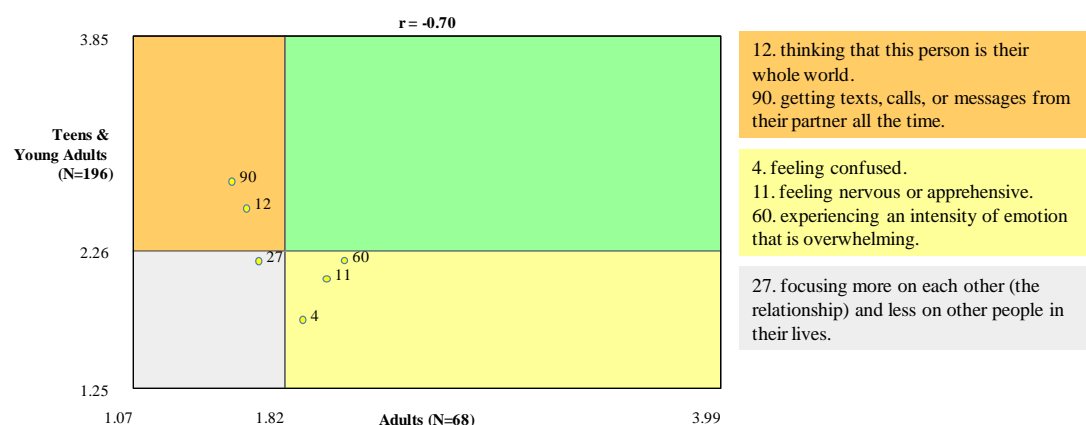
**Fig. 5c.** Scatterplot cluster 3, *Signs of Commitment*, Adults compared to Youth on desirability.



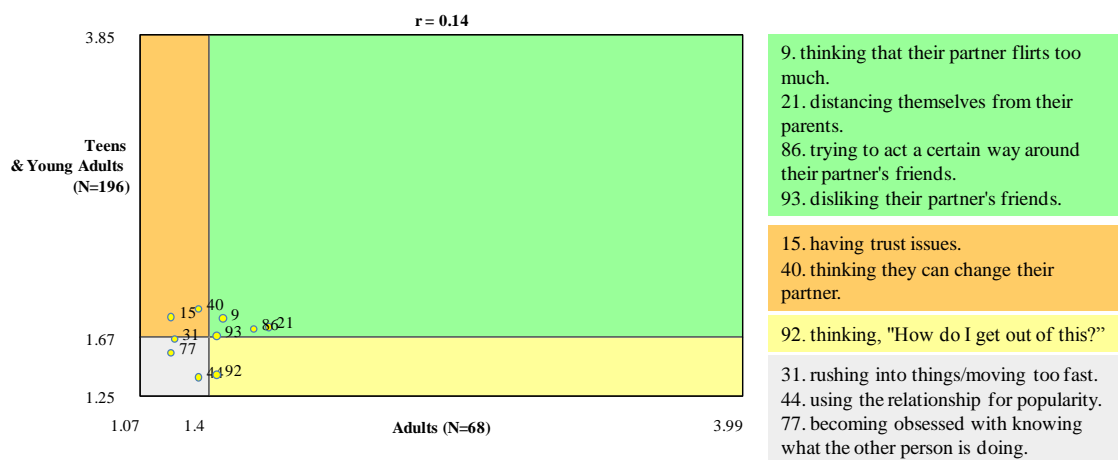
**Fig. 5d.** Scatterplot cluster 4, *Social Concerns & Consequences*, Adults compared to Youth on desirability.



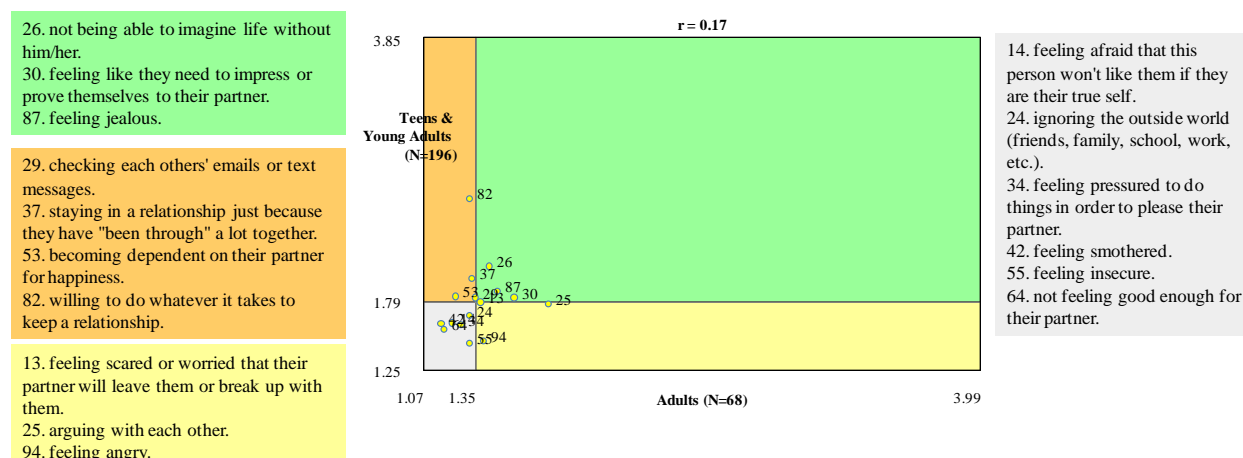
**Fig. 5e.** Scatterplot cluster 5, *Insecurities*, Adults compared to Youth on desirability.



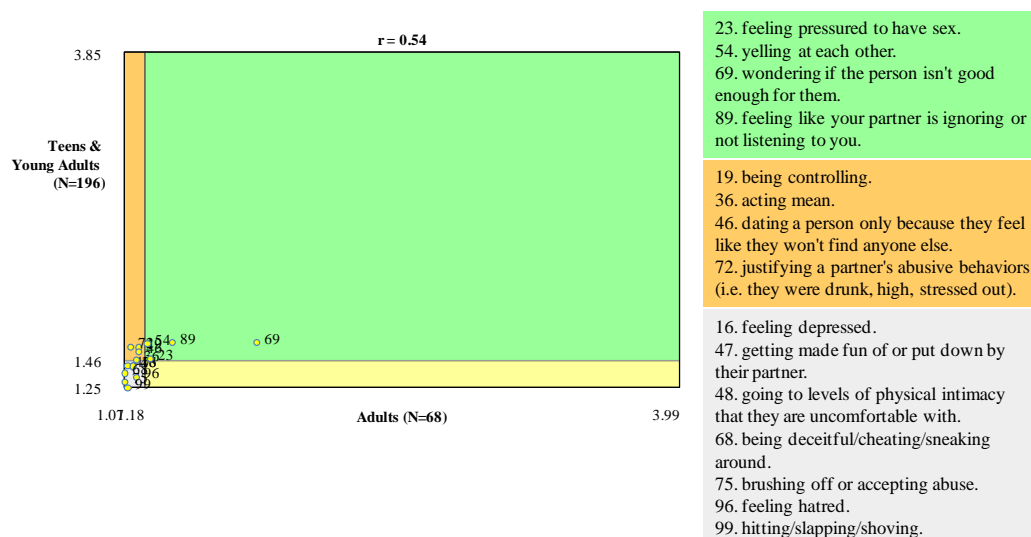
**Fig. 5f.** Scatterplot cluster 6, *Intense Focus on the Relationship*, Adults compared to Youth on desirability.



**Fig. 5g.** Scatterplot cluster 7, *Warning Signs*, Adults compared to Youth on desirability.



**Fig. 5h.** Scatterplot cluster 8, *Dependency*, Adults compared to Youth on desirability.



**Fig. 5i.** Scatterplot cluster 9, *Abuse*, Adults compared to Youth on desirability.

As a cohesive framework of constructs authored by youth and adults, we note that the concept map may be effectively used as a lens for reframing and further exploring other areas of teen dating relationships. We consider the map's use as an organizational framework for both broadly attending to different aspects of teen dating relationships in practice and in research, as well as for advancing existing theoretical approaches. In relation to prominent theoretical strains reviewed earlier, clusters may provide more detailed ideas that could be used in expanding the scope of concepts already included in existing work.

We propose that the map clusters could be viewed as larger territories with particular relevance to broader areas of concentration. Cluster 1, *Positive Communication and Connection*, relates to how teens and youth programs may describe ideal dating relationship characteristics, and may relate to adolescents' sense of satisfaction with their relationship, depending on the extent to which their relationship includes these ideas. Cluster 3, *Signs of Commitment*, suggest how youth conceptualize signs of a more serious relationship, and may be useful concepts for programs to consider in thinking about what youth may

strive for or work toward achieving with their dating partner. From a theoretical perspective, the contents of Cluster 3, *Signs of Commitment*, may be more closely examined to identify ideas that naturally align with prior work on attachment theory as well as expectations of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Likewise Cluster 4, *Social Concerns & Consequences*, links to both developmental-context and attachment perspectives, including ways in which youth experience the prominence of peers as social models and influences (both positively and negatively).

While the peer context is present to varying extents in several clusters, Cluster 2, *Early Stage of a Relationship*, Cluster 5, *Insecurities* and Cluster 6, *Intense Focus on the Relationship* include items specific to the novelty of romantic relationships in adolescent years. Aspects of these clusters would likely be included in characterizing a normative perspective of teen dating relationships, as many of these ideas link to areas of attachment theory and the developmental perspectives that consider how teens' focus shifts from relationships with family to relationships with peers during first experiences with dating partners. These also clusters align with temporal perspectives of development, as they include components of initial transition stages between childhood and early adolescence.

Work on dating violence and aggression relates most overtly to clusters 7, *Warning Signs*, 8, *Dependency*, 9, *Abuse*, though as we later suggest in the Recommendations section, violence prevention programs may benefit from focusing on all cluster of the map since many unhealthy dating relationships include both "ideal" and violent characteristics.

## DISCUSSION

The concept mapping process resulted in strong consensus among youth and adults. At each step of data collection, overall agreement emerged. Teens, young adults and adults generated similar thoughts, actions, feelings and behaviors that teen dating relationships include, allowing for a final set of ideas that represented characteristics generated by all participant groups. Agreement across conceptualizations was evident through the quantitative and qualitative similarity of participants' sorting arrangements. With regard to value judgments, perspectives on the frequency and desirability of the map items were overall strongly aligned across participant groups at both the statement and cluster levels, with the exception that compared to adults, youth perceived *Insecurities* as less common in teens' relationships.

Content closer to the center of the map exhibited more variation in how participants sorted these ideas. This variation was evident across participant groups, suggesting that both youth and adults consider the association of these ideas with other constructs as more dependent on the particular dating situation and difficult to judge in isolation of the context.

As part of the preliminary interpretation meeting, the Planning Group also considered whether the conceptual dimensions that emerged through the pilot were again present in the full study map. The Group agreed that the same dimensions underlie the representation of teen, young adult, and adult conceptualizations. In reviewing how the content changes from the northern area of the map (Cluster 1, *Positive Communication and Connection*) toward the southern area (Cluster 9, *Abuse*), it was clear that the ideas closest to cluster 1 are those that are healthier or more positive aspects of a relationship, while content located closer to cluster 9 is unhealthier and increasingly abusive. This conceptual pattern also corresponds loosely to participants' cluster-level ratings (highest to lowest) of the frequency and desirability of the constructs. After asking youth discussion participants to identify this dimension, all groups agreed that "desirability" or "healthiness" best captured the relative gradation in how the content changes along this dimension.

Perpendicular to the Desirability or Healthiness dimension, the Planning Group again identified an internal/external or public/private dimension, with content located closest to the left-hand side of the representation in [Figure 3](#) (Cluster 4, *Social Concerns & Consequences*) as more public or external, and content located closest to the right-hand side (Cluster 6, *Intense Focus on the Relationship*; Cluster 8, *Dependency*) as more private or internal. In subsequent youth discussions, teens and young adults also articulated this dimension in terms of more behavioral items on the left-hand side, and increasingly emotional and thought-based aspects on the right-hand side. The methodological details and results of these discussions follow in the next section.



