

A Portfolio of High School Relationships

Introductory Psychology 101

### Introduction:

My topic of interest will be high school relationships. I am going to study the relationships and what different aspects of a relationship will make it “successful”. The things that I will research is traits of relationships, length of relationships, and how people feel about highschool relationships in general. This topic is interesting to me because I have been in a relationship for two years, since I was 14. It will be interesting to research how different relationships work. I want to find out the psychological reasons behind the success and failures of relationships in high school. How do people feel in the beginning of a high school relationship towards the end? Are there single people who simply do not want a relationship? What parts of a relationship makes the two people grow closer to each other? My initial thought is that a lot of things that have to do with the feelings in a relationship will be related to chemical releases in the brain. Also, I think there will be a lot of personality traits that influence the success of a relationship.

### Nature Domain:

I will research things about how different genders view relationships in high school. Also, I am going to try and broaden my study into more than heterosexual relationships in highschool, such as homosexual relationships. It would also be interesting to see age differences in relationships, how those are perceived, and who has been in a relationship with a significant age difference. I may ask, why does an age difference matter so much in high school, but as an adult, it is often disregarded? Although interracial relationships are rare in our area, if I can expand my study into that area, I would.

Freud’s stages of development show that adolescence is a very important time for sexual desires and the formation of relationships. According to Freud, once one hits puberty, sexual desires greatly increased after being repressed from the ages of 7-11. Often times, adolescents rebel during this stage of their life. So, I may ask, how does being in this stage influence relationships in high school compared to relationships as an adult?

The endocrine system will dramatically will impact my study. The endocrine system secretes hormones throughout the body that cause us to feel certain things. The Adrenal glands cause the body to arouse itself, increasing sexual function. The testes and ovaries also influence sexual function because they secrete sex hormones such as testosterone and estrogen.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs states that the third highest level you can achieve is the “Love and Belonging” level. Characteristics of this level include friendship, family, and pertaining to my study, sexual intimacy and the significant others. This is important to my study because according to Maslow’s theory, in order to reach higher levels of need, relationships are necessary.

Dynamics in relationships could also be dependent on what level of consciousness people are in. If are dealing with a red person paired with a purple person, you would see a very

dominant-submissive relationship, potentially. That is just one example. It would be very interesting to see the dynamics between relationships involving differing levels of consciousness.

Another things that could influence my study is how the use of drugs and alcohol in a relationship alter certain things about it. The brain is altered when under the influence of drugs, so I would wonder how the use of these things altered the dynamic of a relationship (length, arguments, etc).

I will keep data on this by asking provoking questions that will answer questions regarding race differences, age differences, orientation, and gender. These differences will be accounted for by keeping strict records that keep track of the information gained.

“A Study Confirms Every Suspicion You Ever Had About High School Relationships” states that social scientists have confirmed that males in high school tend to exaggerate and lie about sexual experience, while females tend to remain honest. Social scientists also confirmed that a female is more inclined to have sex when it means that she can “keep” someone. These facts will assist me in my study because it provides insight to a lot of social dynamics regarding sex in high school relationships.

#### Nurture Domain:

Much of the way one acts and views relationships is learned from their environment. For example, I think one latently learns many things from their parent’s relationships, their peer’s relationships, etc. I would say that this is latent learning because you are not consciously using your parent’s relationship as a model for your future relationship, but you are learning from it and taking in the dynamics of all relationships around you. Latent learning can determine the success of a relationship because you will put the actions you have modeled from relationships around you into action.

In high school, there is great deal of observational learning in relationships. When it comes to sex in relationships, one might think, “My best friend did it, so I will too”. This form of learning can be dangerous because people can do things that they would not necessarily do as a result of role models.

Memory can also have a great deal of influence on the dynamics of relationships in high school, and also their successes and failures. Mainly, how one may repress unwanted memories of the relationship in order to make it succeed. For example, in abusive relationships, one may learn to repress the abusive moments in order to make the relationship work.

Temperament could have a large influence on relationships and their dynamics. This relates to relationships because two people with “feisty” temperments may butt head s a lot more than two people in a relationship, one having a “flexible” temperament and one having a “feisty” temperament. Different combinations of these temperaments could greatly influence conflicts in a relationship, and how those conflicts are resolved.

