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“She Posted It on Facebook”: Mexican American Adolescents’ Experiences With Technology and Romantic Relationship Conflict

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Abstract

We examined experiences with technology and dating conflict among Mexican American (MA) adolescents (ages 15-17 years) using mixed qualitative methodologies. Focus groups, divided by three levels of acculturation and gender (*N* = 20), and videotaped observations of couples (*N* = 34), found that technology (i.e., cell phones, social media) afforded adolescents increased visibility of their partners’ day-to-day peer interactions. Feelings of romantic jealousy resulted in text message harassment and the expectation of immediate technology-facilitated contact. Females were more flirtatious as well as emotionally affected by jealousy resulting from social media sites, and males set rules regarding other-sex texting. Social media was particularly salient among more highly acculturated youth. Online spaces offered an opportunity for outside parties to observe unhealthy relationships and to offer support.

Keywords

technology, adolescence, violence, romantic relationships, qualitative methods, Latinos

A more complete understanding of modern youth culture requires an integration of peer interactions and social norms with adolescent technology use. The PEW Internet and American Life Project (2013) uses nationally representative samples to track trends of information communication technology (ICT) and has found that utilization rates among adolescents (ages 12-17 years) have been steadily increasing. The number of American adolescents with a cell phone is now 78% and 37% of their phones are Internet connected (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013). In addition, 93% of teens have access to a computer at home, and one in four teens has a tablet (e.g., iPad). Adolescents' experiences with ICTs vary somewhat by socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, cultural background, and age (Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera, & Pattern, 2013), although nearly all youth spend time online (Lenhart, 2012). This includes Latino populations for whom the digital divide gap is closing (Lopez et al., 2013) and who, in fact, may use certain ICT functions more frequently than other racial/ethnic groups (Lenhart, 2012). Youth in the United States are going through an important developmental period that intersects with technology-facilitated social interactions in ways that we have yet to fully understand.

The present study is an exploratory examination of romantic conflict as experienced through ICTs among Mexican American (MA) middle adolescents (15-17 years). The focus on MA youth reflects important cultural considerations that shape relationship experiences and differences found in ICT behaviors. The body of research on romantic relationships and ICT experiences largely consists of survey data of primarily Caucasian college students. The present study utilizes a mixed qualitative methods design (focus group + observational dyadic data) to understand MA adolescents' experiences with romantic relationship conflict as described among same-gender and similarly acculturated peers and as lived in couples' real-time interactions.

Social Media and Texting Among Diverse Adolescents

The number of teens who report that they are online is high; 95% are connected, and 70% are on the Internet daily (Lenhart et al., 2011). Certain social networking sites (SNS) are more popular than others; of teens with SNS accounts, 93% report using Facebook (Lenhart et al., 2011). In addition to social media use, a majority of youth (63%) report texting someone every day with a median of 60 outgoing texts; meanwhile, the number of outgoing phone calls continues to decline (Lenhart, 2012). Earlier research and public opinion evidenced a marked concern over a digital divide due to the afford- ability of technology-facilitated platforms (Lopez et al., 2013). Rather, the PEW

Research Center has found that the rates of ICT use are high across all adolescents but that the type of device and activity vary by age, income, and race. For example, older adolescent females send more texts than younger adolescent males and females, and Hispanic youth report the highest number of daily outgoing text messages ($M = 202$; Lenhart, 2012). Although the majority of Latinos own cell phones (81%), the high volume of texting by Hispanic youth could be explained by the low percentage (35%) of those who own smart phones (Lenhart, 2012). Texting potentially replaces time spent using social media or chat features available through smart phones (Lopez et al., 2013). Text messaging and online socializing have become a predominant mode of communicating among adolescents and during a developmental time when peer networks and romantic relationships are a high priority (Connolly & Goldberg, 1999).

Social Media and Relationship Experiences

Surprisingly, there has been minimal research examining the influence of ICT on adolescents' romantic relationships. Some studies suggest contextual and age considerations. For example, compared with nononline chatters, Canadian adolescent females using chat rooms were more likely to experience dissatisfaction with their best friends but have improved levels of trust, commitment, communication, and feelings of intimacy with their romantic partner (Blais, Craig, Pepler, & Connolly, 2008). Similarly, ICT use among married and engaged couples enhanced feelings of closeness; individuals reported using online communications to speak frequently throughout the day as well as to express positive feelings and affection toward their partner (Coyne, Stockdale, Busby, Iverson, & Grant, 2011).

In addition to communicating intimately through messages, Facebook offers several tiers, both public and private, to share information. For example, the courtship ritual termed “FBO” or “Facebook Official” has become an important cultural public declaration of feelings. Among college-age youth, this ritual is linked to relationship satisfaction, as is having a profile picture that features a romantic partner (Papp, Danielewicz, & Cayemberg, 2012). Other studies similarly indicate that the use of social networks influences emotions and perceptions in gendered manners within romantic relationship contexts. For example, undergraduate females report higher rates of affectionate displays than males when using Facebook, and are more likely to view them as appropriate (Mansson & Myers, 2011). Adolescent females also view monitoring as more acceptable than do males, particularly as it concerns social media sites (Lucero, Weisz, Smith-Darden, & Lucero, 2014).

Romantic Relationship Conflict and Violence

Social networking and other forms of ICT (e.g., texting) contribute in unique ways to experiences with romantic relationship conflict. Muise, Christofides, and Desmarais (2009), for example, found that exposure to previous roman- tic partners and unknown friends predicted Facebook jealousy, particularly among females. Others have similarly concluded that Facebook encourages feelings of jealousy and surveillance behaviors (Elphinston & Noller, 2011). Among MA adolescents, jealousy may serve as a trigger for dating violence (Adams & Williams, 2014), which may be facilitated via ICT. A study utilizing a national sample of adolescents found that 18% reported a partner's use of social media to harass them or put them down, 11% reported sharing a partner's private content without permission, 10% reported physically threatening a partner, and 17% reported fearing consequences if they did not respond to a phone call, text, or other form of communication from their partner (Glauber, Randel, & Picard, 2007).

The U.S. 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance survey found that Hispanic youth, and especially girls, experience dating violence victimization to a greater extent than other ethnic groups (Kann et al., 2014). Seventeen percent of Hispanic females, as compared to a 14.8% national average, reported experiencing electronic bullying within the past year, which included using social media messaging, email, and texting (Kann et al., 2014).