## PART 2: FACILITATED DISCUSSIONS

The second part of this study was used to validate and augment the concept mapping results through facilitated discussions with youth and adults. These discussions were intended to better understand some of the complexity underlying teen and young adults' perspectives of the emergent constructs within the context of teen dating and adolescent social life, including how they perceive adults' viewpoints of teen dating relationships as comporting with their own. Discussions with adults were also used to consider potential implications of the concept map results for healthy relationship program development, teen dating violence prevention, and future research in related areas.

### METHODS

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The theoretical premise of facilitated discussions, as they are used in concept mapping, is embedded in three major principles. First, the meaning of things arises out of the social interaction one has with others. Second, the meaning of things are understood and modified through an interpretative process by the individual. Finally, individuals act and respond to things based on the meaning those things hold for them. These principles have been drawn from various sources of discussion facilitation (Hogan, 2005; Stanfield, 2000), and represent the key assumptions that guide their use as supplementary and augmentative frameworks for post-concept mapping interpretive data collection.

While very similar to focus groups, facilitated discussions differ somewhat in that they are purposefully used to arrive at some level of consensus among participants on a particular set of issues. Focus groups are typically structured more like interviews, and do not necessarily include intentional room for dialogue among participants (Patton, 1990). In contrast, a facilitated discussion is a tool that is used to improve the quality of communication by employing techniques to support cooperative discussion and create a common perspective and to enhance understanding of a topic. The facilitator's responsibility is to lead the group process, and to help groups stay on task and be more creative, efficient, and productive than they would be without such help (Schwartz, 1994).

### PARTICIPANT SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT

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The research team conducted twelve facilitated discussions total, spread across each of the three participant groups sampled in the concept mapping process: four with adults, four with teens (ages 14-18), and four with young adults (ages 19-22). Two adult discussions included researchers and academics with active interest in investigating adolescent health and development, teen dating violence, intimate partner violence, and related areas. Two other adult discussions included practitioners and advocates, many of whom held leadership positions in youth programming that focused on healthy relationship education, dating violence intervention and prevention, and resource centers for adolescent youth. Researchers, practitioners and advocates were recruited largely through Planning and Advisory Group members who nominated colleagues in their professional networks. A fifth adult discussion was conducted with federal employees that comprised the Federal Interagency Workgroup on Teen Dating Violence.

The research team had several goals in recruiting teen and young adult facilitated discussion participants. As with the concept mapping recruitment, the research team strived to recruit youth from various geographic locations and a combination of groups that did and did not focus explicitly on healthy relationship development. Several other youth recruitment goals emerged from the Planning Group's interpretation of the concept mapping results. First, because the majority of youth concept mapping participants were female (70%), the research team decided to recruit, to the extent possible, discussion groups that could include a mix of male and female youth. Second, the research team aimed to identify groups that served youth from a range of socioeconomic statuses. LGBTQ youth was an additional perspective not explicitly captured in the concept mapping process but that was thought to be important to include in the facilitated discussions. Finally, the research team aimed to recruit youth groups that both had and had not also participated in the concept mapping process to explore the extent to which the results and their interpretation resonated across a broader youth sample.

For both youth and adults, the study design did not include formal collection of discussion participant demographic information in the same way that the concept mapping activities did (i.e., sex, race, ethnicity, zip code). Nonetheless, we provide some contextual information on the youth discussion groups with regard to geographic location: one teen and one young adult discussion in Boise, ID; one teen and one young adult discussion in Austin, TX; one teen and one young adult discussion in Hayward, CA; one teen discussion in Greenfield, MA; one young adult discussion in Ann Arbor, MI. Approximately half of these organizations were explicitly focused on healthy relationship development, although their organizational leaders recruited youth participants from both within and outside of the organization, ensuring a more diverse sample with regard to program experience. Other organizations that participated were resource centers for youth, community centers, and community colleges. Apart from the absence of individual demographics, our facilitation experiences allow us to state that most groups were mixed sex (male and female) and mixed race (mostly white and black), with few groups either mostly or all white or black. Multiple groups included teens and/or young adults that identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

## AGENDA AND QUESTION DEVELOPMENT

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The professional facilitated discussion agenda and questions were developed primarily through discussion with the Planning Group, with the goal of understanding implications of the results for research, practice, program development and policy. These discussions were conducted as webinars to allow participants from disparate locations to join. Prior to conducting the webinars, the research team pilot tested the agenda and questions with the project Advisory Group to ensure that the discussion efficiently elicited the anticipated feedback across the range of topics. For each webinar, the research team reviewed the project purpose, concept mapping process and results, before posing a set of questions to prompt interpretive discussion ([Appendix V](#)).

Teen and young adult discussions included a modified review of the concept map results. The analytic aspects of the process were simplified, and the focus was largely on the cluster arrangements and the overall agreement and slight nuances between youth and adult ratings. Several of the same questions about the cluster map used in the project pilot were used again these discussions. Some modifications

were made to explicitly focus the discussion on comparing the perspectives of youth and adults. Appendix VI includes the full list of the guiding questions used in facilitating the youth discussions.

## ANALYSIS

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The same member of the research team facilitated all youth discussions. In addition to the facilitator, a note taker was present to record typewritten notes on the content of each discussion. Discussion notes included verbatim recording of participant dialogue to the extent possible, however all notes were taken in a confidential manner with no disclosure of participant name, age, or other potentially identifying information. Three different note takers were involved across the eight youth discussions, with one individual present at three discussions (two young adult, one teen), another individual present at three (one young adult, two teen), and another individual present at two (one young adult, one teen).

Immediately following each discussion, the facilitator also documented their own impressions of key themes that transpired over the course of dialogue, as well as quotes or other language (often noted by hand over the course of the discussion) that illustrated well the group's consensus on or perspectives of particular topics or questions. The combination of a single facilitator and multiple note-takers allowed for the convergence of four perspectives on the key themes that emerged from the discussions, with the facilitator providing a "birds-eye" perspective of similarities and differences across all discussion groups, and note takers being able to confirm or disconfirm the salience and interpretation of discussion outcomes. This process also allowed for reliability to be managed across the various teams present at each discussion. Following each discussion, the facilitator and note taker compared their impressions of key themes. After each note taker had been present for more than one discussion, the facilitator and note taker also discussed the commonalities and distinctions across discussions.

This iterative process allowed for codes to be developed inductively, in a similar fashion to the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The facilitator generated an initial set of codes after the first three discussions, and continued to refine the list based on the outcomes of each subsequent discussion and based on each debrief with the respective note taker. Throughout this process, some more general codes were revised into more specific categories if later discussions shed light on patterns of more nuanced themes within the broader code. In other instances more specific codes were generated during the first few discussions were combined into broader themes, as subsequent discussion groups conveyed less distinction among the original codes. In this manner, the validity of codes was managed throughout the discussion series. The research team used the extent to which a group's dialogue alluded to a particular code in order to judge the extent to which the concept resonated broadly with youth's understanding of teen dating relationships. Codes were refined accordingly.

As the adult discussions included notably less dialogue (explained in the subsequent results section), the more extensive framework of youth codes were also used as a basis for comparing the extent to which adult discussion themes converged or diverged with those of youth. As we convey in the Results section, most adult commentary could be linked to the themes that arose in the youth discussions. Other themes less relevant are more specific to the unique questions asked of adults, including directions for future

research and programming and practice implications. These responses are summarized as direct results of the questions asked.

The final code list included ten themes that were ultimately used to summarize the discussion content. These themes are used in the following Results section as an organizational framework for presenting the youth discussion outcomes.

## RESULTS: YOUTH FACILITATED DISCUSSIONS

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The following section summarizes the results of the youth facilitated discussions through descriptions of key emergent themes. These themes are loosely ordered as they most closely relate to one another, however the order does not reflect relative emphasis or importance as part of the discussions.

### CLUSTER REVIEW AND VALIDITY

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Following the facilitator's orientation to the project and process, all teen and young adult discussions began with a review of the ideas in each cluster. Groups reviewed the nine clusters sequentially, beginning with Cluster 1, *Positive Communication and Connection*, and concluding with Cluster 9, *Abuse*. After a volunteer participant read aloud the ideas in a cluster, the facilitator asked the group to pause for dialogue on the major themes of the grouping and to suggest a cluster label. Whereas the final cluster labels used throughout this report reflect the input and overall consensus drawn from across the youth discussions, several themes from the cluster reviews also warrant attention.

First, all youth groups immediately identified a shift from relatively positive content in Clusters 1, 2, and 3 to more questionable or unfavorable ideas in Clusters 4, 5, and 6. While youth generally discussed the first three clusters with regard to romance, love, and healthy relationship characteristics, each group was quick to describe the subsequent three clusters in terms of negativity, and unhealthy or problematic relationship behavior. Only after reviewing the ideas in the later three clusters (which include more overtly dangerous or abusive ideas), would youth typically revise their evaluations of the earlier clusters to describe their impressions in a less critical tone. Oftentimes teens and young adults would note aspects of these clusters as "normal parts of relationships," and containing ideas that "could be good or bad" depending on the specific frequency or intensity of its occurrence. As many youth pointed out, getting texts, calls or messages from your partner all the time (90) could be welcomed attention for some teens, while in other instances could be considered obsessive or stalking behavior. In some discussions, participants also observed a sense of imbalance in some of the ideas and clusters. For example, in cluster 8, *Dependency*, some youth remarked that the ideas conveyed more of a "one-way" relationship, and less of the more mutual, reciprocal ideas in other clusters (i.e., spending time together (1), getting to know each other (45)).

Second, almost all groups described the progression through the clusters with references to "stages" or "phases" of a relationship, a descriptive theme that also arose in the pilot discussions. Clusters 1 and 2 were often referred to with terms such as "the honeymoon stage," "first love," "the beginning," or "puppy

love phase”, while Clusters 7, 8, and 9 were talked about as “the end,” “fright stage,” or “time to get out.” Some participants explained Cluster 6 as “the decision point” or “the neutral stage when you could still turn things around.” Other youth described relationships that “bounce back and forth between the good clusters and the bad clusters,” also referred to as “yo-yo” or “on again-off again” relationships.

Participants carried this temporal orientation throughout the discussion, often seamlessly weaving references to particular clusters in offering examples of dating situations to support their thoughts about other discussion questions. Examples included statements such as, “I was mostly in Cluster 1 when I was in high school,” “Cluster 3 is where my relationships fits right now,” and “I have a friend who is stuck in Cluster 8 and can’t get out.”

Despite the tendency for youth to characterize the clusters as stages, some individuals also pointed out the misalignment between considering specific clusters in isolation and what actual occurs in many relationships. Indeed, several teens and young adults observed that teen dating relationships likely include elements from multiple clusters at any given point in time. As one young adult noted, “The way the language is presented here [in the clusters] makes it easy to recognize what is good and bad, but it in a real relationship there is a mixture of things from all of the clusters which can make some of the [bad things] hard to recognize.”

Though the research team did not anticipate cluster discussion to substantially extend beyond the label suggestions, these observations lend credence to the validity of teen dating characteristics as organized in these groupings. While most groups suggested some additional items for the map, participants in all eight discussions expressed general concordance with the map content and confirmed its overall completeness in describing thoughts, actions, feelings or behaviors in teen dating. Teens and young adults were able to match aspects the cluster arrangements to their own experiences with ease, and almost effortlessly use the concept map as an organizing framework for answering many of the facilitator's more abstract questions about dating that did not specifically probe the map. The project team uses this observation to support the conceptualization results as a robust basis for future work with youth, emphasizing how the ideas and constructs authored by a convenience sample in Phase I also resonate with a broader group of discussion participants in Phase II.

## MISSING CONTENT

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Among the ideas that youth mentioned as missing, several groups discussed insufficient representation of peer pressure as a key influential element of dating relationships. As teens in one group explained, “Friends have a direct influence on dating. They might ask ‘Why are you dating that person?’ or even pressure someone to get into a relationship even if they don’t want to, just because ‘everyone is dating.’” Young adults, too, stated that “friends are huge factors in making or breaking a relationship. They will sometimes try on purpose to make you break up with someone.”