The type of family structure one is brought up in could also have an influence on the success of relationships in high school. Someone who is brought up in an assertive environment

may have a better level of communication than someone who was brought up in an authoritarian family structure. Someone who grew up with an authoritarian parent may be more likely to give in or take the blame, whereas someone who grew up with assertive parents may be more willing to talk things out and resolve problems mutually.

“Contracting” is important in all relationships, but especially important in romantic relationships. Telling your significant other how you feel and your expectations for a relationship can have a great deal of influence on the success of a relationship. Communication is a vital element to a healthy relationship, so “contracting” and making your feelings known is very important.

Neuroplasticity could influence a relationship in the way that it could heal someone who suffers from sex addiction. Sex addiction could put a lot of strain on a relationship, and make things difficult and uncomfortable. Through neuroplasticity, someone can work on sex addiction and change their brain in order to heal themselves and put less sexual strain on their relationship.

“Parenting Style Impacts Teen Autonomy, Relationships” is an article that discusses how parenting styles can affect autonomy (ability to reason, ability to be your own person) in relationships. A study found that teens who have parents that are psychologically controlling at the age of 13 are likely to have less autonomy in relationships and be less willing to speak for themselves. Teens who experience psychological control are more likely to suffer from depression and loneliness that could lead into adulthood.

In my study, differentiating between learned and unlearned skills will not be too much of a challenge because you can tell if someone has learned things that influence them in many situations. Also, I think that the unlearned skills used in relationships are similar for everyone, so accounting for them should not be too difficult.

#### Social Domain:

There are various different aspects of social psychology that have influence on teenage relationships; for example, the Mere Exposure Effect. This states that repeated exposure to the same stimuli increases the liking of them. This can have a large influence on who, or what someone is attracted to. Obviously, this has a great deal of influence on high school relationships because it has a hand in determining who is attracted to who. Depending on what, or who someone is surrounded by, what they find as attractive may vary.

Another aspect that has influence on high school relationships is reciprocal liking. This means that someone is more likely to like a person who likes them. This can have a great deal of influence on who dates who in high school. If someone shows that they “like” another person, the person they like is likely to “like” them back. This may influence the results of my study because it may have increased the amount of people who date, or who is attracted to who.

The “Hotty” Factor, which predicts that physical attractiveness increases dating frequency, also influences high school relationships. Often times in high school, people are attracted to the “hottest” boy or girl in the school. What people find attractive varies by culture;

therefore, this may vary depending on what cultures find attractive. This could influence my study because of what the surveyees view as the “Hotty” factor.

In the domain of social psychology, there are two types of love: passionate love and companionate love. Passionate love is often found at the beginning of relationships, and consists of intense, positive feelings for one another. Compassionate love occurs when deep attachment develops among people whose lives are intertwined. Depending on how someone may feel about if it is “cool” or “not cool” to love someone. The results of questions based on these two types of love may vary, but only slightly. Regardless of culture or origin, people all feel the same type of love.

Equity is common in many healthy relationships, which simply means that you get what you give. Altruism can also be seen in romantic relationships. This occurs when someone has an, “unselfish regard for the well-being of others” (Eckert). These aspects are seen in romantic relationships. If someone grows up in a household where one parent sacrifices more than the other, they may be likely to do the same thing. This could cause outliers in the study. Also, other cultures may have different expectations on the roles in relationships.

Whether one considers relationships to be “in” or “out” could have an influence on my study. If one identifies with an in group that values relationships in high school, they are more likely to approve of relationships or be in one themselves. These people may view groups who do not approve of high school relationships as their outgroups. This could have a large effect on my study because depending on who I survey, and what they consider as their “in group” or “out group,” could change.

The Conflict Center is working to create positive social norms to decrease dating violence among teenage relationships. They have set two programs in action, in hopes of decreasing relationships violence among teens. The programs also reduce risk factors by creating positive, protective factors. These programs are set in hopes to create a healthy understanding of teen relationships and what makes a good, healthy relationship for teenagers. Short term and long term, the main goal of this program is to set social norms for teens showing the dating violence is never acceptable, as teenagers or in the future. Researchers hope that as more norms develop, dating violence will decrease.

## Bibliography

Arcidiacono, P., Beauchamp, A., & McElroy, M. (n.d.). Terms of Endearment: An Equilibrium Model Of Sex and Matching. Retrieved June 2, 2015.

Lowrey, A. (2010, November 15). A study confirms every suspicion you ever had about high-school dating. Retrieved June 2, 2015.

