BUILDING HEALTHIER RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN COMMUNITIES: THE CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF GUYANESE PERSPECTIVES ON ADOLESCENT DATING VIOLENCE AND ITS PREVENTION

by

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ABSTRACT

Dating in adolescence is an experience that has been thought to provide positive opportunities to learn and enhance social and interpersonal skills. However, some adolescents are exposed to various forms of violence in their dating relationships, which can lead to poor health outcomes for both perpetrators and victims regardless of gender, race, or class. To prevent such negative outcomes, adolescents as well as their communities need community-specific opportunities to discuss and tackle dating violence. While adolescent dating violence research has increased internationally, there remains a paucity of information for the Caribbean region. For this reason, I completed a critical exploratory qualitative study in Guyana, a country that has the highest reported incidence of domestic violence for the Caribbean. The aim of my study was to provide a contextualized understanding of the phenomenon, by examining how discourses on race, gender, age, and class shape perspectives on adolescent dating violence and its prevention. A postcolonial feminist lens guided this study and data collection included 6 key informant interviews and 8 focus group discussions with parents, teachers, school officials, and adolescents at a public secondary school. Students who attended this school were from low-to-middle income families in the city of Georgetown and surrounding areas. In total, the study had 36 participants (13 male; 23 female). Three
key findings emerged: 1) community perspectives on dating violence are primarily shaped by dominant discourses on respectability, colonial discourses on gender norms, family, and education, resulting in dating being unacceptable during adolescence; 2) Current authoritarian interpersonal relationships between adults and adolescents limit the possibility of engaging in conversations on dating violence; 3) Adolescents are yearning for more information on dating relationships, however, parents and teachers lack institutional and social support to promote healthy relationships and environments, which leads to frustration and fatigue. I suggest a more effective way of addressing adolescent dating violence in Guyana is to approach it as a community issue. This includes continuously questioning dominant discourses and social systems in Guyanese society and creating more opportunities for people to relate to each other in ways that promote less authoritarian interactions in the current environment.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Adolescent dating violence is a complex public and global health issue that negatively impacts the health of teenagers throughout their lifespan ("Teen Dating Violence", 2014). In Guyana, girls and boys have been exposed to various forms of violence including those occurring in relationships. The stories that are documented in Guyana’s news depict an intensity of violence that has resulted in fatalities. There are many other stories of lesser violence that tend not to be reported even though the country has identified domestic violence as a national problem (UN Women, 2011).

A popular African proverb states ‘If you want to go quickly, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together’ ("The Best: 72+", 2012). This saying embodies the philosophy of this dissertation in the contribution it provides to the issue of dating violence in adolescence. To improve and create prevention initiatives that acknowledge the intersectoral approach required for this public health issue, the community must first be heard. This research provides a step towards this end goal by first answering the question of how adolescent dating violence and its prevention are perceived in Guyana.

In the introduction to this thesis, I first discuss my experiences with violence, outlining my interest in this topic. I then highlight the global effects of violence, focusing regionally on the Caribbean. Next, a description of Guyana’s geography, population, and current situation of violence is introduced, followed by a section on the importance of community on adolescent dating violence. To conclude this chapter, I state the aim of this research and present the organization of this thesis.
Violence: A topic of Personal and Professional Interest

I am a Canadian woman of Afro-Guyanese heritage who is a wife, daughter, sister, nurse, activist, and now a researcher. I never realized how complex my identity was until I entered this new world of academia, nor was I fully aware of how various forms of violence have impacted my life and shaped the decisions that have compelled me to focus on improving the health of adolescents.

The ideas for this thesis have originated from my personal experiences in adolescence and adulthood. Professionally, I now have a greater awareness and understanding of my voice and strengths as a nurse, as well as a strong desire to have a positive impact within my own community. While the question of “why” has always been etched into my vocabulary, at this stage in my life I believe that this inquisitiveness can be acted upon to not only ask questions, but also seek answers despite the complexity of addressing violence as an academic issue.

Exposure to Violence in Adolescence

When I think about my years as a teenager growing up in Hamilton, Ontario, the most important influences were school, friendships, and my family. My high school had a strong reputation for sports but was overshadowed by drugs, gangs, and what seemed like almost daily fights or ‘jumpings’ that often would occur on school grounds. Violence was entertainment and fights were the primetime show that garnered the largest crowds. My friends and I had grown up surrounded by violence, often not afraid to assert ourselves verbally or with violence if we were provoked by other groups of girls or boys.

These years are imprinted with witnessing numerous fights as well as partaking in fights voluntarily and involuntarily. I realize now how desensitized we had become to
violence and its consequences. For instance, our response to a fight breaking out and gun firing in a party was to take cover and then continue dancing when the music started to play again. I distinctly remember that venue was down a narrow set of stairs with only one exit, and we chose not to leave until the party was finished. We actually laughed when telling the story of how we had stayed and how it didn’t ruin our night.

Before my friends and I started dating, violence was not personal. We were not deeply affected by fighting or what we had witnessed. We did not understand violence to have a lasting effect or to even be truly damaging – you would always heal. However, when each of us began to experience violence in sexual, physical, and/or psychological forms it took on a different meaning. When this started to occur we did what was familiar to us, which was to fight. However, we were not only fighting the people we dated, we were fighting police officers who ignored our numerous pleas for help, and others within our adolescent community who felt ‘we must have done something to deserve it’. Unbeknownst to us, we were experiencing the systemic nature of violence that subconsciously taught us to be structurally silent. Even if we wanted to approach our problems in a more peaceful manner, we were often met with further violence or dismissal from those who were in positions to help.