Likewise, in another group, teens conveyed that the idea of “pressure” is more pervasive and all-encompassing than its specific association with drinking and sex in the concept map. Pressure, from their

perspective, is more of “just a general thing in dating.” Some young adults specifically described social acceptance as underlying all areas of the map, explaining that concerns and anxieties about one’s reputation in school and what others think and say about them tend to drive teens’ decisions and behaviors around dating.

Other participants noted the absence of content related to “working through things” or “going through a rough spot.” Similarly, a young adult group discussed the need to include a sense of uncertainty around when the relationship should be over, or whether the couple should attempt to “work through a rough patch” and stay together. While youth referred to “rough patches” in qualifying judgment around some of the relatively negative clusters, several participants also suggested its explicit inclusion in the map.

One teen group mentioned the notion of “denying a relationship” to be pertinent, explaining that in some cases one partner denies or refuses to acknowledge the dating relationship publically or in certain social settings. Young adults in another group spoke about false allegations of abuse in dating relationships, as well as birth control sabotage and spreading rumors about a partner having an STD. One teen group talked specifically about the use of social media as a means to hide or passively communicate while in a relationship. Examples included breaking up via text message or asking someone to the prom or on a date through Facebook.

Others noted feelings of empowerment or control as relevant for including in the map, as well as maintaining a sense of independence while in a relationship. In one group, participants emphasized the lack of content around children, including the challenges of dating someone when one or both partners have children, and/or having children with a partner as part of a teen dating relationship.

Although youth discussions confirmed overall validity of the map in describing dating relationships, multiple groups suggested that the map might be different for different categories or types of teen romantic relationships. Whereas this map seemed to resonate with the characteristics of a couple that is exclusively dating one another, other concepts might be present if the study asked specifically about first dates, casual dating, “just hooking up,” or “friends with benefits.” Another group discussed “yo-yo relationships” or “on again, off again” as types of teen dating that could have been specified as an item in the map, or thought of as a separate category of dating.

In some cases, missing content may be considered more specific or nuanced cases of concepts already included on the map. In other instances, researchers and practitioners may be able to align the missing content with an existing cluster. The validity of these hypothetical placements, however, would need to be confirmed through additional discussion with youth.

## SELF-AWARENESS AND UNHEALTHY OR ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

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In most discussions, participants explicitly mentioned a lack of self-awareness for teens in dating relationships. Whereas teen and young adults were able to clearly distinguish between positive and negative aspects of dating relationships, youth continuously noted challenges around teens’ ability to recognize this distinction while in their own relationships. “Teens can’t step back and see the lines



between healthy and unhealthy,” one young adult explained. “It’s just you and them [your partner], thinking your relationship is so special and blocking out everything else.”

Youth also recognized these challenges as contributing to the incidence of unhealthy or abusive dating relationships. “It’s hard to see it [abuse] when you are ‘in it.’ The lines can be really blurry,” a young adult stated. “You can’t always tell when you’re in a bad relationship if you’ve never been in one. You might keep focusing on the positive things.” Teen groups also echoed the tendency to “cling to the good memories,” especially for people in their first relationships. Groups discussed teens’ resistance to end relationships as part of an effort to “seem more mature” or “to prove they are mature by working through things like adults.” Much related to statement 50, thinking the relationship will last forever, some teens mentioned the notion of getting past an unhealthy or rough patch as a sign that the relationship is “meant to be.” Others noted the high school context as a contributing factor. “Teenagers will stay in a relationship just because they don’t want to be seen as alone. No one wants to go to a school dance alone.”

## FRAME OF REFERENCE

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All groups noted peers and their own dating experiences as their primary frames of reference in thinking about typical characteristics of teen dating relationships. Some participants also mentioned pop culture and social media as influential sources, including reality television shows, music, and celebrity posts on Facebook and Instagram. Others discussed their parents’ and older siblings’ relationships as additional important references for relationship behavior. One group discussed extensively anime, fan fiction, and fan art as sources of relationship models. Across all youth groups, however, these frames of reference were discussed as secondary to the influence of peer networks and individuals’ personal dating history. As one teen stated, “Nothing you see on social media is as influential as what you see happening in school.”

## HIGH SCHOOL CONTEXT

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Intensity of the high school social environment and its impact on teens’ dating experiences was a major theme that emerged in all discussions, perhaps not surprisingly given teens’ emphasis on peers as a primary frame of reference. Interestingly, teens’ sentiments around the “drama” of high school were confirmed by young adults in separate discussions, even though the facilitator did not ask any groups to directly comment on the topic. As one teen offered, “Teens love the drama of relationships. It fills some void. People like to take all of their relationship problems and make it their life.” Another teen stated: “Teens want drama because it makes them feel important when people make a fuss over them. For a lot of people in high school, everything is about relationships. If there is no drama, there is no relationship.”

Many youth also commented that teenage years are a time when they are trying to gain independence from their parents, and therefore become increasingly dependent on their friends and dating partners. This explanation was often provided in response to discussion of youth rating Cluster 8, Dependency, as relatively more frequent and desirable than adult participants. Teens expressed the belief that adults have a greater sense of individuality and security that evolves with dating experience, such that when a relationship ends they know that “life will go on.” Although teens were able to articulate this perspective

around adult relationships, they still described the social and emotional stresses and insecurities associated with high school as at times overwhelming and all-encompassing. As one participant described, “In high school, you are stuck in this small box with only so many people you can date, fear of being judged by others, and pressure to fit in. But as an adult, there are a lot more ‘fish in the sea.’ You don’t think in that small box anymore. So many other things matter.”

Others suggested that the relatively short duration of many high school relationships contributes to the “drama.” Some participants described teen relationships as “fast,” oftentimes beginning and ending within a few days or weeks. The emotional intensity of the relationships can be magnified when the relationship cycle occurs within a more narrow time span. “[Teens] get really depressed after a break up. Emotions are so raw in high school and no one knows what to do. You need someone to tell you that you will move on, that this one relationship is not the only thing.”

Beyond the specific ideas in Cluster 8, the concept of dependency was discussed more broadly in terms of teens’ reliance on cues from the school context to make decisions, and in emphasizing this reliance as something that changes after high school. “In high school, you base all of your decisions off of what is going on in your environment,” one young adult noted. “It’s all about popularity. People stay in their group. Geeks stick with geeks, cheerleaders stick with cheerleaders. Then you get to college and you don’t even know who the geeks and cheerleaders are. It’s more open and people can be themselves more [than they could in high school.]” Participants in another young adult group noted, “Teens don’t see the bigger picture. Young adults, especially those in college, are hit with the reality that what they are doing now will set them up for the rest of their lives, so relationships become less of a focus. You start to realize that updating your relationship status on Facebook is not your biggest issue.”

In light of this consensus across youth groups, young adults tended to distinctively describe the ideas in Cluster 2, *Early Stage of a Relationship*, in terms of “a high school relationship,” “stuff you do in high school,” “very teenager,” “a younger relationship” or similar ways that denoted a sense of immaturity or naiveté associated specifically with the high school years. Whereas teen participants also noted a sense of inexperience in this cluster, their label suggestions were more heavily related to the notion of the beginning of a relationship or a first love. This slight difference between age groups’ perceptions of Cluster 2 may suggest that following high school or teenage years, youth associate themselves less with the sentiments of lust and excitement represented by this construct. It may in fact be the case that these specific ideas are more notably present or magnified within the high school context or, as some young adults pointed out, tend to fade with dating experience and maturity more generally. Indeed, several teen and young adult participants felt that prior experiences with dating relationships were more influential on one’s current decision making and behavior in dating relationships than age alone.

## WHAT YOUTH THINK ADULTS THINK

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Several common themes emerged across youth discussions in relation to their perceptions of adult perspectives. Especially prominent was a sense of judgment by adults against teens in general, particularly on the topic of dating relationships. Many teens expressed the feeling that adults do not take their relationships seriously, but rather see them as “experiments” or “rebellion.” Some participants went



on to describe these feelings as reasons why they choose not to discuss their relationships with their parents or other adults, and instead rely mainly on their peers for relationship advice.

Nonetheless, most youth reacted with little surprise to the high degree of conceptual and ratings similarity among youth and adult. In several instances, youth explained that “love is love,” and that it is “basic human nature to group these [ideas] this way” (with reference to the cluster map). Some youth suggested that participants of any age would likely sort and rate the ideas similarly, implying that these activities were more an exercise of distinguishing right from wrong than anything especially specific to teen dating. Still, in accounting for the concordance in results, almost all groups offered the explanation that “they [adults] were teenagers once, too.” Youth assumed that adults drew on their own teenage experiences when sorting and rating, recollecting how they as youth would think about dating relationships.

Additionally, many youth discussed their perceptions of adult relationships as not being particularly different from their own. Several of the map concepts, including abuse, were noted by youth as issues that adults also grapple with in their own romantic relationships. As teens in one group stated, “A lot of adults judge teen relationships as being unhealthy, violent or not serious, but a lot of these things [on the map] can happen even in marriages. Adults think just because they are experienced they can tell teens what they should do, but really a lot of adults can’t find answers to their own relationship problems.” Similarly, in a young adult group, participants remarked: “There are plenty of adults that *don’t* leave an abusive relationship, and plenty of teens that *do* get out [of an abusive relationship-].” (Emphasis their own)

Youth discussed these perceived parallels between adult and teen relationships to support both their expectations of similarity in the concept map results, as well as a caution that perhaps adults’ judgment of youth is unwarranted or holds teen relationships to a double standard. This idea arose in one adult discussion, where a practitioner explicitly suggested that engaging adults in a similar exercise to map characteristics of their own relationships might reveal striking resemblance to the teen dating map. This type of comparison could potentially help to reset adult assumptions about teen dating that inhibit open communication with youth on this topic, or that contribute to teens’ perceptions of being judged by adults.

Finally, when the facilitator asked youth their opinions on why adults rated Cluster 5, *Insecurities*, as significantly more frequent than teens and young adults, participants in multiple groups discussed an overall tendency for adults to notice these aspects of teen relationships more so than youth themselves. Some youth explained that parents “pay more attention to the negative stuff” in teenagers’ relationships, and therefore think the ideas in this cluster occur more often than they actually do. Participants remarked that their parents are much more likely to ask if something is *wrong* in relation to their dating partner, than they are to ask about what is going well. “Parents see the drama-side with their kids,” one teen explained. “They think this stuff [ideas in Cluster 5] is more common because this is what they hear their kids complaining about.” Some young adults also considered this difference in the Cluster 5 ratings as more reflective of teens’ naiveté around the actual level of social stresses and insecurities that are present

in their relationships. “Teens just aren’t aware of how often these things happen. They think they are normal so they don’t notice how common they actually are in their own relationships.”

### “ABSTINENCE IS DEAD.”

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While the facilitator did not explicitly ask youth to comment on sex, a focus on this topic emerged as part of some groups’ discussion of adult conceptualizations. Teen participants tended to emphasize that sex is far more common than adults seem to think it is or want it to be, and can be part of any type or phase of teen dating relationships despite the statement’s location in the cluster *Signs of Commitment*. As one group expressed, “Sex is a partying thing that teens use just for fun to see if they like each other. It’s not necessarily meaningful or done out of love.” Similarly, teens in another group commented that “sex could really be in every cluster of the map, in some form.” Whereas adults and youth might idealize sex as part of a more serious, long-term relationship, teens conveyed that sex is far less tied to emotions, moral values or commitment as some may generally think, and happens throughout a relationship regardless of other behaviors or emotions that are present simultaneously. As one young adult group noted, teens with less dating experience might share this ideal with adults, but will “learn very quickly that if you really like someone, there is no putting off sex until later. Abstinence is dead.”