Nauert, R. (2014, October 24). Parenting Style Impacts Teen Autonomy, Relationships. Retrieved June 2, 2015.

Positive Peer Norms - The Conflict Center. (n.d.). Retrieved June 2, 2015, from <http://conflictcenter.org/programs-classes/positive-peer-norms/>

## Varying Studies on Relationships and the Factors that Affect them

### Introduction

Relationships are arguably one of the most prominent aspects of society. I find the topic of relationships fascinating because they seem to be something that everyone eventually craves. My parents have been together for over 30 years and been married for 26. Throughout my entire life, I have witnessed my parent's lasting relationship. Perhaps this is why I find researching relationships and the varying aspects that influence their longevity so interesting. There have been numerous studies on the different aspects of relationships. This paper will review the various studies on relationships, and consider the factors that affect them and their stability the most.

### Literature Review

A study covering young adults' perception of relationships provided information on a psychological aspect of relationships. In order to conduct this study, researchers recruited a sample of eighth graders and supplied them with a questionnaire filled with questions regarding the different components of relationships. The questionnaire was formatted with open-ended questions that regarded the important characteristics in a romantic partner and approximation to sexual activity. Their answers reflected upon the young adults' perception of what relationships are and their feelings on them. They concluded that young adults consider "dating activities" to be spending time together, exchanging gifts, and enjoying time with each other. There was a large spectrum of findings in the sexual activity section of the questionnaire. Results ranged from holding hands, kisses on cheeks, oral sex, to sex. When asked to describe relationships, common responses would be "good," "positive," "serious," and "forever." When asked to describe the reasoning behind being in a relationship, responses ranged from social enhancement to personal growth. From here, researchers say they would like to expand upon the sample size and to find a way around participants self-reporting. This study helps me to understand a lot about how teenagers view relationships and many different aspects of them. Also, this study provides a sample of how I could set up a questionnaire, and what questions and terms I could use on this. The terms used on a table on page 403 will provide me with a list of dating activities that I will be able to create my own questionnaire with (Royer et al, 2009).

A ten-year longitudinal study covered how personality types had different friendship as well as romantic relationship quality. Researchers hypothesized that those with over controlling or resilient personality types would have less successful relationships. The study was conducted to a group of Dutch young adults. The format of the study included four waves of questionnaires, distributed to two age groups: 12-21 years, and 16-25 years. Researches began by assessing adolescents' personality types through the "Quick Big Five" questionnaire. The adolescents personalities were assessed using five important dimensions: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness. Researchers next questioned the

adolescents based on the positive and negative aspects of their relationships. Researchers then used scaling to determine whether one was dominated or not. Finally, researchers determined whether adolescents were “over controllers,” (someone who feels the need to constantly be in control) “under controllers,” (someone who lets themselves be bossed around too much) or “resilients” (take things one step at a time, bounce back from challenges with ease). Results found that over controllers and under controllers had higher levels of negative communication in relationships and that resilience were better at maintaining relationships through communication. Results also found that friendship quality as young adults has a lot of influence on future relationship quality for young adults. This study will aid my future work because it discusses the importance of friendship quality in relationships. This could lead to me incorporating some aspect of friendship in my study as well, comparing teens’ friendship quality to their relationship quality (Yu et al, 2009).

A study from Brown University researched into how much of an impact relationships have on adolescent behavior. Researchers believed that while relationships promote intimacy, they may interrupt some important psychological processes during adolescence. They believed that relationships are extremely important to adolescent development, and that relationships too early or too late can have negative effects on teens. The methods for this study were not provided, but results and suggestions for future work were. Results reported that relationships have profound health risks that come along with them, which could in turn alter behavior. The risk of teen pregnancy can alter teenage behavior, causing stress and strain. In the case of a teen pregnancy, a teen is forced to grow up and completely change their priorities and behavior. Researchers also found that sexual or physical abuse, especially in relationships, can have profound impacts. The study concluded that 25% of young adults in relationships are victims of dating violence. This leads to an increase in depression and thoughts of suicide. Researchers were correct in their hypothesis and found that it can indeed be harmful for adolescents to be involved in relationships too early or too late. Those involved in romantic relations too early can lose sight of other important priorities and focus solely on relationships. Those who get involved in relationships too late can often be psychologically underdeveloped and socially awkward. This study will be helpful to me because it discusses how certain aspects of relationships can have negative effects on behavior. It has provided me with information that will aid the behavioral aspect of my future work (Brown University, 2003).