Cultural Considerations

MA adolescents may have unique values that shape their use of technology and, correspondingly, their romantic relationships. For example, MA youth place greater emphasis than do European American (EA) youth on intimacy with romantic partners through friendship, trust, and care (Williams & Hickle, 2010). Also, Latino youth typically begin dating at a younger age than other ethnic groups (age 13), and male partners tend to be older (Bouris et al., 2012). As compared with African American youth, MA youth are also more futuristic and family oriented when assessing dating and marital plans. In doing so, displays of outward affection, particularly from a boyfriend to his female partner, may be particularly important (Milbrath, Ohlson, & Eyre, 2009). Such gendered processes are affected by acculturation, an ongoing process through which people from one culture adjust to another culture, including modifying their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors as a result of con- tact with the new culture. Acculturation is a nonlinear process; however, most MA adolescents fall into three distinct acculturative groups (i.e., high, low, bicultural; Nieri, Lee, Kulis, & Marsiglia, 2011).

An understanding of MA romantic relationships inspires the inclusion of acculturation in the research study design. For example, low acculturated adolescents may be more likely than highly acculturated adolescents to demonstrate possessive jealousy traits facilitative of partner violence online as they do offline (Adams & Williams, 2014). Further, jealousy may be a particularly salient relationship experience among acculturating MA adolescents who navigate distinct and at times opposing sets of cultural values concerning romantic relationship expectations (Milbrath et al., 2009). Studies with adolescents suggest that jealousy and online violence behaviors are related but may not be perceived as abusive (Lucero et al., 2014).

The Present Study

The present study used focus groups divided by three levels of acculturation (low, bicultural, and highly acculturated) and gender (male, female), as well as direct observations of couples (videotaped interactions) in order to better understand the role of technology in MA adolescents' experiences with conflict in romantic relationships. We utilized a qualitative mixed-methods design as outlined by Morse and Niehaus (2009). This method dictates that one source of data, having reached saturation, forms the core component from which major findings are derived. A second but distinct method is then used to supplement the core source of data and is interpreted using the results from it. This is denoted as QUAL + qual: here, "QUAL" meaning that focus groups formed the core analytic component and "qual" meaning that dyadic video-observations supplemented the themes derived. This multitiered form of analysis is ideal when the aim is to explore and triangulate findings across different data sources, particularly when a second source adds a layer of conceptual depth to the first. This design allowed for an assessment of how adolescents interpreted technology use, conflict, and dating violence (i.e., as discussed freely among same-sex and similarly acculturated peers) via a phenomenological standpoint that privileged the meaning youth assigned to these experiences (Padgett, 2008). Building on these findings, we then explored whether and how technology use, as described, surfaced within couples' conversations of conflict to affect them in real-time dyadic contexts.

Method

Sample and Recruitment

The governing institutional review board approved all research activities. The goal of the Mexican American Teen Relationships (MATR) study is to further our understanding of the romantic relationship experiences of urban MA middle adolescents from a Southwest border state. Participants (*N* = 304) were recruited in collaboration with area high schools, community centers (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs), and citywide events. All adolescents who met recruitment criteria (i.e., 15-17 years, self-identified as MA) were invited to participate in a survey, and were told they would then also be eligible to participate in a focus group (*N* = 64) and/or a videotaped interaction task with a dating partner also between the ages of 15 and 17 years (*N* = 34 couples). Adolescents each received US$15 for survey participation, US$10 and pizza/ snacks for focus group participation, and US$15 for the videotaped interaction task. See Table 1 for sample demographics. Of note, approximately half the participants had both perpetrated and been victimized by physical violence within their most recent romantic relationship as assessed by the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI; 70 items; Wolfe et al., 2001). The CADRI has demonstrated strong internal consistency, 2-week test-retest reliability, and acceptable partner agreement. We achieved good to excellent reliability in the MATR sample: physical violence perpetration, $\alpha = .83$; physical violence victimization, $\alpha = .86$; general dating violence perpetration, $\alpha = .93$; general dating violence victimization, $\alpha = .94$. All materials were provided in Spanish and English. Parental consent for all three study components was obtained in one form, and assent for each component was provided individually (i.e., up to three separate times) from the adolescent at the time of data collection. All data were collected either at the school or agency in a private room, or at the University. An educational debriefing handout on healthy relationships was provided after participation.

Focus groups. In order to encourage in-depth discussion of romantic relationship experiences, including those with violence, a total of 20 small homogeneous groups were created. Such group characteristics are preferred when the intention is to provide minority voices the opportunity to dialogue about sensitive topics among others of perceived similarity and to offer sufficient time for each individual to talk in greater detail (Letendre & Williams, 2014; Toner, 2009). Groups of three to five participants were scheduled (17 of 20 groups resulted in two to four participants as a result of "no shows"). Homogeneous acculturation groups were created according to adolescents' survey responses on the *Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans–Short Form* (ARMSA-SF; 12 items; Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995). This measure uses a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much or almost all the time*) to assess cultural preferences via both social (e.g., "I associate with White people"; changed from "Anglo" in the present study) and linguistic indicators (e.g., "I enjoy speaking Spanish"). A total of 12 items measure Mexican orientation (MOS subscale; 6 items; α = .89) and Anglo orientation (AOS subscale; 6 items; α = .70), and an overall acculturation score was calculated by taking both subscales into account (AOS-MOS). Participants were invited into three respective groups: highly acculturated (HA; >1), bicultural (BI; 0-1), and low acculturated (LA; <0). This grouping reflects a slightly skewed Anglo orientation mean (.82) in the present sample. All adolescents were invited to participate until each group type (gender/acculturation) was saturated, resulting in 7 HA groups (three male), 7 BI groups (three male), and 6 LA groups (three male). At the time of survey, over half (*n* = 41) the participants were involved in a relationship (see Table 1). Although groups were comprised of both heterosexual and homosexual youth, a majority (*n* = 31 of 35 respondents) reported dating a partner of the other sex.