Despite this general perception by youth, the concept map suggests a different story. Adults and youth rated the frequency of statement 95, “having sex,” very similarly, with mean ratings of 3.04 by adults and 3.13 by youth. Various factors may explain this discordance between youth assumptions about adult perspectives and the actual adult ratings results. First, most adults that took part in the concept mapping activities included researchers and practitioners in the field. It may be the case that these adults were already familiar with the frequency of sex in teen dating, given their professional familiarity with adolescent development. It is possible that a sample of parents unaffiliated with this topic may report lower frequency. Second, it is possible that teens underestimate adults’ knowledge of sex in teen relationships as a consequence of generally poor communication with parents, teachers, and other adults in their lives. A sense of being judged by adults may contribute to a more overarching assumption that adults lack understanding of what teen dating relationships are actually like, even though the results of this project suggest otherwise. Further, as much of the messaging that youth receive in school settings places emphasis on sex education, decision-making and safe sex, teens may conclude that adults are unaware of how routine sexual behavior actually is in adolescent relationships. As many youth said, “sex is just not a big deal.” Although this theme permeated the majority of youth discussions, future research may consider the extent to which these attitudes toward sex are in fact pervasive, and how certain contextual factors play a role in shaping these opinions, including environmental cues from peers and other sources of messaging.

### GENDER NORMS

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Review of ratings data comparing male and female perspectives often prompted discussion around common expectations of gender specific dating behavior. Most youth reasoned that the high degree of similarity across male and female ratings was not surprising, and could be tied to an innate ability of most youth to distinguish what one should and should not consider desirable or report as frequent. Like youth’s explanations of concordance among adults and youth, agreement across genders was often

considered a reflection of “human nature,” whereby “everyone knows that abuse is bad and respecting each other is good” regardless of whether you are male or female.

For some groups, these explanations also led to conversation about what they perceived as actual gender differences around the map constructs that were not reflected in the results. One young adult group talked specifically about the frequency of females perpetrating abuse, despite the perception that males are almost always thought to be the aggressor. While females verbally and physically abuse male partners more often than many people believe, they explained, this abuse goes largely unnoticed because young men feel pressure to conform to gender stereotypes in deciding how to respond. “It’s a pride thing when it comes to men... We are taught at a young age that boys have to be prideful and that’s why men don’t say anything when they are abused.” The group also suggested that these stereotypes are upheld by law enforcement, such that even in instances with a female aggressor, women are better able to “play off of emotion, and make it seem like she had no other choice or that it was out of self defense.” From their perspective, the confluence of male hesitation to report abuse and expectations of female behavioral and emotional tendencies explained why the vast majority of arrests related to domestic violence were men.

In other discussions, participants commented on certain ratings results they would have expected to differ more among male and female youth. *Signs of Commitment* and *Dependency* were expected to be rated higher by females than they actually were. Some youth felt that long-term commitment was more of a priority for females than males, and that females seemed more dependent on their partner and more emotionally distraught when a relationship ended. As one teen said, “Guys are more about the physical stuff, and girls are more about the flowers, movies and chocolate.” Others suggested that males may have rated the items in *Dependency* as slightly more desirable than females because they like feeling depended upon by their partner, as well as a sense of power or control that may stem from that dependency. Some youth were surprised by males’ high ratings of *Positive Communication and Connection*, commenting that typically “it’s the girl that does the communicating [in the relationship].” Finally, some female participants were surprised that male youth rated the items in *Warning Signs* as slightly higher on both scales than females, as education and programming around detecting abuse are seemingly more targeted toward women than men.

## TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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Youth discussions did not include explicit questions about technology and social media, but their presence and value in dating relationships was conveyed across groups. Teens and young adults confirmed texting and Facebook as key means for communicating with their dating partners. Relatedly, statement 90, “getting calls, texts or messages from their partner all the time,” generated mixed perceptions as to whether this idea represented stalking behavior, or whether it was simply a reflection of how teens interact in dating relationships. Most groups reached consensus that unwanted, persistent, or intrusive texting (i.e., “Where are you? Who are you with?”) is problematic, but that virtual communication is otherwise entirely embedded into day-to-day interactions. As one teen summarized, “It doesn’t affect just one cluster. It’s everywhere- just part of life. Texting is the way we talk to each other.”

Discussion participants also insinuated that texting and social media are means of hiding aspects of a relationship from parents and peers. Youth commented that cell phones and social media make it easier to date, talk about and do things without adults knowing what exactly is going on. As one young adult explained, “It used to be that to make plans I’d have to call a house phone and ask an adult to speak with my boyfriend. Now I can just text them directly.”

Several participants also offered examples of how texting and social media lead to increased “relationship drama.” Some youth explained that girls become upset when “guys don’t get the subtle nuances in Facebook posts or texts,” and that girls also tend to “read into texts,” finding unintended meaning. Teens in particular noted Facebook posts as a primary source of information about the status of their peers’ relationships, as well as a forum for publically announcing or displaying infatuation with their partner that can lead to jealousy. Teens in one group, for example, explained that girls hide behind social media to act passive aggressively or to “throw each other down” around relationships and peer conflicts. Some participants also mentioned a double standard around texting in relation to adult perceptions. Whereas some youth noted feeling judged by adults for frequently texting or using social media, participants pointed out that adults, too, are often using their phones and Facebook. In more than one group, youth conveyed the sentiment that if adults were not occupied with jobs, they too might text and use social media with the same intensity as teens. “Teens just don’t have as much to do as adults do,” one teen said. “So of course we talk to our partners all the time.”

## MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Teen groups were explicitly asked for their thoughts about how middle school-aged youth might have responded to the concept mapping activities. Similar to young adults’ tacit attitudes toward teens’ responses, teens tended to presume that middle school-aged youth would convey greater “drama,” immaturity, and PDA (public display of affection) in their dating relationships. Teens specifically noted the ideas in Cluster 2, *Early Stage of a Relationship*, as being more intensively present in middle school. “The feelings are more drastic,” one teen explained. “The younger you are, the more intense everything seems to be.” Multiple teen groups also perceived greater contextual and peer pressure. As one teen described, “Everything in middle school is a show. It [dating] is a status thing. It’s all about the status updates and popularity at that age. In high school, relationships get more serious. In middle school, people are clingy and will date the first person they think is attractive.” Others remarked that overall communication skills were weaker at a younger age, and may not have been rated by middle school youth as desirable to the extent that teens rated communication-related ideas. Teens also discussed middle school as a time when youth realize that dating ideals shaped by the media are not necessarily realistic.

Interestingly, many of teens’ comments around middle school dating were similar sentiments to what young adults’ expressed toward high school dating. Developmentally, this pattern suggests that with time, maturity, and changing context, youth likely revise their perceptions of prior dating experiences. A focus for practitioners may be to consider how to broaden teens’ perspectives of their dating context in a way that includes a prospective understanding of how future experiences may change their current experiences and feelings around particularly intense dating situations.

## RESULTS: ADULT FACILITATED DISCUSSIONS

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Across professional discussions, participants were encouraged and in some cases surprised by the strong alignment between youth and adult perspectives. “This [similarity] is something we don’t often think about,” one researcher stated. “As adults, we often separate ourselves from adolescents and young adults. We think we have the answers and tend to say, ‘They are just kids.’” Many participants agreed that this concordance was a key outcome of the project as a whole. “This consensus is a message that compels adults to speak [with youth] about relationships, and compels youth to speak with adults about what they are going through.” One practitioner suggested that a barrier to youth and adults effectively communicating on this topic is a lack of awareness of each party’s concerns: “Youth are focused on their autonomy and want ultimately to be taken seriously by adults. Adults, on the other hand, are mostly just concerned about their teenagers’ safety, but this concern doesn’t always come through [when they talk to each other].” Family values around dating were mentioned as a key starting point for practitioners seeking to bridge the disconnect between youth and parents’ communication about romantic relationships.

Both researchers and practitioners noted the marked inclusion of positive relationship characteristics as a relatively refreshing perspective on teen dating. One practitioner stated: “We always are on the lookout for the negative, but a key message here is that there needs to be more promoting of healthy relationships. Even as we see [youth] muddle through a lot of the pitfalls, it isn’t for lack of wanting a healthy relationship.” In the practitioner discussion specifically, participants also noted how the inclusion of positive items speaks to the similarity between youth and adult relationships- an alignment also noted in some of the youth discussions. “It’s good to see that teens support what we support in our heart of hearts: having respect for each other.” As an Advisory Group member remarked in a separate discussion, “We’ve known what we’ve been fighting against, but not always what we’ve been fighting for.” In this case, the inclusion of positive dating attributes provided some contradiction to existing research focused more exclusively on precursors of abuse, which may neglect to consider the confluence of negative and positive dating characteristics.

Participants also recognized additional nuances within the more negative or unhealthy constructs. Whereas research and programming typically focus on abuse specifically, the map reveals several conflict-related statements and ideas related to unhealthy communication that may not fall within the more commonly recognized “abuse” category. Even within the concept of abuse as it is conveyed through the map, researchers noted the inclusion of items outside of the typical definition. “Most of our focus is on physical assault,” a researcher remarked. “But here [in Cluster 9, *Abuse*] we are seeing the physical assault grouped with other things like feeling depressed.” One group suggested a key message for future work around ensuring that the “full spectrum” of relevant negative or unhealthy items is considered in research, intervention and prevention efforts, rather than the more explicitly abusive items that tend to be a focus. Clusters 6, 7, 8 and 9 were thought to offer “fine tuning” for discussing and addressing what makes a relationship unhealthy, and provide areas of extending the scope of both research and programming.

Both researchers and practitioners discussed the inclusion of emotional and cognitive relationship characteristics, in addition to those elements more typically thought of as part of teen dating. “We’ve been limiting ourselves by thinking of this [teen dating] only in terms of behaviors,” one practitioner mentioned. “What we are seeing here is also emotional and experiential.” Other researchers noted a “layer of cognitive processes” in the map that is conceptually logical but not often included in the measures and frameworks used to think about teen dating relationships and teen dating violence.

Relatedly, researchers also noted the complexity underlying how the dating characteristics are organized on the map. “When I think about the measures and communication styles we use around [teen dating] violence, I’m not sure we capture what we are seeing here. It [the map] shows that it isn’t as simple and static as how we’ve been measuring things. There is a lot of cognition, emotion and anxiety that we aren’t tracking on,” one participant mentioned. Other researchers commented on how individual dating history and context likely affect how teenagers experience the map constructs differently. These observations highlight the need for future efforts to match the multidimensional qualities that teen dating relationships encompass. “A striking takeaway for me is how so many of these items don’t clearly fall into a positive or negative category, but depend on the context- what else is going on,” one practitioner stated. “This is where the prevention work is- in helping teens define when things cross the line.” As with helping youth to identify “the bad stuff,” as another practitioner explained, it is also important to help youth explore healthy aspects of relationships, such as trust and communication, which also include certain complications that can be difficult for youth to navigate.

Adult facilitated discussions yielded notably less overall content than youth. We believe this to be largely attributable to two aspects of the adult discussions: (1) adult discussions were conducted via webinar, and not in a face-to-face format like the youth discussions, and (2) adult participants as a whole included similar representation with regard to professional orientation. The webinar format was initially selected to allow for professionals from disparate locations to easily participate in the discussions. While the webinars did facilitate participation, we believe that the lack of in-person interaction was in large part a reason why substantially less discussion took place. Participants had little awareness of others on the webinar, and the virtual format made it difficult for participants to respond to one another or be aware of who was talking at a given point in time. Additionally, the research team spent approximately 45 minutes reviewing the details of the results at the start of the discussions. The lack of interactivity during this period may have resulted in a loss of participant attention. The virtual format may have also provided a less motivating setting for professionals to take part. We consider the webinar format to have ultimately been a limitation of the study design.

Secondly, the diversity in comments from adult participants was quickly saturated across discussions, as groups were strikingly similar in their reactions to the concept mapping results and their suggestions for future work. We believe that the redundancy in professionals’ dialogues was largely due to the overall similarity in their professional backgrounds. All participants were involved research, policy and practice aspects of teen dating relationships and adolescent development, which may have lead professionals to note similar ways in which the concept map results resonate with current issues and gaps in the field.