Richard B. Slatcher questioned how the use of certain words in Instant Messages (IMs) give prediction towards relationship success. It was presumed that the use of active first-person pronouns would reflect stability and success, and the use of words like “me” and “you” would reflect instability and failure. In order to conduct this study, a team of researchers analyzed archived IM messages between 68 heterosexual couples (68 men, 68 women). They examined linguistic features relevant to romantic relationships, the use of personal pronouns, and the use of emotional words or sarcasm. Researchers evaluated the IM messages and participants were separately questioned using the Relationship Satisfaction Scale (1-7). Researchers concluded that

the use of the word “we” had neither a positive or negative effect. There was a positive correlation between the use of “I” and couples rating on the Satisfaction Scale. The use of emotion words (sad, happy, angry, nervous) reflected stability. This finding is due to the fact that the use of emotion words typically reflects communication on feelings. Researchers also found that individuals who portray themselves as optimistic in their IM’s are matched with partners who do the same. This study came with several limitations. First off, since the IMs were forwarded to the researchers by the participants, the participants could send messages that have positive conversation and leave out negative IMs. This could be improved in future studies by not informing participants when their messages would be retrieved, and selecting random samples. Also, this study only included a small percentage of relationships compared to what could have been done. Expanding the study could be beneficial in order to retrieve broader results. Also, since this study is restricted to only IM messages, it would be interesting for future studies to explore comparing IM conversation to face to face conversation. This study helps me a lot because it breaks down how the coders decoded the messages between couples, and if I do something involving messaging in my study, it will be beneficial to have the knowledge provided by the coders from the study (Slatcher et al, 2008).

A team of researchers examined desire discrepancy (DD). This term is used to describe sex drive differences within a couple. DD is a common issue for many couples and can result in much frustration and disharmony in a relationship. It was hypothesized that the lower the level of discrepancy, the higher the rate of satisfaction would be. Researchers defined sexual satisfaction as: “an effective response arising from one’s subjective evaluation of the positive and negative dimensions associated with one’s sexual relationship.” 133 heterosexual couples were selected. These couples had been in relationships for over one year. These couples took an online survey that assessed satisfaction in romantic relationships. The couples were instructed to take the surveys independently and keep their answers private. In order to determine sexual satisfaction, researchers used the Index of Sexual Satisfaction. In order to calculate desire discrepancy in relationships, the dyadic subscale of the Sexual Desire Inventory was used. Results confirmed sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction had a positive correlation. Also, women and men with higher levels of discrepancy from their partners tended to have higher levels of sexual satisfaction. Researchers suggest that future work should expand upon a larger, more diverse group of people (this study was conducted in Ontario, Canada). Perhaps expanding this study worldwide would provide researchers with more information. Also, there were no cutoff scores in this study that indicated someone had an unhealthy level of sexual desire. This could show large levels of discrepancy that cannot be controlled by partners due to a medical issue; therefore, incorporating cutoff scores could prove beneficial. This study will aid me in my research because I learned a lot about desire discrepancy and how it is involved in romantic relationships. If I were to use this study as a starting point, I would probably expand upon what the differences in desire discrepancy lead to in a relationship (Mark et al, 2012).

A study based out of Philadelphia, PA studied a group of Puerto Rican and African American teenagers. The objective of the study was to find out how electronic communication has a role in young romantic relationships. Going further, they wanted to compare how couples who only “hook up” communicate when contrasted with couples who date steadily. This study focused on a group of 18-25 year old, sexually active Puerto Ricans and African Americans. The selection of participants were put through various forms of data selection which included focus groups, interviews, but most importantly, coital diaries. Researchers asked participants to write a detailed diary which focused on their relationships. Through the various forms of data selection, researchers found that 90% of the young adults surveyed used cell phones as a mean of communication. Cell phone use is most important during the formation of relationships, when face-to-face communication may be too intimidating. Researchers concluded that verbal conversation over cell phones is more important in long term relationships, because it serves as a way to remain close even when there is distance between a couple. Cell phone use was also important to the young adults because it provided them with a way to address difficult topics in a way that was not face-to-face, making the situation less uncomfortable for some. The team of researchers conducting this study suggested that future work should expand from simple cell phone use (texting, verbal) to the use of dating apps and social media sites. Also, this study was conducted in 2006-2007, which was before many people had smartphones. Couples now use facetime, skype, and various other forms of communication. It would be interesting for future work to study how the evolution of these apps has had an influence on relationships. This study could prove to be very useful for me if I decided to focus on the social media aspect of relationships. It gives a good framework for what was done for cell phone use, so I could transform it into something that studied how different social media apps had influence on relationships (Kraft et al, 2012).