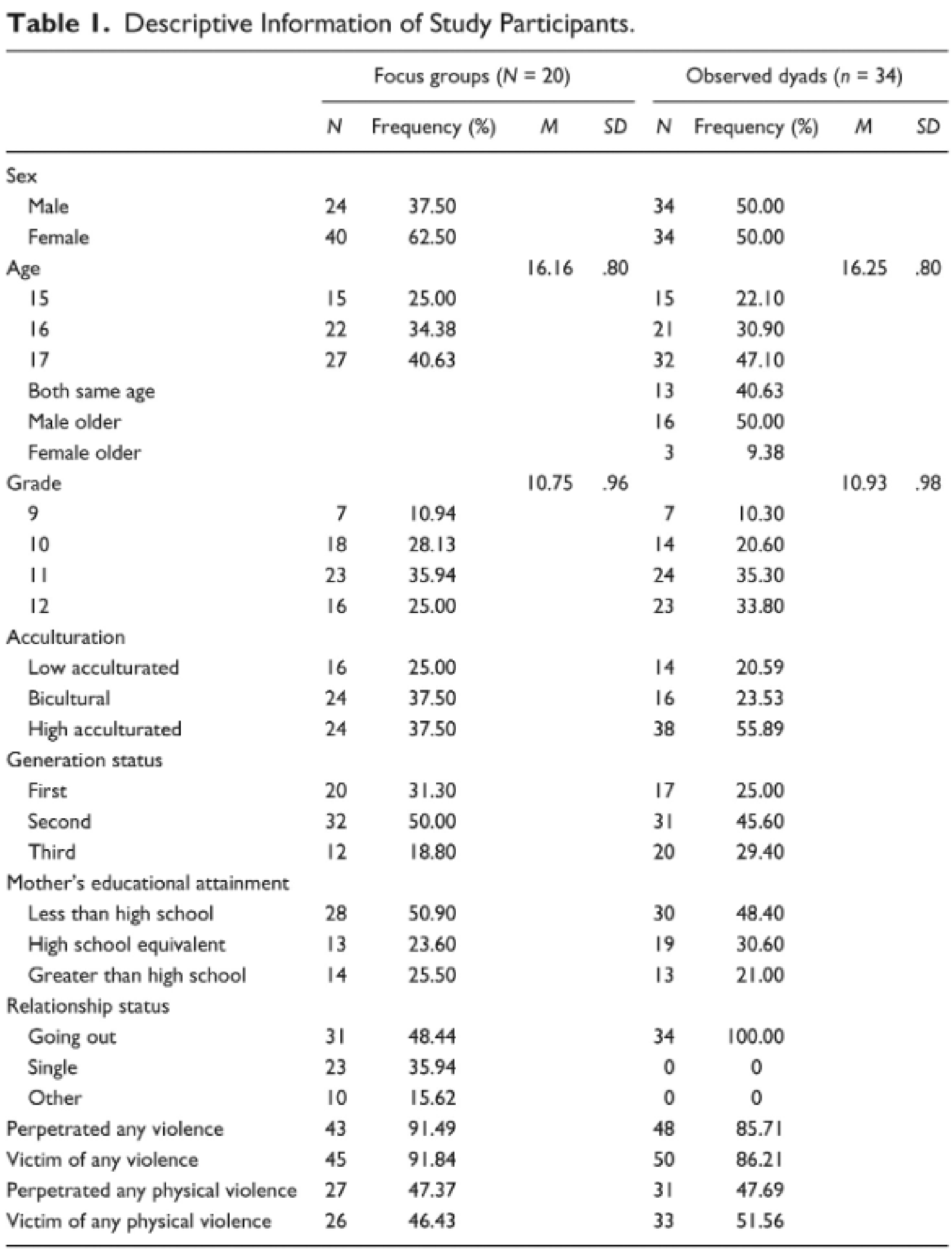

Table 1. Descriptive Information of Study Participants.

	Focus groups (*N* = 20)				Observed dyads (*n* = 34)			
	N	Frequency (%)	*M*	*SD*	*N*	Frequency (%)	*M*	*SD*
Sex								
Male	24	37.50			34	50.00		
Female	40	62.50			34	50.00		
Age			16.16	.80			16.25	.80
15	15	25.00			15	22.10		
16	22	34.38			21	30.90		
17	27	40.63			32	47.10		
Both same age					13	40.63		
Male older					16	50.00		
Female older					3	9.38		
Grade			10.75	.96			10.93	.98
9	7	10.94			7	10.30		
10	18	28.13			14	20.60		
11	23	35.94			24	35.30		
12	16	25.00			23	33.80		
Acculturation								
Low acculturated	16	25.00			14	20.59		
Bicultural	24	37.50			16	23.53		
High acculturated	24	37.50			38	55.89		
Generation status								
First	20	31.30			17	25.00		
Second	32	50.00			31	45.60		
Third	12	18.80			20	29.40		
Mother's educational attainment								
Less than high school	28	50.90			30	48.40		
High school equivalent	13	23.60			19	30.60		
Greater than high school	14	25.50			13	21.00		
Relationship status								
Going out	31	48.44			34	100.00		
Single	23	35.94			0	0		
Other	10	15.62			0	0		
Perpetrated any violence	43	91.49			48	85.71		
Victim of any violence	45	91.84			50	86.21		
Perpetrated any physical violence	27	47.37			31	47.69		
Victim of any physical violence	26	46.43			33	51.56		

Note. First generation denotes that the adolescent was born in Mexico, second generation denotes that (a) parent(s) was born in Mexico, and third generation denotes that both parents were born in the United States. A relationship status of "other" denotes that the adolescent was either casually dating, in a hookup relationship, or in a friends-with-benefits relationship. One adolescent in this category was married. Valid percentages were used when there was missing data. The Conflict in Relationships Dating Inventory (70 items, CADRI; Wolfe et al., 2001) was used to assess violence; violence indicators denote that the adolescent had enacted violence against a dating partner or had been victim to violence at least one time by a dating partner in the past year. Emotional, relational, sexual, and physical violence are included in the measure of any violence.

The ethnicity and gender of the moderator and/or the assistant moderator were matched to the focus group type whenever possible. A bilingual moderator (first author) asked questions in the preferred language of the group, as was more common of LA groups. Key questions were consistent and solicited youth's experiences with relationship conflict, including common sources of arguments, the contexts in which conflict occurs, how conflict is related to experiences with dating violence, and the consequences of conflict and dating violence to adolescents' lives. A digital recorder and smartpen were used to record audio, the latter of which linked recordings with hand- written notes. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and bilingual staff transcribed and translated Spanish dialogue.