Future work already underway is specifically intended to address these issues. Additional adult discussions plan to utilize a face-to-face format to the extent possible in order to encourage more active participation. Participants will also represent a more diverse sample of adults, including parents of adolescents, teachers, health experts, guidance counselors, team coaches, and others who frequently interact with teens and may provide a unique perspective on the map results. Another limitation of this study was in the intentional inclusion of adult professionals as an initial adult sample. While we believe this to have been an important first sample to assess alignment among professionals and youth given the active role of these adults in the field, agreement between youth and adults in this study may have been somewhat inflated given these professionals are expected to have some degree of working knowledge about youth development and youth experience in romantic relationships.

## **DISCUSSION: AREAS OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE AMONG YOUTH AND ADULTS**

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Beyond the high degree of convergence evident in the concept mapping results, the facilitated discussions highlighted further areas of alignment in youth and adult perspectives. Perhaps most prominent was participants' common suggestion for improved communication among youth and adults on the topic of teen dating. While youth, unlike adults, were generally not surprised by the concordance in the map results, they still conveyed an impression of adults' disrespect for or distrust of their relationships. For adults, attention to the consensus represented in the map led to similar comments around adults' general disregard or condescension toward teen dating, believing that they "know better." As one practitioner stated, "A lot of content written for teens is really patronizing, not intentionally, but the world seems to have low expectations of teens and focuses on their 'poor choices.' Ironically, when parents do it [the same things as a teens], it is not considered a problem. TDV is prevalent, but so is adult DV."

Both youth and adult discussions also noted the "on the ground complexity" of teen dating relationships that underlies the visual simplicity of the map. While agreeing that the map is a generally accurate representation, participants noted that the saliency of these different concepts is highly dependent on the contextual details of a given relationship, and that oftentimes elements of multiple clusters are present at a given point in time. Facilitated discussions with teen participants also illuminated specific statements and clusters, particularly those located toward the center of the map, which could be perceived as healthy or unhealthy depending on the specific circumstances in which they occur. Discussion with project Advisory Group members suggested that this ambiguity or continuum along which teens might consider a certain idea as healthy/unhealthy or desirable/undesirable may be reflective of their stage of development or level of experience with dating relationships. Nevertheless, young adult participants in this study made similar remarks as teens about the uncertainty and variation in interpretability of some concepts.

Another area of convergence, unprompted by the facilitator, was around the media's portrayal of teens and teen dating relationships. Some practitioners discussed negative relationship messages delivered by the media, particularly through reality television. "With arguments and fighting pervasive on these shows," one practitioners asked, "What would make youth strive for something better or work toward



something better when they are told that this is just the way they [relationships] are?" Similarly, some youth groups noted that media seems to glorify "relationship extremes" and "high drama" situations. One youth group also mentioned the tendency for news media to highlight more extreme cases of physical teen dating violence, which they suggested might lead youth to take less seriously emotional, psychological or verbal forms.

No areas of clear divergence emerged across youth and adults from the facilitated discussions. While youth discussions included more extensive participant engagement and dialogue, this was in large part due to the in-person nature of the meetings (versus webinars with adults), abbreviated results presentation, and their capacity to speak about the topic as a salient aspect of their day-to-day lives. Youth and adult discussions did include different points of emphasis, however. Teens and young adults referred extensively to the clusters and their contents throughout the discussions, using them as points of reference to articulate many of their ideas about dating relationships. Adults discussed the clusters more broadly, emphasizing the inclusion of both positive and negative ideas, as well as the presence of behaviors, emotions, and cognitions.

In general, youth were less surprised by the alignment among youth and adult conceptualizations, considering the ideas, their groupings and ratings as a reflection of "human nature." Adult participants tended to remark more on the similarity as surprising, as well as encouraging result for the field. Nevertheless, topics such as the routine use of technology and social media, and the frequency and triviality of sex, emerged as points of discussion that youth suggested adults were likely unaware or uninformed. Youth groups also consistently recommended that parents and teachers be informed of the similarity in perspectives that resulted from the ratings activity, believing that these adults would be more inclined to take their relationships seriously in seeing that teens can clearly distinguish "good from bad."

Finally, while young adults were purposefully included to examine any differences between the older adolescent age group and teens, few notable distinctions emerged through the facilitated discussions. Much of the same discussion themes and interpretations arose across all teen and young adult groups. Perhaps most notably different was young adults' attention toward certain items on the map that they felt to be more characteristic of high school or teenage relationships and less so of their own age group. Young adults also tended to discuss the post-high school environment as catalyzing a shift in their priorities. Career, college education, and exposure to a new social contexts were among the factors mentioned as decreasing the emphasis or importance placed on dating relationships after high school.



## PART 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the collective results of this study, we propose the following recommendations to further efforts to better understand teen dating relationships, and to advance responses to adolescent dating violence. The order in which these recommendations appear is not reflective of priority or any other emphasis.

### GENERALIZABILITY

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One of the most apparent directions for future research is to test the generalizability of the results with a broader respondent universe. As the results of this study demonstrate, it is possible for general consensus to emerge across youth samples on the representativeness of the map ideas and their conceptual relatedness, while still finding important distinctions through interpretive discussion. One interesting research avenue will be to explore in greater depth how a given construct of the concept map is experienced differently across social and environmental contexts. The youth sample in this study included a convenience sample of teens and young adults with some consideration for geographic diversity and a mix of experiences with healthy relationship education and programming. Future work should more purposefully investigate the extent to which the map content resonates with different populations, including but not limited to LGBTQ youth, various socioeconomic statuses, urban and rural locations, races and ethnicities, high-risk neighborhoods, religious beliefs and family environments. As this concept mapping sample included 70% females, future research should also more purposefully explore the conceptualizations of young men, specifically given the field's focus on gender and its role in teen dating and TDV. Additionally interesting would be to compare conceptualizations and ratings among youth that have and have not been victims and/or perpetrators of TDV, as well as youth that have and have not been through programs such as *Safe Dates* and *Dating Matters* (Tharp, 2012; Tharp et al., 2011).

This research recommendation also has programmatic implications. Of the prevention programs currently implemented, relatively few have been designed and evaluated for their impact on specific youth populations. Whereas *Ending Violence* is one program that has been evaluated specifically with Latino/a youth (Jaycox et al., 2006), most prevention and intervention initiatives are developed for use with youth more generally. Research on how racial and ethnic groups experience aspects of dating relationships differently may further inform program design in a more culturally sensitive way. Given the overall youth consensus on the comprehensiveness and validity of the concept map, this framework may provide a fruitful basis for discovering aspects of programming that may be customized to maximize effectiveness in the context of specific cultural norms.

The generalizability of the concept map should also be more extensively examined across age ranges. Although the research team found little difference in the perspectives of teens and young adults, future research should investigate differences among youth that pursue different life choices during and after high school. For instance, is there a notable difference in conceptualizations of youth that pursue college education as compared to those that directly enter employment after high school? Is there a difference in perspectives among teens that do not complete high school as compared to those that graduate high

school? This research avenue is of particular importance given the developmental impact of teen relationships and these life choices on relationships in young adulthood (Shulman & Kipnis, 2001).

Relatedly, the concept map results should also be shared and tested for validity with middle school-aged youth. As middle school years tend to be when youth first begin to navigate dating relationships, many existing TDV programs are implemented with youth ages 11-14. Future research should consider the extent to which the map resonates with youth during these formative pre-teen years, in order to better understand how middle school programming may appropriately target their youth conceptualizations of teen dating.

Finally, research should also more explicitly examine parents' and teachers' conceptualizations of teen dating relationships, and consider the extent to which they are similar or different from those of professionals in the field. While few teachers were included in the study sample, parents and teachers are often the most consistently present adults in teens' day-to-day lives, usually having the greatest opportunity to observe the influence of dating relationships at the individual level (parents) and within the broader peer context (teachers). Given their proximity, a better understanding of parent and teacher conceptualizations of teen dating may be used to inform education and communication tool development that would support the role of these adults as resources for teens. Additionally interesting would be to compare the conceptualizations of middle-school and high-school teachers, to examine whether differences in their perceptions of their students' dating relationships mirrors youth feedback on the distinctions in relationship characteristics across these age groups.

## REVISING PROGRAMMING FOCUS

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Perhaps the most significant implication of this study for program design is around broadening focus to be more inclusive of dating characteristics that are not necessarily overtly abusive. Most prevention programs focus on educating teens about the signs and consequences of dating violence, help-seeking behavior, changing attitudes that condone violent and abuse behavior, and/or changing attitudes about gender norms and role expectations (Meyer & Stein, 2004). The results of this study emphasize that many components of teen dating relationships are not explicitly unhealthy, but may nevertheless be risk factors in certain contexts and/or antecedents or correlates of abuse that teens are largely unaware of while in their own relationships. First, in line with the aforementioned research recommendation, broadening the scope of these programs to include focus on positive, healthy behaviors could be undertaken. Not only do healthy relationships include their own complexities, but inclusion of more positive components may also help to validate teens' dating relationships, diminishing the notion that adults do not take their relationships seriously or view them approvingly.

Second, program development should be specifically designed to help teens navigate uncertain or stressful aspects of relationships. Often referred to by youth participants as "rough patches," programming is needed to help teens make decisions around whether the combination of seemingly negative or undesirable characteristics warrant a break-up, or whether it is appropriate to "stick it out and work through it." With regard to the latter option, further developmental support is needed around skill building for how to work through rough patches in a way that supports a healthy relationship. As teens

put it quite simply in the discussions, “It’s hard to tell when the bad stuff is normal.” More programming is needed to support adolescent judgment and decision-making in this area.

Curricula for healthy relationship and teen development programming may also use the map dimensions as general guidelines for encompassing the totality of concepts included in the map. The healthy-unhealthy and internal/emotional/cognitive-external/behavioral dimensions provide overall continuums that programmers can use to ensure that program components do not focus too heavily or exclusively on only certain aspects of relationships. As these study results convey, the full spectrum of each continuum has implications for youth experiences and decision-making in dating relationships, and likely also influence short and long term outcomes associated with the extent to which certain concepts are present in a given relationship. Future research efforts may evaluate the extent to which the curricula in existing programs such as *Safe Dates*, *Dating Matters* and *Shifting Boundaries* include concepts along either dimension.

Finally, programming that focuses specifically on abuse identification and response should consider a design that is sensitive to the likely reality that unhealthy or abusive factors are often compounded by the presence of more positive feelings and behaviors. Indeed, some research already suggests that high-risk couples exhibit a mix of both warmth and hostility toward one another (Florsheim & Moore, 2008), further emphasizing the need to acknowledge positive and negative dynamics in prevention and intervention programs. As multiple youth groups in this study emphasized, a “real relationship” often includes aspects of multiple clusters simultaneously, making it especially difficult at times to recognize abuse and/or warning signs. The more that awareness and skill-building programs can incorporate these “real relationship” scenarios into design, the more likely they are to resonate with youth dating experiences.

## RELATIONSHIP STAGES

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Practitioners and educators may incorporate the temporal vernacular that all youth discussion groups mentioned to describe the relationships among clusters. Conceptualizing adolescent relationships as stages is not new to the field, however these stages are often couched in attachment theory, developmental-context theory, or other frameworks that consider adolescent relationship stages in terms of the individual’s maturation and social-psychological theories of early, mid and late adolescence (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009; Connolly & McIsaac, 2011). As a key objective of this study was to include youth voice in adolescent relationship research, we recommend exploring further the pathway or timeline model that many participants articulated. From the perspective of youth, “stages” in teen dating refer specifically to the context of the relationship itself, and the thoughts, feelings and behaviors that transpire at the beginning, middle, and end. One group referred to the map as a “dating wheel,” and several others as a “timeline” or “roadmap” of relationships, where a couple can move from one cluster to another. General consensus emerged among youth that the “middle” stage is where characteristics become more complicated, often context-dependent and specific to the couple.

While youth acknowledged the co-occurrence of ideas from multiple clusters, the field could consider whether a timeline perspective, in conjunction with the map, may be a useful tool in talking about healthy relationships and dating objectives with youth. Teens may resonate with curricula that discuss

relationship characteristics in terms of a beginning and an end, with various areas of ambiguity in between. For instance, while the generally positive and desirable items in cluster 2 may be features of early relationship stages, teens should be aware and anticipatory of less desirable items in other clusters that may become part of the relationship over time. While adolescents may idealize the emotions and behaviors associated with the “honeymoon stage,” teens may also be susceptible to more extreme disappointment or depression as these characteristics fade, and work harder to try to restore a relationship back to these early stages despite increasingly unhealthy qualities.