A team of researchers developed a study that answered the question: does virtual intimacy exist? This study not only answered that question, but also compared face-to-face intimacy and virtual intimacy. This study defined intimacy not just as sexual, but as simply feeling close to someone. Researchers hypothesized that there would be a level of intimacy in virtual relationships, but it would be significantly lower than face-to-face relationships. A selection of 546 participants took part in this study. The participants were required to be involved in both online relationships as well as face-to-face relationships. Intimacy in participant’s relationships were scaled using Sternberg and Ruben scales. These scales were used to measure intimacy. The next step was comparing the levels of intimacy in the two different types of relationships. Results confirmed the hypothesis that levels of intimacy in virtual relationships would be much lower than face-to-face relationships. However, those involved in virtual relationships reported that they felt less intimate in face-to-face relationships, whereas those who are not involved in online relationships reported higher levels of face-to-face intimacy. Researchers found that intimacy developed online is often superficial and disappears when translated into face-to-face intimacy. Although researchers felt as if they gained a lot of

information in this study, there is much left to be discovered. This study was relatively small, seeing how large the internet and its possibilities are. Expanding the study may be beneficial. Also, now that it has been confirmed that online intimacy does exist, future studies should examine the success of relationships with face-to-face intimacy and relationships with virtual intimacy. This study will aid me because it gave a good definition of what intimacy is, and expanded upon the idea of it, which I could incorporate. Also, if I were interested in looking into social media, this could be useful when studying those relationships developed online (Mottarella et al, 2006).

Researchers tackled the task of finding out if conflict resolution and recovery from conflict could predict the success of a romantic relationship. They presumed that successful recovery from conflicts enables relationships to focus on new, positive relationship goals. This ultimately would lead to healthier, longer relationships. A final sample of 80 heterosexual couples was derived from a group of 1,913 individuals. The mean age of these individuals was 15.48 years old. The first step to this study was both partners completing an online questionnaire. Next, the participants were placed in a room together (one couple at a time) and researchers videotaped them and observed. They were given a common topic of conflict (cheating, forgetting, jealousy, not liking friends, etc) and given 4.5 minutes to discuss. At 4 minutes, a researcher would knock on the door and tell the couple to come to resolution within the next 30 seconds. This exercise was repeated five times. Using a simplified 10-code version of Specific Affect Coding (SPAFF), the researchers broke down the couple's success in resolving conflicts through evaluating facial expressions, gestures, and speech characteristics (tone, volume). The entire process of the 5 conflicts being presented and then the discussions being coded occurred for five years straight, once a year. At each visit they would report their relationship status, and discuss any problems they were currently dealing with. To the researchers surprise, results reported that conflict resolution and recovery was not an accurate predictor of the likelihood of breaking up. However, this could be a result of the fact that adolescent relationships often face less "severe" conflicts than adult relationships, so conflicts may not be a factor in relationship stability. For future studies like the one described, researchers recommend a few suggestions. This study was conducted only on a group of Dutch teenagers enrolled in higher education. This limits the study from being generalized for couples all around the world because it is only sampled from one country. Also, researchers recommend using a larger sample to observe, and observe them for longer periods of time, even into adulthood. This will show future researchers the true effects of conflict resolution over a long period of time. In my work, this study will help me because now I know that focusing on conflict resolution could bring up some varying results that I had initially anticipated. I will primarily be focusing on successful relationships, and if conflict resolution has little to no effect on relationship success I will not focus on it (Overbeek et al, 2013).