Videotaped couple interactions. Adolescents were invited to participate in the videotaped interaction task if they had identified on the survey that they were in a dating relationship with a partner aged 15 to 17 years. Focus group participation did not preclude an adolescent from also participating in the video- taped interaction task (14 participated in both research components). Further, although adolescents could bring a dating partner of any ethnicity for the interaction task, a large majority of couples (30/34) were both MA. Although we recognize the value in sampling same-sex couples, we did not have enough interested couples to allow for comparisons across couple types; therefore, we limited participation in the interaction task to those in heterosexual relationships.

Two trained researchers led couples in an interaction task whereby participants were asked to discuss their favorite movies (5 minutes warm-up), two areas of conflict in their relationship (7 minutes each partner), and their individual goals (5 minutes each partner). Couples' conflict issues were chosen from the *Partner Issues Checklist* (Capaldi, Wilson, & Collier, 1994). Couples were told that the list was comprised of common relationship problems, and each partner was instructed to privately star the issue most recent or important to them. They were also instructed to circle a second issue, used for discussion when partners had starred the same issue. After facilitators had given verbal instructions concerning each task, they left the room only to return at the allotted time. A video camera was positioned to capture adolescents' faces and body language, and a digital recorder was placed in front of the couple (i.e., on the desk or table). Video and audio recordings were later used to transcribe verbatim dialogue.

Analyses

All focus group and dyadic data were organized using NVivo (Gibbs, 2002). Consistent with a QUAL + qual method of analysis (Morse & Niehaus, 2009), distinct but compatible paradigms were used to analyze two forms of qualitative data. A phenomenological approach privileged youth's perspectives in focus groups and sought to uncover meaning as they assigned it to such experiences (Padgett, 2008). In line with this theoretical drive, as is common in qualitative methods (Padgett, 2008), technology use surfaced tangentially to the key questions asked. As such, we were sensitized to its utilization as instrumental to their experiences with romantic relationship conflict and explored it as the basis for the present study. Technology use also surfaced within conversations among couples in observed discussion of conflict, thus alerting us to how it became part of adolescents' experiences with dating conflict in lived dyadic and real-time contexts.

Focus groups themes and subthemes were derived via inductive content analysis, whereby verbatim transcripts were first carefully analyzed in their entirety for any mention of technology (i.e., all such dialogue was initially coded into this broad "technology" theme) and then categorized into meaningful conceptual units. The first author coded all data multiple times as the codebook underwent reiterations by the second and third authors until all authors agreed upon categories as reflective of participants' technology use and experiences. We sought differences and similarities by gender and level of acculturation, and gave weight to dialogue on the basis of personal examples, extensiveness, affect, and frequency. Observational data were integrated at the point of interface, meaning that results from the core component (i.e., focus groups) formed the theoretical foundation for analysis of video- taped dyadic interactions (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). That is, focus group dialogue served as the dominant data source and formed the organizational template for integration of observational data. Flexible templates are used when the aim is to verify existing findings while permitting new insight (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Specifically, direct observations of couples allowed us to “go and see” (Morse & Niehaus, 2009, p. 112) whether findings that emerged as salient within peer contexts were supported in dyadic interactions. In presenting results, pseudo names are utilized alongside example quotations.

Results

Technology affected how conflict within romantic relationships was experienced, including greater opportunity for interactions with peers of the other sex, heightened jealousy and mistrust, and consequently, enhanced partner monitoring and surveillance. These themes are understood within the broader finding that many adolescents endorsed loose definitions of cheating, including talking to someone of the other sex, particularly when involving someone unknown to the partner. Such interactions were popularized and difficult to avoid as “talking” to someone included multiple forms of ICT. Thus, “technology” herein includes the use of social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, MySpace) available on computers but accessed primarily through smart phones, other smart phone–specific applications and functions (e.g., “They’re using this app called ‘voxer’” Luis, HA, which is “like walkie talkies” in that voice messages may be sent), and cell phone text messaging. Such communication was instantaneous, constantly updated, and highly accessible. These characteristics of technology were facilitative to partner harassment and control. Paradoxically, technology use also alerted peers and parents to couples’ experiences with conflict and dating violence, thus providing a potential intervention opportunity.

There were noted differences in adolescents’ experiences by gender, particularly as female adolescents offered more extensive dialogue overall than did males. Females described themselves as more flirtatious than males on social media platforms, and their dialogue included more instances of emotional upset stemming from Facebook jealousy. Jealousy associated with texting, on the other hand, was viewed as more concerning to males than to females; the latter was evidenced by males setting texting rules that limited interaction with peers of the other sex.

There were also notable distinctions across acculturation. LA males and females contributed little to discussion of technology in focus groups as compared with BI and HA youth. One exception was that LA males and females, and not BI and HA, discussed using search engines, such as Google, to learn about dating violence or to seek help for it. BI and HA males and females, on the other hand, discussed various technology platforms, including social media, phone applications, and texting, each of which contributed significantly to emergent themes concerning jealousy, mistrust, and alerting others to unhealthy relationship dynamics. Thus, we interpret technology's role in these experiences as particularly salient to BI and HA youth, especially as multiple platforms facilitated interaction with peers of the other sex and contributed to romantic jealousy. Mistrust and surveillance behaviors were, however, evidenced in LA youth's dialogue although they spoke of home computers, calling, and texting versus smart phone applications and social media. Despite these distinctions, dyadic conversations suggest that as youth form mixed-acculturation pairs, multiple technology-facilitated plat- forms are utilized to communicate with one another. Furthermore, themes from focus groups were largely supported among mixed-acculturation pairs in their discussions. Results are outlined temporally, first displaying focus group themes and following with an integration of dialogue from couples' conversations. The latter includes findings that were captured by the focus group thematic template, as well as emergent findings unique to observations of dyadic conversations.