Although more research is needed on the temporal dynamics of teen dating relationships (Matson, Chung, & Ellen, 2012), programming should educate youth as to what a more realistic picture of dating relationships may include after the “beginning” excitement. This design could also include guidance around navigating the ambiguity of the “middle” stage. The study findings support the limited research available on adolescents’ challenges in coping with ambiguity, specifically around intimacy, fidelity and relationship obligations (Draucker, Martsof, & Stephenson, 2012). The concept map may be a constructive instrument in more specifically gauging youth perspective on what temporal stages include, as well as eliciting narrative detail as to circumstances that would drive a couple to pursue one pathway within the map versus another.

Focus on the “end stage” of dating relationships may be particularly germane to improving youth programming. The extent to which youth are able to effectively manage relationship dissolution can have significant implications on a number of mental health issues, including depression and suicide (Monroe, Rohde, Seeley, & Lewinsohn, 1999). In this regard, programs may better benefit youth mental health in providing training curricula around the topic of a “healthy” break up, and/or healthy ways of coping with relationship dissolution. The stronger a teen’s toolbox for strategically dealing with relationship loss, it is possible that detrimental emotional and behavioral consequences will be less likely.

## CATEGORIES AS PROGRAMMING TOOLS

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Although youth noted that relationships include aspects from multiple clusters, most participants agreed that the presentation of items by cluster helped to elucidate the negative qualities of certain ideas that might otherwise be thought of as normal or neutral. For example, the association of texting all the time with items related to anxiety, worry, or feeling smothered conveys an unhealthier scenario, whereas its placement with the ideas in Cluster 2 tells a different story, one of infatuation, lust and excitement. These nine constructs may provide an instrumental organizing device in helping youth to recognize when certain behaviors or feelings might be healthy aspects of a relationship or, in other cases, warning signs. Practitioners may consider using these categorical “buckets” of dating characteristics as part of scenario building or other skill-building activities, including asking teens to generate any additional elements that might be salient features from their own relationships.

These relationship scenarios could be developed with groups of teens and young adults with the assistance of a facilitator. Just as youth facilitated discussion groups naturally used the clusters to describe their own relationship experiences, the same process could become a guided narrative activity with youth to help them recognize how different characteristics of relationships may relate with more healthy, unhealthy, public/behavioral or private/emotional aspects. In this regard, the cluster map

becomes both a scenario building, story-telling framework, as well as an organizational device for educating youth about the meaning or implications of relationship components within the broader context of dating experience and in familiar vernacular.

Relatedly, scenario building and other educational activities may help programs to consider the contextual dependency of how many behaviors are interpreted. While a simplified approach may categorize certain behaviors as either "good" or "bad," "healthy" or "unhealthy," to complexity of dating relationships elicited through the work suggests that nuances specific to the situation and relationship may require or bring about different responses and attitudes from adolescents. For instance, rather than concretely educating youth that "constant texting is bad," programs may allude more to the contextual variants that may help teens to evaluate the extent to which a behavior is cause for concern, in the context of the other attitudinal, emotional, cognitive, temporal and behavioral components of a particular relationship.

In summarizing the programmatic aspects of these recommendations, the challenge for practitioners is to consider how to balance the clarity and novelty of these associations by cluster with the muddled reality of teen dating relationships. From these discussions, it is clear that youth resonate with the ideas, their groupings within these nine categories, and agree with their collective representation of teen dating. Nonetheless, the practical application of these categories require a focus on their empirical integration if programs are to help teens make informed judgments and decisions about their own relationships, improving their capacity to distill the good from the bad while "in the moment."

## VARIATIONS IN TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS

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Teen dating relationships range in form. In this study, the research team asked youth and adults for their opinions about teen dating relationships without providing a specific definition. Whereas general consensus emerged across participants as to the defining characteristics, facilitated discussions included mention of the variation in level of commitment and formality of romantic relationships. Youth noted that elements of certain clusters may be more or less present depending on whether a couple is "just hooking up," "friends with benefits," "in a serious relationship," or other "types" of relationships.

Future research could further distill the unique qualities of variations in teen dating, both to enhance our understanding and operational definitions of adolescent relationships, as well as to inform the specificity of prevention and intervention programs. Specifically future research should investigate how youth conceptualize aspects of less committed relationships. Whereas the map represents how youth think about more exclusive dating relationships, these concepts may serve as a basis for examining the extent to which youth conceptualizations of "hooking up" or more causal dating include items that are similar to or different from the items in the concept map.

Developing a better sense of how youth experience different relationship "types," may help in understanding whether certain constructs of the map are perceived as more acceptable, desirable or frequent when teens consider the parameters or status of their relationship in different ways. This line of research may be relevant to identifying predictors of abusive or unhealthy relationship characteristics, particularly in situations where dating partners have misaligned understandings of the "type" of relationship they are in. For instance, is cheating on a partner or being cheated on more acceptable when

a couple is in what they define as an “open” or “casual” relationship? Is stalking behavior considered more acceptable in a “serious” relationship or when a couple is “going steady?” The concept map provides a fruitful basis for this research, as the specific ideas and clusters can be used as variables for youth to assign a strength or presence weight based on a given relationship “type.” Expanding our knowledge of how youth conceptualize acceptability of dating characteristics across relationship forms can enhance our understanding of whether certain scenarios make relationship abuse more likely. A key issue with current TDV programming is its attempt to address such a broad range of relationships with a single design (Hickman & Jaycox, 2004). Through this research, program design can be more circumstantially sensitive in matching prevention and intervention efforts to better resonate with variation of teen experiences.

### ASSOCIATIONS AND INTERRELATIONSHIPS AMONG DATING CHARACTERISTICS

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In line with modification or new development of measurement tools, researchers could use the organization of ideas in the concept map as a basis for further investigating the interrelationship among specific dating characteristics. As adult discussion participants noted, the map clusters include behaviors, emotions, and cognitions that collectively comprise a higher-order construct, even though behavioral elements are often those more immediately considered and noticed when thinking about dating abuse. Researchers could also consider how emotional, behavioral and cognitive items within the same or adjacent (conceptually similar) clusters correlate and/or may be causative factors of one another. For example, “feeling depressed,” “feeling hatred,” “feeling like your partner is ignoring or not listening to you” are emotional ideas that cluster with many behavioral items in cluster 9, *Abuse*. Future research may consider whether these emotions are in fact correlated with the occurrence of these abusive behaviors, as well as whether they tend to also be antecedents and/or outcomes. While similar investigation can be undertaken with the ideas in other clusters, we recommend beginning with the ideas cluster 4 through 9 in order to further our understanding of how emotional, cognitive and behavioral components interrelate in those clusters closest to abuse or potential risk-factors for an abusive or otherwise unhealthy relationship.

Items outside of cluster 9 also illuminate a number of other relatively undesirable relationship characteristics that may be considered risk factors for abusive relationships. In some cases, these ideas imply a dating relationship context (e.g. “thinking they can change their partner”), while others are not necessarily associated with a relationship outside of the map context (e.g. “feeling nervous or apprehensive,” “feeling insecure.”) Future research may distill whether ideas that reside outside of the abuse cluster tend to be perpetrator and/or victim characteristics, expanding our understanding of risk factors and correlates at the individual level. Relatedly, research may investigate how often and in what combinations the more positive, healthy characteristics tend to co-occur with more negative, unhealthy characteristics within a dating relationship.

Additionally, the map and youths’ articulation of temporal progression may better inform program design with regard to correlates of unhealthy or abusive relationship characteristics that need to be targeted to reduce future risk. Temporal sequence and directional influence flow has been noted as a significant matter for prevention and intervention programs seeking to ameliorate abuse (Roberts, Klein, & Fisher, 2003), particularly around identifying factors that are antecedents to abuse. Currently, many program



designs rely on assumptions about antecedents, such as pro-violence attitudes, depression, risky sexual behaviors, drug use, and others, when often these factors are consequences or effects of abuse rather than predispositions (Howard & Wang, 2003; Wingood, DiClemente, McCree, Harrington, & Davies, 2001). Although this study did not focus on or explicitly ask youth to comment on their ideas about antecedents, the generation and organization of the map content- co-authored by youth- could be used to suggest other potential antecedents less frequently considered to date. Some ideas related to depression, drugs, and other risky behaviors are included on the map; however, the presence of many other items identified by youth as existing along a spectrum of desirability and temporality may suggest future research directions for investigating the subtler and more nuanced sequence of factors that can lead to dating violence.

## MEASUREMENT

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These study results underscore the complexity of teen dating relationships, specifically the co-occurrence of a variety of dating characteristics that fall along a spectrum of frequency and desirability. As such, TDV measurement tools must account for this complexity in assessing TDV prevalence, risk factors, and program effectiveness. We recommend using the results of this study to consider modification of some of the existing scales *as they are used in this field*, to account for many of the non-violent, non-behavioral, but in many cases highly relevant aspects of adolescent relationships that may indicate unhealthy relationship development, including emotional components such as anxiety.

Commonly used instruments to assess abusive dating behavior or teens' attitudes toward abusive or unhealthy dating behavior include the Conflicts Tactics Scale (CTS), Conflict Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI), Justification of Interpersonal Violence Questionnaire, and the Justification of Dating Violence and Jealousy Scale, among others. Many of these scales ask respondents to report the frequency of behaviors that are explicitly argumentative or abusive (e.g. "I threatened him," "He spoke to me in a hostile manner"), or the extent to which they agree with or accept abusive behaviors (e.g. "In general it is okay for a woman to hit her husband/partner"). While useful for understanding incidence of these specific actions, the results of this study suggest that more sensitive measures are needed to capture the intricacy of behaviors, emotions, and cognitions- both positive and negative- that are antecedents to or characteristics of unhealthy relationships.

As both youth and adults discussed, oftentimes items from multiple clusters occur simultaneously in a relationship. This co-occurrence can make it difficult for youth to identify unhealthy or abusive characteristics, and/or prevent youth from seeking help. For instance, when items from the *Warning Signs* cluster take place in conjunction with items from *Signs of Commitment* or *Positive Communication and Connection*, youth may pay less attention to or diminish the severity of the unhealthier items, placing more weight on the more desirable items. In these cases, scales asking youth to report the frequency of explicitly abusive behaviors may not capture the whole story. Researchers may consider developing more comprehensive instruments that incorporate the range of items in the map, accessing relationship elements that may make addressing and identifying TDV particularly challenging. By creating and utilizing such instruments, the field may also be more informed of how the presence of multiple relationship characteristics affects the impact of prevention efforts, and highlight focal areas for enhancing teens' awareness of potentially unhealthy aspects.

The conceptual dimensions that emerged in both the pilot and full study maps also provide a solid basis for guiding instrument development. The desirability/healthiness and internal/external dimensions articulate the spectrum of ideas that youth in this study perceive as relevant elements of teen dating relationships, and which researchers can use as a framework for creating a scale's item pool. Although all items on the map are not necessarily relevant for inclusion in a given instrument, these dimensions may be used to promote development of measurement tools that are comprehensive and that reflect the multidimensional nature of teen dating realized through this study. As one of the challenges with current tools is their fragmentation in focus (Hamby & Finkelhor, 2000), these dimensions may lead to questionnaires that allow for collection of more systematically relevant factors in studying teen dating relationships and dating violence, thereby stimulating more work on their interactive effects and outcomes.

Finally, we recommend that the field use the dating characteristics captured through this project as an "idea bank" for exploring how the emotional and cognitive items might be instigated through different means and modes, particularly those commonly utilized in teens' social settings. As many existing scales are behavioral and/or developed by adults, the items in the concept map include a range of youth-authored thoughts, actions, feelings and behaviors. For example, a research looking to develop a scale to measure abuse in dating relationships may draw from the list of items in cluster 7, *Warning Signs*, cluster 8, *Dependency*, and cluster 9, *Abuse* in generating the scale content. In this regard, the statements in the map can be used by researchers in developing more multidimensional scales that better capture the "whole picture" of dating relationships beyond just behaviors, and in a way that resonates with youth experiences. A key advantage of this "idea bank" is that it provides researchers with an existing set of youth-generated concepts without requiring initial research to sketch the landscape of youth conceptualizations of dating relationships.