A 2001 study geared its focus towards the prevalence of psychological effect resulting from partner violence and the implications resulting from it. Researchers did not have a specific

prediction on what their findings would be, this study more set a framework for future studies involving partner violence in teenage relationships. The methods for this study involved students filling out an online, confidential questionnaire. 7500 adolescents who reported to be in heterosexual relationships were analyzed. Students were asked if they were ever called names, sworn at, publically embarrassed, threatened with violence, had something thrown at them, or if they had been pushed or attacked violently. The Conflict Tactics Scale was used to measure the participants' levels of victimization based on the answers to the questions. Results concluded that  $\frac{1}{3}$  of adolescents reported some sort of violence in their romantic relationships. 12% of the violence reported was physical violence. The victims also reported that they often had feelings of sadness and depression, and that the abusive relationships tended to end in failure. It was concluded by researchers that physical and mental abuse was common in adolescence. In future studies, researchers recommend expanding more upon the psychological effects of partner violence and how it affects a relationship. They also suggested being more narrow and subjective in future studies, perhaps focusing solely on physical violence or mental violence, not both. No same sex relationships were included in this study, and expanding into that realm could prove for an interesting comparison between heterosexual partner violence compared to homosexual. This study will aid me in my work because it provides a solid framework for future studies involving partner violence. It could easily be expanded upon using the suggestions listed above, and I think it would prove to be very interesting to expand into homosexual relationships (Oslak et al, 2001).

A study dove into investigating how the outcomes of relationships differed based off of the timing of sex. The researchers hypothesized that early sex (before or on the first date) may have negative long-term effects on a relationship. 10,932 unnamed individuals participated in this study. They answered the basic question, "Did you have sex for the first time before the first date, on the first date, or after the first date?" Participants answered this question on a 1-10 scale; one being before the first date, and 10 being waiting until marriage. From here, participants completed a survey with 300+ that analyzed all aspects of romantic relationships. To examine the specific dynamics of relationships, researchers used the RELATED Instrument. Once the relationships were fully analyzed, the researchers compared the timing of sex to the characteristics, dynamics, and success of the relationship. Most participants had sex within the first few weeks of dating. However, researcher's hypothesis was confirmed when they concluded that the most successful relationships delayed sex or waited until they were married. It was found that in these relationships, couples communicated more and were more open to discussion. Not surprising the researchers, couples who had sex earlier in the relationship tended to have lower relationship satisfaction and higher chances of failure. From here, researchers see many opportunities. Timing of sex is only one aspect of an intimate relationship; therefore, expanding upon this topic could be beneficial to understanding the role of sex in a relationship. Also, this study was based completely off of self-reports. This could lead to discrepancies in results. If it were possible to expand this study into something other than self-reporting, results may differ. Another interesting way to expand upon this study would be finding out what kinds of behavior

may influence sexual timing. Lastly, studying the implications of sex on a relationship could lead to an interesting study. This study was solely based on sex, and that is not something that I am looking to completely dive into. I think that the format of using a 300 question questionnaire may be helpful to me, so I can make sure that whatever topic I study, it is covered well. Also, I could include aspects of this study as a component of my final project, but I would like to expand upon more than just sex and the effect it has on a relationship (Carroll et al 2014).

#### Conclusions and Future Study

To fully understand high school relationships and the various factors that affect them would require combining various studies described above. The studies covered in this review will help set a framework for future studies on high school relationships. The studies above were typically specific to one aspect of a relationship, and examining these aspects in a study combining them all would be helpful. This would be interesting because I would be able to analyze all of the aspects that alter relationship dynamics in high school. High school relationships are important to research because they are so influential on the formation of future relationship. Relationships established in high school often set young adults up for their future relationships, therefore furthering research in this category is essential. Future studies should examine aspects of high school relationships, including conflict resolution, sexual dynamics, communication (through media or face-to-face, etc), age, and perception.