Theme 1: Technology Contributed to Romantic Jealousy

Adolescents reiterated Roxy's (BI) sentiment that "most teens now have smart phones and apps," and BI and HA adolescents in particular viewed technology-facilitated interaction not only as a norm but also as sometimes preferred over face-to-face communication. Alyssa (BI) stated, "You don't stay up talking with that person on the phone anymore. You don't know how to interact with people anymore because you're always texting," similar to Sheila (BI), "A relationship online cyber texting or sexting . . . it's normal." Youth described various ways in which the use of technology offered limitless opportunity for interaction not only with their dating partner but also with peers of the other sex. Online social media websites such as Facebook were salient to the experiences of BI and HA acculturated youth, who viewed them as particularly problematic (e.g., "I think social networking is a big, like relationship problem" Kara, HA), and as exclusively attributed to issues of jealousy and mistrust. First, Facebook created opportunities to connect with previously unknown peers. Kara described this as "when a boyfriend has so many girls that he doesn't know . . . same goes for the girl too. She's adding all these guys she doesn't even know." Second, adding new "friends" opened the door to further communication with that individual and Facebook was viewed as a platform for more daring, uninhibited, and flirtatious interaction. Kara provided the following example: "'Thanks for the add' or being 'Oh, let's talk, or text me some- time.'" Luis, HA, contrasted this succinctly, "in person, you're all shy," but "on Facebook you can say whatever." Accepting a friend's request or send- ing one, therefore, led to jealousy on behalf of dating partners, particularly as written comments were documented and semiavailable for peer viewing (i.e., as long as all parties were "friends"). Adolescent males and females discussed this phenomenon, yet females dialogued in greater detail about their involvement in altering relationship dynamics via Facebook, and were more emotionally upset by Facebook postings. Specifically, females felt that they were more likely to flirt, including the creation of gamelike online communication (e.g., "The truth is . . ."). They were also more troubled by others' flirtation with their partner, as exemplified in this conversation among BI females:

> Jacquelyn: Because like there's things . . . on Facebook and you're just like "What is this?!" . . . Like let's say your boyfriend and this girl, and this girl takes things just a little too far and you see it—like obviously you're going to get mad and then that starts another argument . . . Then there are these posts that say all these things that you're not supposed to say to someone who's dating somebody because then that person that they're dating is going to be like, "Why is she saying this kind of stuff to you?" . . .
>
> Kara: Yeah it's like, "'Like' my status and I'll tell you 'The truth is . . .'" and then they like write all this stuff like "The truth is you're pretty cute, you're really funny." . . .
>
> Jacquelyn: And then they'll be like . . . "Let's talk sometime" and then they reply back and stuff . . . and you're like "Oh! What is she doing?!" but like the guy doesn't even really care. Like he isn't paying attention to it.

Females also offered more personal examples than did males of how tex- ting became problematic in their relationships; contrary to their indifference to Facebook postings, they felt that males overreacted to what they perceived as innocent texting communication. Vanessa (HA) voiced this sentiment: "I don't know, like it just came out that I was texting another guy, and he went crazy . . . I didn't do anything really," as did Caprice (HA), "Like sometimes if you're with them and you're texting, even if it's your mom . . . they just automatically get jealous."

Although this theme of enhanced opportunity for interaction with peers and of jealousy was supported most heavily by female dialogue, the outcome was within-couple mistrust and suspicion. This, in turn, was associated with a tendency by both males and females to vigilantly oversee a dating partner's Facebook and phone activity. The following theme reflects adolescents' experiences with technology monitoring and surveillance—perceived as acceptable by some, and as abusive by others.

Theme 2: Mistrust Propagated Partner Monitoring, Surveillance, and Controlling Behaviors

Surveillance and monitoring: "I've got her password and she's got mine."

Given that comments such as those discussed were only available for public viewing among mutual Facebook "friends," and privately within Facebook personal messages, some adolescents shared passwords to their online accounts. Discussion of password sharing was couched within a desire for trust, and served as a test of it. For example, Luis (HA) felt that he and his girlfriend mutually respected one another's Facebook privacy:

> Like me, I've got her password and she's got mine, but I never check hers and she never checks mine . . . So I mean if you trust each other, there's no need to be checking. Because like I told her, "You're old enough to know what's wrong and what's right, so there's no need for me to treat you like a little girl."

Females, including Roxy (BI), described instances of logging into a part- ner's account and finding messages from girls: "I think some forget that they gave the password to their girlfriend and then you go and like stuff that's not supposed to be said and is said." Although checking private messages was not discussed, one group of low acculturated males did feel that, "Like twenty-four seven, trying to see what you do" was "overbearing" (David), described as "like checking your computer at home" (Gary). Texting, how- ever, was viewed by David as a more appropriate way to monitor a partner: ". . . text them, but that's about it."

As Lorena (HA) described, the choices surrounding texting someone of the other sex was a "trust thing"; however, a partner may ask to see his or her partner's phone or sneak it when they weren't around. Adolescents debated the extent to which this was acceptable, and opinions ranged greatly. Julia (HA) felt it constituted relationship violence:

> Even if they think it's cute, like, "Oh he was looking at my text messages to see if I were talking to another boy." Still that is abuse because he is going through your stuff when you should have the trust for him not to go through it.

Others felt that it was unhealthy, but not constitutive of abuse. This was described by Sheila (BI):

> Not abuse, but invade your privacy, 'cause like even if you're in a relationship and you guys talk about everything—it does not give them the right to go through your email, go through your text messages . . . if you have a healthy relationship you would not have the need to snoop through their things.

Still others felt that it was justified at times, particularly given previous experiences with a partner's secretive phone activity as tied to cheating. This was explained by Caprice (HA):

> I don't hide it. Like he cheated before so I'm not afraid to say anything about it and I told him I'm not going to get cheated on by him ever again, so I just say what I feel and if I want to, I look through his phone . . . Like, I notice that and like I know I shouldn't be doing that even though he cheated on me. But I do look through

his phone a lot.

Harassment: "They won't text you back."

In addition to surveillance and monitoring, cell phones were used at times as a tool to control and harass. For LA youth, this meant incessant phone calls, although for BI and HA, it also included texting and other smart phone applications. Rita (LA) described, "Like you should not be calling every five minutes . . . Like you're barely coming out of school . . . and he's like 'WHY DIDN'T YOU ANSWER?' and you're like, 'I just barely got out of a test!'" Dialogue among BI males reflected that an untimely or lack of response catalyzed arguments:

> Moderator: Anything else that couples fight about?
> Walter: Like when they don't answer phone calls or something . . . Like when they don't respond to texts . . .

In her description of tracking-enabled smart phone technology, Sheila (BI) reiterated an earlier sentiment that some viewed such harassment as "cute": "It's like the phone is tapped to know where you are at. Some people may think that is cute like they are following you like a little puppy but others could be like, 'Dude that is kind of freaky.'" However, others including Genesis (HA) found it overwhelming: "If I get in a fight I would cry myself to sleep, turn my phone off, and just throw it. And go to sleep and wake up the next morning and be like 'I got to deal with him today.'"

Control: "He forbid me from boys."