## RESEARCH ON SELF-AWARENESS

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Multiple youth groups noting challenges in identifying unhealthy aspects in their own relationships, while still being able to recognize warning signs or risk factors in their friends' relationships. Research might focus on the social psychological and developmental processes of adolescent dating that may explain this phenomenon. It may be the case that adolescents are more likely to engage in defense mechanisms, particularly when experiencing in their initial dating relationships, and attempting to match these first experiences to an idealized vision of romance.

Youth discussions on lack of self-awareness resonates with other research finding that adolescents tend to view interactions with their partner as positive and highly connected even when discussing contentious or difficult topics (Galliher et al., 2008). Future research could focus on potential theoretical positions that may explain tendencies for youth to perceive interactions and characteristics of their own relationships in a more optimistic light than others would, or even than how they themselves might evaluate the same interactions among their peers.

One way to use the project results to explicitly study youth self-awareness is to use the map items and various rating scales to compare youth perceptions over time or across relationships. For instance, youth



could be surveyed on the presence of various relationship characteristics during and 6 months following the end of a dating relationship to evaluate whether self-awareness is improved once teens are out of a relationship. Studies could also compare how youth describe or rate the presence/desirability of items in their current relationships with a past relationship, or their own relationship compared to a close friend's relationship. The overarching implication is to use the map content to directly observe whether and along which dimensions youth awareness of relationship characteristics changes relative to whether they are being asked about their own current relationship or a past or other relationship to which they are mostly an "observer."

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Many youth groups suggested that the project results be used for parent and teacher education as well, noting that adults in their lives rarely seem interested or able to talk about their relationships or help them with relationship challenges. "Teachers belittle teens' emotions as silly and childish," one teen remarked. "If they see this study, they can see how relationships actually help us grow." Another teen added, "This [map] might make our relationships more real to them [teachers and parents.]"

While particularly challenging to reach parents as a target audience, family interventions require more support to help parents effectively communicate with teens (Akers, Yonas, Burke, & Chang, 2011). The vernacular and conceptual relationships highlighted in this study can further inform tools for parents to influence their adolescents' romantic relationships, underscoring teens' ability to objectively distinguish healthy and unhealthy characteristics. This finding may be used to engender a greater sense of respect in how parents approach topics related to their teens' relationships.

The similarity among youth and adult conceptualizations should be disseminated for incorporation into teacher and guidance counselor professional development. As both youth and adults noted in different ways the disconnect in how adults talk with youth about their relationships, communication skill-building in adult ongoing education programs could help to ameliorate this divide. Family therapists and school social workers may also benefit from utilizing these study results to shift tone around teen dating relationships, lending more validity to adolescents' emotions and experiences, and potentially opening the door for greater trust and help-seeking by youth. Additionally, given that little work to date has considered adolescent romantic relationships using the direct perspectives and vernacular of youth, sharing the concepts and ideas that resulted from this study with adults more broadly may also improve the noted disconnect in how youth and adults effectively communicate with one another on this topic. Such adults may include parents, teachers, coaches, and others who regularly interact with youth.

## PEER NETWORKS

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Given the emphasis on peer influence as part of teen dating, researchers in this field could expand their level of focus beyond the dating couple. Within the context of this project, we suggest that much can be gained by considering how the map can be used as a lens into peer related issues. While some of the map items already relate specifically to friends, the map constructs themselves may be used as a framework for further querying the role of peers in teen dating relationships. For instance, one might consider how concepts like dependency, insecurities, and commitment within the dating relationship manifest, influence, or are affected by dating partners' friendships in order to more fully understand how teens'

broader social context intersects with romantic partnerships. Indeed, many of the map items were not just specific to an individual or the dating couple, but rather referred to the opinions of or interactions with others in the peer or familial network (see ideas in cluster 4, *Social Concerns & Consequences*, for several examples).

## THEORETICAL EXTENSION

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As the results of this project include detailed accounts of dating relationships from the perspectives of youth, this vernacular may be relevant to advancing theory on adolescent relationships. For example, the language used by teens and young adults to explain the sequence of "stages" within a given relationship may be used to further specify theory on the duration and temporal aspects of adolescent dating relationships. Whereas existing theory posits temporal sensitivity at a much broader level and in accordance with overall developmental stages, the insight from this study suggests the need for theory at a more micro level, describing the sequence of behaviors, emotions and cognitions characteristic of a relationship cycle. A developmental perspective may consider how this micro-level sequence changes over the course of broader developmental transitions. For instance, how might characteristics of early, middle and end phases of a relationships change from early adolescence to emerging adolescence?

Additional theory development might focus on the role of media in shaping youth perspectives of dating relationships, such as in the expected roles and associated behaviors of men and women in relationships. As media may shape youth perspectives in part through its reinforcement through peers, the developmental-contextual approach may consider incorporating the influence of public messaging and social media in theorizing about the dynamics of the peer context in adolescent romance.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study emphasize that teen dating relationships are complex and multidimensional. As formative experiences in adolescent development, dating relationships can include a range of thoughts, actions, feelings and behaviors that vary considerably in their collective impact and outcomes. To date, the field has lacked a well specified, operational conceptualization of adolescent romantic relationships (Collins et al., 2009). The constructs and their interrelationships realized through this study provide a robust basis for resolving definitional ambiguity and further understanding the intricacies of teen dating.

In supporting NIJ's efforts to address teen dating violence, these results shed light on some of the strengths and challenges within the field. Whereas professionals and youth hold similar perspective of the elements of teen dating, this study also prompts a more holistic perspective of adolescence romance. Despite general concordance in conceptualizations, the study results encourage a more systematic consideration of both normative adolescent romantic relationships, as well as teen dating violence.

As teen dating relationships are multidimensional, so too is teen dating violence. Research, programming and policy aimed to curb rates of this problem are most likely to be effective by accounting for this multidimensionality in their design and execution, along with attention to bridging the social and communicative divide between youth and adults on this topic.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Planning & Advisory Group Members

#### Planning Group:

Dr. Shannan Catalano, Bureau of Justice Statistics

Mitru Ciarlante, Boys & Girls Club of America

Dr. Dara R. Blachman-Demner, National Institute of Justice (*Project Lead*)

Aisha Hasan, Formerly of the Office of Adolescent Health

Anna Kindermann, Health Resources and Services Administration, HHS

Aleisha Langhorne, Office of Women's Health, HHS

Dr. Aleta Meyer, Administration of Children and Families, HHS

Dr. Shari Miller, RTI International

Dr. Carrie F. Mulford, National Institute of Justice (*Project Lead*)

Dr. Phyllis Holditch Niolon, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Dr. Barbara Oudekerk, National Institute of Justice

Dr. Andra Tharp, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Dr. Tisha Wiley, National Institutes of Health, Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research (now at NIDA)

#### Advisory Group:

Dr. Frances Ashe-Goins, Office of Women's Health, HHS

Dr. Diane Hall, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Dr. Donna Howard, University of Maryland School of Public Health

Neil Irvin, Men Can Stop Rape

Dr. Elizabeth Miller, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh

Dr. Wendy Nilsen, National Institutes of Health, Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research

Stephanie Nilva, Day One

Rebecca Odor, Administration for Children and Families

Dr. Terri Sullivan, Virginia Commonwealth University

Dr. Jennifer Urban, Montclair State University

## Appendix II: Youth-Serving Organizations

*The Project Team is grateful for the time and effort that the following youth-serving organizations and their leaders dedicated to the concept mapping activities and/or facilitated discussions, without which these project results would not have been possible.*

4-H Cornell Cooperative Extension, Murray Hill, NY;

[http://www.ccelivingstoncounty.org/4H\\_Youth\\_Development/4h.html](http://www.ccelivingstoncounty.org/4H_Youth_Development/4h.html)

Aiken Youth Empowerment, Aiken, SC; <http://aikenyouthempowerment.org/main/>

Austin Community College, Austin, TX; <http://www.austinctc.edu/>

Bay Area Youth Center, Hayward, CA; <http://www.baycyouth.org/>

Boston Public Health Commission, Boston, MA; <http://www.bphc.org/whatwedo/Teens/Pages/Teens.aspx>

Boys and Girls Club of Worcester, Worcester, MA; <http://www.bgcworcester.org/>

Center for Court Innovation, New York, NY; <http://www.courtinnovation.org/>

College Possible, Milwaukee, WI; <http://www.collegepossible.org/locations/milwaukee/>

Community Action Youth Programs: Generation Q, Greenfield, MA;

<http://www.communityaction.us/our-groups-programs.html>

DoSomething.org, New York, NY; <https://www.dosomething.org/>

Fulton County Public Library, Atlanta, GA; <http://www.afplweb.com/>

Idaho Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence, Boise, ID; <http://www.idvsa.org/>

Indigenous Peoples Task Force, Minneapolis, MN; <http://indigenouspeoplestf.org/>

Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) Goodwill, Indianapolis, IN;

<https://www.employindy.org/oneflow/JobsforAmericasGraduates.aspx>

Jobs for America's Graduates class at Woodsville High School, Woodsville, NH; <http://whs.sau23.org/>

Kentuckiana Works, Louisville, KY; <http://www.kentuckianaworks.org/>

La Familia Counseling Services, Hayward, CA; <http://lafamiliacounseling.org/>

Malden YMCA, Malden, MA; <http://www.ymcamalden.org/>

Massachusetts Promise Fellowship (AmeriCorps), Boston, MA; <http://masspromisefellows.org/>

MERS Goodwill Transition Services, St. Louis, MO; <http://mersgoodwill.org/mission-in-action/programs-services/services-offered/youth/>

Quaker Experiential Service and Training(QuEST), Seattle, WA; <http://www.quest-seattle.org/>

SafePlace, Austin, TX; <http://safeplace.org/>

Tompkins County Community College, Tompkins County, NY; <http://www.tc3.edu/>

University of Michigan Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center, Ann Arbor, MI; <http://sapac.umich.edu/>

Urban League of Metropolitan, St. Louis, MO; <http://www.ulstl.com/>

Vermont Works for Women, Barre, VT; <http://vtworksforwomen.org/>

YouthBuild AmeriCorps Program, Troy, NY; <https://youthbuild.org/ameri corps>

### Appendix III: Participant Responses to Demographic Questions

| Respondent Question                              | Teens        |      | Young Adults |      | Adults       |      |
|--|--------------|------|--------------|------|--------------|------|
|  | <i>N</i>     | %    | <i>N</i>     | %    | <i>N</i>     | %    |
| Age ( <i>M</i> ); range (in years)               | 16.27; 13-18 |      | 20.11; 18-22 |      | 45.64; 23-72 |      |
| Sex ( <i>N</i> )                                 |              |      |              |      |              |      |
| <i>Female</i>                                    | 100          | 0.65 | 70           | 0.77 | 72           | 0.90 |
| <i>Male</i>                                      | 53           | 0.35 | 21           | 0.23 | 8            | 0.10 |
| Race ( <i>N</i> )                                |              |      |              |      |              |      |
| <i>American Indian or Alaska Native</i>          | 2            | 0.01 | 0            | 0.00 | 2            | 0.02 |
| <i>Asian</i>                                     | 5            | 0.03 | 7            | 0.08 | 3            | 0.04 |
| <i>Black or African American</i>                 | 53           | 0.35 | 31           | 0.35 | 7            | 0.08 |
| <i>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</i> | 1            | 0.01 | 0            | 0.00 | 1            | 0.01 |
| <i>White</i>                                     | 54           | 0.36 | 43           | 0.48 | 66           | 0.80 |
| <i>Two or more races</i>                         | 25           | 0.16 | 7            | 0.08 | 2            | 0.02 |
| <i>Prefer not to answer</i>                      | 12           | 0.08 | 1            | 0.01 | 2            | 0.02 |
| Ethnicity ( <i>N</i> )                           |              |      |              |      |              |      |
| <i>Hispanic or Latino</i>                        | 36           | 0.24 | 5            | 0.06 | 5            | 0.06 |
| <i>Not Hispanic or Latino</i>                    | 112          | 0.76 | 84           | 0.94 | 73           | 0.94 |
| Experience in Dating Relationships ( <i>N</i> )  |              |      |              |      |              |      |
| <i>A lot</i>                                     | 39           | 0.26 | 41           | 0.48 | N/A          |      |
| <i>Some</i>                                      | 99           | 0.64 | 42           | 0.49 | N/A          |      |
| <i>None</i>                                      | 15           | 0.10 | 3            | 0.03 | N/A          |      |
| Professional Orientation ( <i>N</i> )            |              |      |              |      |              |      |
| <i>Advocate</i>                                  | N/A          |      | N/A          |      | 29           | 0.35 |
| <i>Practitioner</i>                              | N/A          |      | N/A          |      | 8            | 0.10 |
| <i>Researcher</i>                                | N/A          |      | N/A          |      | 38           | 0.46 |
| <i>Teacher</i>                                   | N/A          |      | N/A          |      | 7            | 0.09 |
| Parent of a 14-18 year old ( <i>N</i> )          |              |      |              |      |              |      |
| <i>Yes</i>                                       | N/A          |      | N/A          |      | 15           | 0.18 |
| <i>No</i>  | N/A          |      | N/A          |      | 67           | 0.82 |
| Parent of a 19-22 year old ( <i>N</i> )          |              |      |              |      |              |      |
| <i>Yes</i>                                       | N/A          |      | N/A          |      | 14           | 0.17 |
| <i>No</i>  | N/A          |      | N/A          |      | 68           | 0.83 |