*Bibliography*

- Bergdall, A. R., Kraft, J. M., Andes, K., Carter, M., Hatfield-Timajchy, K., & Hock-Long, L. (2012). Love and Hooking Up in the New Millennium: Communication Technology and Relationships among Urban African American and Puerto Rican Young Adults. *Journal Of Sex Research*, 49(6), 570-582. doi:10.1080/00224499.2011.604748
- Ha, T., Overbeek, G., Lichtwark-Aschoff, A., & Engels, R. E. (2013). Do Conflict Resolution and Recovery Predict the Survival of Adolescents' Romantic Relationships?. *Plos ONE*, 8(4), 1-6. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0061871
- Halpern, C. T., Oslak, S. G., Young, M. L., Martin, S. L., & Kupper, L. L. (2001). Partner Violence Among Adolescents in Opposite-Sex Romantic Relationships: Findings From the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *American Journal Of Public Health*, 91(10), 1679-1685.
- Mark, K. P., & Murray, S. H. (2012). Gender Differences in Desire Discrepancy as a Predictor of Sexual and Relationship Satisfaction in a College Sample of Heterosexual Romantic Relationships. *Journal Of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 38(2), 198-215. doi:10.1080/0092623X.2011.606877
- Royer, H. R., Keller, M. L., & Heidrich, S. M. (2009). Young adolescents' perceptions of romantic relationships and sexual activity. *Sex Education*, 9(4), 395-408. doi:10.1080/14681810903265329
- Scott, V. M., Mottarella, K. E., & Lavooy, M. J. (2006). Does Virtual Intimacy Exist? A Brief Exploration into Reported Levels of Intimacy in Online Relationships. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 9(6), 759-761. doi:10.1089/cpb.2006.9.759
- Slatcher, R. B., Vazire, S., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2008). Am "I" more important than "we"? Couples' word use in instant messages. *Personal Relationships*, 15(4), 407-424. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2008.00207.x
- Teen relationships may impact behavior and health more than expected. (2003). *Brown University Child & Adolescent Behavior Letter*, 19(1), 1.
- Willoughby, B. J., Carroll, J. S., & Busby, D. M. (2014). Differing Relationship Outcomes When Sex Happens Before, On, or After First Dates. *Journal Of Sex Research*, 51(1), 52-61. doi:10.1080/00224499.2012.714012
- Yu, R., Branje, S., Keijsers, L., & Meeus, W. H. J. (2014). Personality Effects on Romantic Relationship Quality through Friendship Quality: A Ten-Year Longitudinal Study in Youths. *Plos ONE*, 9(9), 1-12. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0102078

## The Correlation Between Public Affection and Relationship Satisfaction

### Abstract:

The following study examines the correlation between public displays of affection (PDA) and relationship satisfaction between high school couples. Participants took a survey that evaluated their relationship satisfaction as well as their use of PDA, giving them a score for each category. From their responses were correlated in order to search for any relationships. The findings of this study were limited, seeing as there was a small amount of responses. As a result of the lack of responses, this study was not able to completely analyze the correlation. Suggestions for future work include broadening the amount of people surveyed, comparing the responses between couples, and correlating the responses of straight couples and gay couples.

### Introduction:

This study explores the path I took to discover if there was a correlation between PDA and relationship satisfaction. There is a lot of debate over PDA in our society, so I thought that it would be interesting to explore whether or not these displays of affection had a correlation with if one was satisfied in his or her relationship. My purpose in this study was to determine if PDA reflects happiness in a relationship. I have done a lot of research on what makes a relationship successful in general, but this study focuses on how the amount of PDA a couple shows reflects upon their satisfaction in relationships. The study I conducted used PDA as the independent variable and relationship satisfaction as the dependent variable. My initial hypothesis was that PDA can be very superficial and just because a couple shows a lot of affection towards each other, does not mean that the couple is not necessarily satisfied.

### Methods:

I began my study by accessing the class lists of four grades (9-12) and looking through those lists to determine who out of those people was involved in romantic relationships. The list I compiled was on the smaller side, consisting of around 20 people. In order to ensure full honesty from participants, I assured these participants that their answers were completely confidential and I was not aware of anyone's specific answers. In order to reduce my experimenter bias, I developed a survey that used neutral words, not making one side seem more favorable than the other.

In order to deal with the ethical concerns of this experiment, I was sure to inform participants that their answers were completely anonymous and I did not know who answered what to the questions. I think that anonymity is important in my study because people may feel embarrassed to answer the questions being asked, so if they are reassured that their responses are completely anonymous I may be able to receive more honest response. Before participants began the survey, there was a disclaimer at the top of the page that informed participants that the survey was completely voluntary and they were able to stop taking the survey at any time.

When developing my study, I developed two different surveys and compiled them into one. The first half of the survey developed focused on relationship satisfaction. The questions were all answered on a 1-5 scale, with 5 reflecting perfect satisfaction in a relationship such as "always agree" or "completely true," and 1 being the lowest correlating with something like "never agree" or "not at all true." Questions ranged from "Rate the validity of the statement: I

feel a close connection with my partner,” To “How often do you wish you had not gotten into this relationship?” Participants were then given a “relationship satisfaction” score, with 120 being the perfect score.

The second half of my survey evaluated one's use of PDA in a relationship. 30 was the maximum score, meaning that people who got this score used the maximum amount of affection in public. The lower the score, the less PDA participants claimed to have used. The questions ranged from things like, “During any given week, how often are you publically seen with your partner?” Or, “During any given week, how often do you publically hold hands with you partner?”