Finally, examples of overt controlling behavior were noted among females who experienced restrictions from their boyfriends. Genesis (HA) spoke of her past relationship: "Yeah, like in my most recent relationship my boyfriend didn't want me texting any boys. Like, he forbid me from boys. No boys . . . Oh my god it was insane," to which Lorena (HA) retorted, "Same with mine. Like he wouldn't let me say 'Hi.' Like, 'Oh you're talking to a boy? Don't talk to me.'"

Theme 3: Technology Alerted Others to Unhealthy Romantic Relationships

Mirroring earlier themes and subthemes, dialogue within this category communicates the role that ICT played in raising peer and family awareness of dating conflict and violence.

Status Updates: "They'll post it on Facebook."

One way that adolescents learned of others' experiences with dating violence was via status updates on Face- book. Luis (HA) described this succinctly: "Like I think Facebook is a pretty good resource. You can tell when they are going through relationship violence or abuse because they'll post it on Facebook—what they feel." This notion of posting "what they feel" was reiterated by Ramón (HA):

> Moderator: So how would you know that you or your friend is experiencing dating violence?
>
> Ramón: Like to me—my friend, she was in one . . . she posted it on Facebook.

When partners were fighting, Facebook served as an outlet for emotional upset—thus alerting peers that the relationship was on the rocks. Although Facebook served as a way of reaching out, not everyone agreed that involving others was beneficial. Roxy (BI) spoke frankly,

> There are people who post it on Facebook so that the whole world knows, you know? I say you keep it yourself and those people you have the problem with, not just trying to add more people on the Internet and make it bigger.

Demand for Instant Communication: "They have to text them back."

In the presence of peers, the demand for instant communication, whether it be via phone calls or texting, served as a sign that a friend was experiencing relationship violence. Irene (HA) stated,

> I just think it's the way they act . . . like if they're texting their boyfriend or something, they have to text them back. Like, really fast, or else their boyfriend is going to be like, "Oh, why aren't you texting me back?"

This notion aligns with earlier sentiment that couples often enact “a relationship online” (Sheila, BI), meaning that their communication extended into online spaces—even while spending time together face-to-face. A group of BI females, including Belinda (BI), described couples’ secretive and “weird” tendencies to talk to one another on their phones privately and in the company of friends:

> They are always on Facebook, and when we all hang out they don’t talk to each other. They will be texting when they are right there. We will be at the movie theater and instead of telling us something, they will be texting.

Even during time spent physically together, one could demand the attention of their partner by requiring them to remain in contact via cell phone. Insisting communication at all times alerted peers to unhealthy relationship dynamics, including alienation as (a) partner(s) required instantaneous time “alone” even while with friends.

Parental Monitoring: “She’s seen my phone.”

Finally, parents were alerted to their adolescents’ experience with dating violence by reading their text messages. Vanessa (HA) shared,

> Like me and him, we’ll get mad at each other and we’ll call each other names sometimes. And my mom will tell me . . . ’cause she’s seen my phone one time when he like texted me and was cussing at me, and she was like “That’s not okay! Why would you even think that’s okay?” And I was just thinking—like it’s really not if you think about it.

Dyadic Videotaped Interactions

Focus group dialogue among like-peers elucidated prominent themes concerning how adolescents think about and describe technology use within their relationships, while videotaped interactions of dating couples discussing conflict engendered an understanding of how technology use shaped relationship experiences in real time and at the dyadic level. Couples’ dialogue was largely supportive of the themes raised in focus group discussions; specifically, all primary themes and all but one subtheme (i.e., posting status updates concerning unhealthy experiences) were reflected in adolescents' dyadic conversations. Often, multiple themes were conveyed in single conversations and thus bolded type is used to call attention to such dialogue. At the conclusion of this section, we discuss findings concerning the role of technology in couples' conflict interactions as apparent uniquely from observations.

Jealousy and Mistrust (Themes 1 and 2)

Jealousy was a salient romantic relationship issue: 15 couples selected this relationship issue (one or both partners), and 21 couples raised jealousy in conversation. Consistent with the focus group findings, jealousy was often facilitated by adding friends of the other sex on Facebook, which resulted in monitoring and rule setting:

> Dulce (LA): I don't like the fact that you like, that you want to be friends with Cynthia . . . every time she adds you, or she texts you, or you talk to her on the phone it's like you want to be friends with her . . . Why do you find it ok?
> Anthony (HA): I don't know. She added me but who deleted her? Dulce (LA): I did!
> Anthony (HA): Exactly.
> Dulce (LA): You know if David were to add me, you would deny him too. Anthony (HA): I wouldn't deny . . . I would let you do it yourself.
> Dulce (LA): Really? Cuz that's not what you've done in the past . . . You've deleted friends. I've deleted friends off of your thing [Facebook].

Similarly, another couples' discussion highlights instances of online partner monitoring, rule setting, flirtatious appeals to friends of the other sex online, as well as the ambiguously suggestive nature of "talking" in online spaces:

> Mateo (BI): Did we ever fight because you're jealous? . . . we did 'cause of that girl from MySpace.
> Shayna (BI): Well yeah, cause I actually knew what you guys were talking about.

> She forwarded all your messages . . . I started talking to [friend] to get you mad.
> Mateo (BI): Mhmm. See, you were jealous and you wanted to get back at me . . . And it started a big argument between the two of us . . . we had to like get rid of them . . . Even after a month I stopped talking to her you were still talking to him.
> Shayna (BI): But you guys weren't talking like "friends" talking—you guys were like "talking talking."

Mirroring the above conversation, this brief excerpt portrays Facebook as a (disputable) site for unrestrained flirtation:

> Maria (BI): What's up with talking to [friend] on Facebook? Calling you "baby"?
> Sergio (HA): Ok. She never calls me "baby."
> Maria (BI): Ok. Like "Baby, I love you." Like what's up with that? Like really?
> Focus group findings were also supported in reference to jealousy resulting from texting, including males' tendency to interpret texting interactions as a more serious threat:
> Samuel (HA): Why do you text them, your ex-boyfriends? If, you know, they are your ex-boyfriends. What do you have to talk about with them?
> Katherine (LA): Well, we can still be friends. Samuel (HA): No.
> Katherine (LA): Why not?
> Samuel (HA): What if they take you away from me? Katherine (LA): They won't.
> Samuel (HA): Sure. And what if they do? Katherine (LA): Then that's another story.
> Samuel (HA): They are going to ruin our relationship. You don't see me talking to my ex-girlfriends.