#### Appendix IV: Statements by Cluster

| #  | Cluster 1: Positive Communication and Connection                                 |
|----|--|
| 1  | spending time together.  |
| 3  | communicating with their partner when there is a problem.                        |
| 6  | helping and supporting each other through the tough stuff.                       |
| 7  | feeling happy.   |
| 10 | being committed.   |
| 35 | smiling and laughing.  |
| 38 | kissing.   |
| 39 | talking to one another about their day, how they feel, etc.                      |
| 43 | falling in love.   |
| 45 | getting to know each other.  |
| 51 | buying stuff for each other.   |
| 62 | respecting each other.   |
| 70 | accepting each other.  |
| 71 | going on dates.  |
| 74 | loving each other.   |
| 81 | holding hands.   |
| 88 | chilling/relaxing.   |
| 91 | wanting to help or take care of their partner.                                   |
| 98 | cuddling.  |
| #  | Cluster 2: Early Stage of a Relationship   |
| 41 | feeling happy that they have someone to go places with, such as school dances.   |
| 50 | thinking that the relationship is going to last forever.                         |
| 58 | PDA (Public Display of Affection).   |
| 63 | feeling wanted/desired.  |
| 79 | feeling lust.  |
| 80 | getting butterflies or goosebumps when they talk to or see their dating partner. |
| #  | Cluster 3: Signs of Commitment   |
| 2  | feeling more mature or grown up.   |

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| 5   | meeting family.  |
| 8   | putting sex off until later.   |
| 20  | hanging out with groups of friends.  |
| 32  | making your relationship status known through social media such as Facebook.               |
| 61  | posting pictures on social media such as Facebook and Instagram.                           |
| 84  | talking with your partner about using protection.  |
| 95  | having sex.  |
| 100 | feeling curious about going further sexually.  |
| #   | <b>Cluster 4: Social Concerns and Consequences</b>   |
| 17  | feeling like everyone is in a relationship except for them.                                |
| 22  | worrying about what their family will think about their partner.                           |
| 33  | getting pregnant.  |
| 49  | thinking that adults think we just want sex.   |
| 52  | feeling frustrated.  |
| 56  | drinking.  |
| 57  | thinking that adults in their lives don't take their relationships seriously.              |
| 59  | thinking that bad things can't happen to them such as unwanted pregnancy, STDs, STIs, etc. |
| 67  | breaking up.   |
| 83  | feeling popular.   |
| 85  | hiding certain aspects of their relationship from their parents.                           |
| #   | <b>Cluster 5: Insecurities</b>   |
| 18  | feeling inexperienced or naive.  |
| 28  | worrying about what their friends think of their partner.                                  |
| 65  | thinking that their partner doesn't call or text them enough.                              |
| 66  | doing things based on what you think other couples are doing.                              |
| 73  | acting dramatic.   |
| 76  | having trouble concentrating.  |
| 78  | acting impulsively without thinking.   |
| 97  | doing drugs.   |
| #   | <b>Cluster 6: Intense Focus on the Relationship</b>  |
| 4   | feeling confused.  |
| 11  | feeling nervous or apprehensive.   |
| 12  | thinking that this person is their whole world.  |

|    |   |
|----|---|
| 27 | focusing more on each other (the relationship) and less on other people in their lives. |
| 60 | experiencing an intensity of emotion that is overwhelming.                              |
| 90 | getting texts, calls, or messages from their partner all the time.                      |
| #  | <b>Cluster 7: Warning Signs</b>   |
| 9  | thinking that their partner flirts too much.  |
| 15 | having trust issues.  |
| 21 | distancing themselves from their parents.   |
| 31 | rushing into things/moving too fast.  |
| 40 | thinking they can change their partner.   |
| 44 | using the relationship for popularity.  |
| 77 | becoming obsessed with knowing what the other person is doing.                          |
| 86 | trying to act a certain way around their partner's friends.                             |
| 92 | thinking, "How do I get out of this?"   |
| 93 | disliking their partner's friends.  |
|    | <b>Cluster 8: Dependency</b>  |
| 13 | feeling scared or worried that their partner will leave them or break up with them.     |
| 14 | feeling afraid that this person won't like them if they are their true self.            |
| 24 | ignoring the outside world (friends, family, school, work, etc.).                       |
| 25 | arguing with each other.  |
| 26 | not being able to imagine life without him/her.   |
| 29 | checking each others' emails or text messages.  |
| 30 | feeling like they need to impress or prove themselves to their partner.                 |
| 34 | feeling pressured to do things in order to please their partner.                        |
| 37 | staying in a relationship just because they have "been through" a lot together.         |
| 42 | feeling smothered.  |
| 53 | becoming dependent on their partner for happiness.                                      |
| 55 | feeling insecure.   |
| 64 | not feeling good enough for their partner.  |
| 82 | willing to do whatever it takes to keep a relationship.                                 |
| 87 | feeling jealous.  |
| 94 | feeling angry.  |
| #  | <b>Cluster 9: Abuse</b>   |
| 16 | feeling depressed.  |

|    |   |
|----|---|
| 19 | being controlling.  |
| 23 | feeling pressured to have sex.  |
| 36 | acting mean.  |
| 46 | dating a person only because they feel like they won't find anyone else.              |
| 47 | getting made fun of or put down by their partner.                                     |
| 48 | going to levels of physical intimacy that they are uncomfortable with.                |
| 54 | yelling at each other.  |
| 68 | being deceitful/cheating/sneaking around.   |
| 69 | wondering if the person isn't good enough for them.                                   |
| 72 | justifying a partner's abusive behaviors (i.e., they were drunk, high, stressed out). |
| 75 | brushing off or accepting abuse.  |
| 89 | feeling like your partner is ignoring or not listening to you.                        |
| 96 | feeling hatred.   |
| 99 | hitting/slapping/shoving.   |



## **Appendix V: Adult Facilitated Discussion Guiding Questions**

At the conclusion of the concept mapping results presentation, adult facilitated discussion participants were presented with the following questions to guide contribution of their feedback and interpretations.

*How do the results align, enhance or confirm:*

- *existing research findings?*
- *the types of practices and programming currently implemented with youth?*
- *the types of policies implemented with youth?*

*How do the differ from, challenge or contradict:*

- *existing research findings?*
- *the types of practices and programming currently implemented with youth?*
- *the types of policies implemented with youth?*

*What are gaps, or specific issues or ideas that are missing from this map?*

*What are key messages that you take away from this project?*

- *What do you see as the critical messages that others should know about?*
- *What audiences should receive those messages?*
- *How should these messages be disseminated?*

*What are your recommendations for next steps?*

## Appendix VI: Youth Facilitated Discussion Guiding Questions

1. *When you look at this map, and when you think of the focus question that we asked teens and young adults like yourselves to answer, what kind of relationships do you think about?*
  - *Your own relationships?*
  - *Friends' relationships?*
  - *Dating relationships you've heard about from others or seen on TV?*
  - *Things you see or hear through social media such as Facebook or Instagram?*
2. *What about this map surprises you?*
  - *Which clusters or ideas on this map, if any, did you not expect to see? In other words, which clusters or ideas do you not consider to be thoughts, actions, feelings or behaviors that teens in dating relationships might have or do? Why?*
  - *Which clusters or ideas appear close together that you would expect to appear farther apart? Why?*
  - *Which clusters or ideas appear farther apart that you would expect to appear closer together? Why?*
3. *What ideas, if any, do you feel might be missing from this map?*
  - *What ideas or clusters would you have expected to see but that are not here?*
  - *What other issues or topics related to teen dating relationships that are not a part of this map do you believe are important to be discussed?*
4. *We asked teens, young adults and adults to come up with ideas about teen dating relationships and sort them into piles. (These were the activities that we told you about earlier today, at the beginning of our discussion.) We ended up finding that in general teens, young adults and adults seem to agree about how all of these ideas should be grouped with one another. The map that we are showing you shows what youth and adults thought about the ideas that describe teen dating relationships and the similarity/differences among those ideas.*
  - *Do you find it surprising that youth and adults generally agreed about the ideas and how they are related on this map? If so, why? If not, why not?*
  - *If adults were looking at this map, what do you think might surprise them?*
    - *Specific ideas?*
    - *Cluster labels?*
    - *The statements that are in certain clusters?*
    - *How close together or far apart certain ideas or clusters are on the map?*
    - *Anything else?*
  - *What ideas or topics are **not** on this map, but that you think adults might have added or expected to see?*

*Imagine that we had only asked adults to do the sorting activity. Imagine that we made a map using only the ways adults grouped the ideas together. How might the map look differently from how it looks now? How might the ideas be clustered differently?*

5. *When we showed this map to our Planning Group (all adults), we talked about ways we could think about some patterns across the entire map. For example, we talked about how over on this part of the map we see more negative, or unhealthy ideas...whereas as we move this way, we see more positive or healthy ideas. How else do you think we could describe how the “flavor” or themes change as we move from, say, “north” to “south”? “East” to “west”?*
6. *We also asked teens, young adults, and adults to rate the ideas on two things. First, we asked them to rate each idea on how frequent/common they think it is in teen dating relationships. Second, we asked them to rate each idea on how desirable they thought it is in teen dating relationships. Just like with the map we just showed you, we found that overall youth and adults agree on the how common and on how desirable these are ideas in teen dating relationships.*
  - *Do you find it surprising that youth and adults generally agreed about the frequency and desirability of the ideas on this map? If so, why? If not, why not?*
  - *Look back through the handouts we have you that have the ideas on them. Which ideas would you have expected adults to think of as **frequent or common** in teen dating relationships than youth? Less frequent?*
  - *Which ideas would you have expected adults to think of as more **desirable** than youth? Less desirable?*
7. *What groups of adults in your community do you feel should see the information on this map? For example, do you think that there are things about teen dating relationships on this map that your teachers or parents would be particularly interested or surprised to know about?*

*What adults in your community do you feel don’t know as much as they should about how teens think about dating relationships?*
8. *To be asked time permitting with teen (14-18) discussion groups: How do you think youth a few years younger than you – middle school-aged- think about teen dating?*
  - *If we had asked 11-13 year-olds to come up with ideas that describe teen dating relationships, in what ways do you think they would be the like the ideas on this map?*
  - *How might they be different? Why?*
  - *How do you think that your own ideas about teen dating relationships, including what you think of as healthy or unhealthy, have changed since you were in middle school?*