As said above, respondents were then given two scores: a relationship satisfaction score and a PDA score. These scores were then correlated with each other to see if there was a relationship between PDA and satisfaction, or no relationship between them at all.

#### Results:

Unfortunately, there was an insufficient amount of responses to my survey. As a result of this, I was not able to come to a concrete conclusion on whether or not there is in fact a correlation between PDA and relationship satisfaction. From the limited amount of responses I received, I realized that there is barely a correlation between relationship satisfaction and PDA. The satisfaction score was 106, which reflects a nearly perfectly satisfied relationship. The PDA score was a 6, which shows that there is little to no usage of PDA in the relationship. This shows that just because a relationship does not show a lot of public affection does not mean that they are not satisfied in their relationship, in this particular instance. I cannot make assumptions that all females that will have the same answers to this. In order to gain full understanding on whether or not PDA is associated with relationship satisfaction, further research would be necessary.

#### Conclusion:

My study was not as successful as I had anticipated it to be. Personally, I think that my survey did a really good job of analyzing the things that I had wanted it to, but unfortunately, solely due to a lack of responses I was not able to grasp a full understanding of the topic as I wanted to. I think that my pool of people to choose from was already limited, so it was hard to find a good group of people to take my survey. Many of the studies conducted were not as limited on participants because the prerequisites to take the surveys were less restrictive than mine were. If I were able to have widened my amount of participants I think that I would have had a much better turnout for my survey.

There are various modifications that I could suggest for future research. First of all, find a large selection of people to survey. This will decrease the chances of having a bad turnout. The more people you include initially, the more likely you are to have more results in the end. Secondly, it would be really interesting to try and compare the answers between couples. For example, compare what surveyee 1 said compared to what surveyee 2 said if they are in a relationship with each other. This may add some complexity to the study, but it would be worth examining. Another way to further research on this topic was compare the results of straight respondents and gay respondents. This may be interesting to see how things change in relationships depending on sexual orientation.

### Reflection:

From this experience, I have learned a multitude of information about psychological studies and experiments. Most importantly I learned that there is much more that goes into these experiments than simply developing a questionnaire. The process is long and requires much attention to detail, which I had never known. Also, I learned that the success of your study relies on a lot more than just the work of the researchers. No matter how well the researchers developed the study, if there is a lack of responses, the study falls to pieces. This happened to me, I spent a very long time developing my study, and when I sent it out to be taken, I only received one response. This was very frustrating because I had put so much time and effort into my study and developing all of the necessary components, so when I was not able to get a true sense of what my results were, I was let down. This experience and frustration has taught me that in this field of science, there is usually a lot of trial and error before something truly works. It takes multiple tries to fully get something down to a system, which can easily be evidenced by my study. I have gained a lot of respect for researchers who do this everyday after learning about how much patience it requires.

All of the work that I have done this year has taught me endless amounts of information regarding relationships that I had never known about. There are so many different aspects of a relationship that make it “good” Or “bad.” The topic of romantic relationships comes with a lot of complexity. There are various moving parts that define relationships. I learned that each one of these “parts” plays a specific and important role in the success of relationships. These “parts” can range from conflict resolution, sexuality, friendship quality, methods of communication, levels of violence, age, etc. Before conducting my research, I knew that there were these varying components in relationships, but I did not realize the importance of each of these. I think that I learned a lot about ways to keep all relationships in my life, not just romantic relationships, healthy. It is important to maintain communication, and stay true to yourself.

As I close this project, I think that there are a few major take aways I will hold with me. Most importantly, I learned that putting months of work into something may be challenging, but well worth it in the end. There were times during this past year where I felt as if this project was never going to end, but now that it has ended, I could not be more proud. I worked so hard on all of the different aspects of this project, and reflecting back on them now, I realize how much I truly have learned. I went in to the beginning of this year not knowing much about the factors that affected teenage relationships, and I am coming out with it bearing a multitude of knowledge regarding countless amounts of information about high school relationships. Also, I learned that sometimes, no matter how hard you try, certain things are not in your control. No matter how hard you try to make something work, when you are depending on other people for success, you cannot fully blame yourself when something does not go the way that you want it to. I am very proud of myself and the work that I have put into all of the pieces of my work showcased in this final portfolio.