Observations highlighted the documented nature of online and text communication and, similar to focus group findings, mistrust manifested itself both in surveillance and monitoring of online and phone activity. For example, one couple retrieved their phone during the interaction task to review texts sent to and from one another and to and from other peers:

> Nubia (BI): What did I say to you?! Before all those texts that I sent you after?
> Gerardo (HA): (gets out phone to look)
> Nubia later alludes to having seen what may have been a deleted message from a girl.
> Nubia (BI): (whispered) That one girl sent you a text with the heart.

Although Gerardo denied having received the text, such observational data portrayed within-couple tension as monitoring behavior was alluded to and formed the basis for arguments. Dyadic interactions also shed light on the reciprocal nature of technology-facilitated flirtation and escalating mistrust, as described by Denise (BI) to her boyfriend: “And when you do it [flirt], it’s because I’m doing it too . . . we are both going to keep on doing it and it’s not going to take us nowhere . . . and I don’t trust you because you don’t trust me.”

Instant Communication and Harassment (Themes 2 and 3)

The following dialogue also parallels focus group findings by illustrating how texting and online messaging created a dyadic expectation for instant and reciprocal interaction. In the following example, this desire catalyzed harassing behavior and in turn diverted attention from important friendships:

> José (HA): You know I’m always there for you . . . it’s just sometimes I wanna be with my friends.
> Krystal (BI): I know you get clotted up with me just [imitates texting motion]. I know that . . . if you don’t come around I’m like “Did I do bad? Why isn’t he calling? What is he doing?” And I know I bug you sometimes when I call you a lot.
> José (HA): Yeah and I had to do homework and stuff.
> Krystal (BI): Yes! I know I text you at school too and I know you get in trouble.

Similarly, in the following example, Jennifer minimizes Carlos’s online pestering as “not that big a deal,” and Carlos blames Jennifer for his harassing behaviors, holding more rigid expectations of her than he holds of him- self. A friend (“Cammie”) witnessed the harassment, supporting focus group findings that technology may alert friends to potentially harmful partnerships:

> Carlos (HA): Does it bother you that whenever you’re online I always like send you a message no matter what? . . . Well does anyone else bother you like that, or is it just like me?
> Jennifer (HA): No, everyone does.
> Carlos (HA): Oh, so it’s not that big a deal. I know what you mean. Like I bet Cammie and stuff is like always on your case . . . “Oh my god, who are you talking to?”
> Jennifer (HA): “Who are you texting?” That’s ok though, I don’t really care.
> Carlos (HA): So it’s pretty much just you (laughing). It’s not me being annoying, it’s you taking it as annoying. (She smiles and nods).

Finally, Nadia and Esteban’s conversation underscores the complexity of adolescents’ interactions as they use multiple communicative outlets and often while on the same topic (i.e., in person, via phone calls, or via texting). It further accentuates verbal abuse:

> Nadia (HA): You didn’t try to calling me, you didn’t try texting me . . .
> Esteban (HA): Yea because, like I said, it’s just—I didn’t want to argue more.
> Nadia (HA): What is going to happen . . . if I don’t text you and you don’t text me? . . .
> Esteban (HA): That’s not fair . . . if I do try to talk to you—you just ignore me. Like I gotta text like a million times or if I try and call you . . .
> Nadia (HA): That’s—dude that’s why I hang up . . . because you’re either rude, you’re talking shit to me, and I’m sitting there crying on the phone like a dumbass. Trying to kiss your ass while you’re being rude to me saying “Fuck you bitch, Fuck you bitch.” What else am I going to do? Am I going to listen to you sit

> there and call me a bitch?

Technology Platforms Contributed to Misunderstandings (Theme 4)

Observations highlighted the nuanced ways in which dialogue could be misinterpreted over text and through social media, thus contributing to conflict. Although focus group dialogue highlighted the centrality of technology in creating situations that couples argued about, the observational task elucidated technology's role as central to conflict discussion itself. Dialogue sur- rounding the following excerpt insinuated that Nadia and Esteban's conflict interactions, for example, took place largely over text:

> Esteban (HA): I tell you [via text] "Oh, hey. I'm sorry." You're like . . . "no, no, no."
> Nadia (HA): Well, you can mean it. You don't have to say "sorry" [sharply]. That's all. You have to say sorry to what you do. How do I know what you're sorry for?
> Esteban (HA): I'm trying to go towards you and tell you, "I'm sorry for this and that." But you're still mad.

The face-to-face nature of the couple's observed interaction communicated how Nadia had interpreted "sorry" over text as a sharply toned (and thus non- meaningful) apology. The shortened nature of texts as compared with in-per- son dialogue, together with most commonly used technological platforms' (i.e., social media, texting) inherent inability to display tonality contributed uniquely to discussion of conflict as observed in dyadic interactions.

Discussion

Findings of this study reflect the relevance of ICT to MA adolescents' interpersonal experiences, as normative and at times preferred over face-to-face dialogue. Further, social media platforms and texting each serve as spaces through which dating conflict emerges, is sustained (i.e., dialogued about), and is shared. Using a mixed-methods qualitative study design (Morse & Niehaus, 2009), we found that technology afforded greater opportunity for interaction with peers including those of the other sex, particularly among bicultural (BI) and highly acculturated (HA) MA youth. This resulted in heightened jealousy and mistrust, and partner monitoring across private (e.g., text and Facebook messages) and semipublic spaces (Facebook walls). These themes emerged in dialogue among same-gender and similarly acculturated peers concerning conflict and were supported in couples' observed interactions of relationship conflict where differences across acculturation were less apparent. Results not only accentuate technology as a tool that may be used by diverse and acculturating MA youth to enact dating violence, but also suggest it as a potential mechanism through which to find help and to alert friends and family to harmful dating experiences.

Jealousy emerged as a troubling conflict issue for MA adolescents both in focus group discussions and among couples, and must be taken in light of broad definitions of cheating that included talking to someone of the other sex. Temptation to interact with someone known or unknown is, in a most literal sense, at adolescents' fingertips via smart phone and computer net- working sites. The decision to track and monitor partners is also influenced by the ease afforded by new technologies (Fox & Warber, 2014). Dialogue via social media platforms was more flirtatious and translated to more inti- mate forms of one-on-one offline communication ("text me sometime") among the MA youth in our sample. Whereas previous literature has found that ICT provides an avenue through which to increase relationship intimacy (Coyne et al., 2011), perhaps during adolescence, its use heightens emotional reactions to perceived infidelity (Lucero et al., 2014). Further, while technology provides the developmental opportunity to practice and model dating behavior in lieu of experience (boyd, 2014), cultural considerations intersect with developmental ones. Perhaps jealousy and resultant monitoring are reactions to more pronounced threats among MA youth who may perceive their relationships as more serious, and for whom demonstrations of affection and commitment are particularly important (Milbrath et al., 2009).

Dividing focus groups by acculturation and gender facilitated within and across group comparisons, and we found more pronounced differences by gen- der. Aligning with other research (Mansson & Myers, 2011), females were more likely to utilize public social media spaces to display affection. This may be contextualized by findings that both EA and MA females emphasize interdependence and connection components to a greater extent than adolescent males (Williams & Hickle, 2010). Females were also more emotionally affected than males by social media flirtation, again underscoring the importance of remaining attuned to intersections of developmental, gendered, and cultural considerations in understanding the impact of ICT among diverse youths. First, and stemming from a Catholic religious tradition, MA adolescent females may be more desiring of romantic demonstrations of care from their partner (i.e., “romanticized care”; Milbrath et al., 2009). Second, despite the notion that smart phones are popular among all youth, dialogue across groups suggests that low acculturated (LA) youth may rely more on basic (e.g., texting/calling) versus smart phone (e.g., Facebook) applications (Lenhart, 2012). This is an area for continued research, as the type of technology forum shapes the norms and interpersonal contexts for peer and couples’ communication (boyd, 2014).

Consistent with high rates of texting evidenced among adolescent daters (Glauber et al., 2007), youth described and experienced harassment in the form of repeated texts and demands for reciprocation. While likely mixed with trivial and friendly dialogue, constant texting serves to continually track a dating partner’s whereabouts, what they are doing, and whom they are with. Although this may be an inadvertent form of partner monitoring that constitutes normal day-to-day interactions, social networking applications may introduce and amplify mistrust and jealousy that translates into urgent cell phone texting and calls (e.g., “WHY DIDN’T YOU ANSWER?”). Adolescents do not view psychological abuse in the same manner as adults, particularly in the realm of ICT where new spaces have necessitated the modification of social and relationship rules (Lucero et al., 2014). Boundaries may flex to allow certain relationship dynamics to be more widely accepted among youth (e.g., password sharing) and to develop into overt forms of monitoring and control (e.g., forbidding texting with peers of the other sex, looking at a partner’s private messages). We find that such rules vary and may be more concrete when cheating has taken place, a context in which MA females may justify looking at a partner’s private messages. MA males, however, were described as exerting more control over a partner’s texting behaviors. This study contextualizes ICT as creating normative portals for discourse among peers including those of the other sex and highlights the importance of continued research concerning the ways trust is formed between partners amid the use of ICT.

Experiences of dating violence were evident among many youth in this study and were catalyzed by jealousy (Adams & Williams, 2014). For example, bicultural and highly acculturated MA adolescents in focus groups discussed Facebook status updates as a portal for emotional disclosure, in turn alerting friends to dating conflict and violence. Furthermore, parents who would usually be considered an important source of social support and guidance are likely uninformed about the issue of dating violence (Glauber, et al., 2007). Our findings suggest that parents may learn of their child's unhealthy relationships by observing their mediated interactions (e.g., cell phones) and imply that parent boundaries that include access to youth ICT may result in honest conversations concerning expectations of their children's relationships. Such expectations are often not communicated although they are valued by Latino adolescents and predictive of relationship behaviors (Bouris et al., 2012).

In addition to addressing the healthy establishment of boundaries, youth interventions should include components related to help-offering stemming from and in tandem with online contexts. Youth programming can emphasize ways for adolescents to find accurate information about dating relationships online, especially considering that MA youth across levels of acculturation regularly use the Internet (Lopez et al., 2013). Research looking at the use of a dating safety smart phone application found that emerging adults perceived the app as a low risk way to find information about healthy relationships, and to learn more about how to distinguish unsafe boundaries and potential abuse (Lindsay et al., 2013). Online interventions, provided in Spanish and English, can provide the autonomy and privacy adolescents desire while linking them with professionals trained to deal with issues of dating violence.

As discussed by Alvarez (2012), adults who work with or care for adolescents might mistake abusive dating behaviors as cyberbullying incidents. Knowing more about the relationship context is necessary to protect the safety of young people (Alvarez, 2012). Future training and preparation for professionals should include familiarity with online culture and popular sites. Finally, when a practitioner has the trust of an individual adolescent, the use of ICT to relive events can be helpful. Going through messages, posts, and interactions with a practitioner can offer youth an opportunity to explain the communication pattern directly. The practitioner seeing the interactions can offer new insight about relationships and especially boundaries in romantic relationships. This may be particularly important for MA females, who like our sample, are more likely to date older males (Bouris et al., 2012).

This study addresses an important gap in the literature, given that most of what we know about technology use within dating relationship contexts stems from surveys among Caucasian college students. Mixed qualitative methods offered the ability to enhance our understanding of MA adolescents' relationship experiences as informed by multiple perspectives. Direct observations of adolescents in discussion of conflict served to support and contextualize focus group themes surrounding ICT. Grouping adolescents by level of acculturation may have facilitated dialogue, particularly as Spanish was spoken more often in low acculturated groups. However, we had difficulty recruiting as many low acculturated youth as we did high, perhaps due in part to recent changes to local immigration policies. Given that ICT was not the primary foci of the study and, rather, emerged from dialogue, within-group discussions and dyadic interactions may be considered a strength; however, it follows that findings present only exploratory avenues for future research with diverse youth populations, including the examination of impact of ICT on adolescent development. Findings have indicated that ICT use can influence relationship progression, but little is known about how these experiences affect the building of trust, emotional support, boundaries, and healthy relationships during adolescence and into future relationships.

As romantic and sexual relationship formation develop alongside and in sup- port of individual identity formation (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010), online spaces offer youth an additional aside from face-to-face courtship to practice relationships with friends and dating partners. Findings demonstrate the need for culturally informed healthy relationship curricula including attention to relationship rituals, implicit and explicit rules across various ICT platforms, and ICT use during help seeking. Research concerning the use of technology in dating contexts—and among diverse youth living in the United States—is increasingly necessary to draw inferences about how adolescents may learn to navigate these spaces and to have healthy and trusting partnerships.

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