**Experiencing the Systemic Nature of Violence**

The majority of my friends and acquaintances during those years had experienced some form of dating violence, and as we grew older, I continued to see firsthand how the cycle of violence that began in our youth had a tremendous effect on the future health of these women, their children, and their relationships. I often look back with a sense of amazement and gratitude that my path has been so positive considering all the
experiences I have had. I believe that this was largely due to the accountability that I had to my mother and family. Regardless of what had occurred outside of my home, there was a high level of expectation to do well because of the sacrifices my mother had made for us.

While all of my friends and I had similar experiences of violence (because we all came to each other’s defense and rescue on countless occasions), what each of us defines as violent or violence is markedly different. I have recognized that those friends who have not severed those abusive relationships from their youth, or have continued with similar circumstances of abuse, have a higher threshold of what is considered responsible behaviour in life, not just in relationships. The violence that they experienced within their youth has affected every aspect of their life. I have realized that my understanding and definition of violence has been shaped by those same experiences in my youth, and my experiences as an adult have provided tremendous insight into the impact that violence has on every aspect of health.

**Experiencing Domestic Violence in Other Countries**

I cannot completely describe in a written form the feeling of helplessness and sickness that came over me when I witnessed a woman beaten by her significant other in Brooklyn, New York, USA. They argued outside of a vehicle, which I believed to be driven by her friend. After this young woman was beaten into what appeared an unconscious state, her boyfriend then picked her up and placed her in her friend’s vehicle and they drove off. As I witnessed this happening I pleaded with the driver of the vehicle I was in to call the police and stop to help her. I kept repeating “We are not in Canada anymore”, as if the violence I had just witnessed was somehow worse than what I had
been exposed to in my own community because the environment was unfamiliar. They chose not to do anything either stating that the way she was beaten meant this was not the first time, and that helping her could cause us harm. I realized that had this been at home I would have intervened because it was very likely that I had grown up with both the abuser and the abused. This experience exemplified that violence within relationships cannot be understood in a silo or approached without a consideration of the community in which it is occurring.

Similarly, while sitting in a vehicle with approximately 10 women during carnival in Trinidad, the women erupted into laughter when one woman’s response to witnessing another woman slapped outside of the vehicle was, “She real stupidy, she should know she have to bring she horner man to dance”. A horn means to cheat in Caribbean slang, and therefore, this woman would not have been slapped had she not brought her real man with her. This whole scenario occurred in front of a police officer whose delayed reaction resulted in telling the man to calm down, and then allowing both parties to go in the same direction with approximately 10 minutes between each person.

Both of these experiences have always stood out to me, because aside from being shocked by how people reacted to each situation, I recognized that the people and context of the situation influenced my reaction. I felt that had I said something in this van full of women in Trinidad, I would have been quickly dismissed because this situation was reduced to a joke at the expense of the victim. From these experiences, I realized that my position in violent situations is to intervene and help to solve the conflict, however this reaction puts me at risk and does not prevent future violence because the understanding of violence and the behaviour is already ingrained in everyone experiencing the situation.
Furthermore, the potential to introduce harm to myself while interjecting in situations as they are occurring is far higher than if it was approached preventatively. All of these experiences have impacted my desire to focus on dating violence in adolescence. However, the layered and intersecting complexities of violence within a larger system did not become realistic to me until I experienced it for myself in Guyana.

**Experiencing Violence in Guyana**

To date, I could not have imagined or written the story that has been my life. To be robbed at gunpoint in your home, and shot along with another member of your family is a life changing experience for everyone involved. To see and feel the damage that something as small as a bullet has inflicted on my own body, and the psyche of everyone surrounding me, is profound. I often contact a spiritual woman living in Guyana for advice and perspective when I have a heavy mind. Upon hearing that I had been shot she said, “well, she came here to study violence and the universe has a funny way of not liking to disappoint”.

The universe taught me countless lessons about being a survivor of violence in Guyana. I experienced the medical system through the lens of an emergency room nurse, the justice system from a Canadian perspective, the media as a ‘PhD Canadian born Guyanese student’, the political system as a Guyanese, and the court of public opinion as a wife, daughter, and victim. Navigating all of these systems simultaneously proved to be complicated, frustrating, pointless at times, and also incredibly enlightening. I often think about how different this situation would be if I were a Guyanese teenager with no medical knowledge, seeking help, due to violence within a dating relationship. When I consider everything that I experienced and continue to experience because of this one
incident, I have a greater appreciation and recognition of the importance of violence prevention.

**Nursing Perspective on Violence**

As a frontline nurse who has worked and traveled to numerous countries, and through my personal experiences with violence, I have witnessed the effects that violence in relationships and community violence have on health. Violence not only impacts physical health globally, but also every social determinant of health. It is a public health issue that is fundamental for the wellbeing of future generations.

**Violence: A global perspective**

The first world report on violence and health in 2002 indicated that the relentlessness of violence irrespective of geographical location has made it a global health issue (Krug, E., Dahlberg, L., Mercy, J., Zwi, A., & Lozano, R., 2002). The interrelatedness of the historical, political, social, and health aspects of violence creates a complex phenomenon that requires a collaborative intersectoral approach, which crosses borders. Within the foreword of the violence and health report, Nelson Mandela indicated that if the social conditions that nurture violence are allowed to continue in the absence of democracy, respect for human rights, and good governance, than violence would not cease (Krug et al., 2002). The substantial number of people presently affected by violence globally demonstrates that without prevention the legacy of violence is to reproduce itself.

**World Prevalence Rates of Violence**

The report indicated that one million six hundred thousand people lost their lives to violence worldwide in a single year; it is one of the leading causes of death for people
between the ages of 15 to 44 years (Krug et al., 2002). This number encompasses interpersonal violence, suicidal behaviour, social conflict, and armed conflict, however, the overall rate masks variations regionally and even within countries (Krug et al., 2002). There are also greater numbers of people who suffer a range of physical, sexual, reproductive, and mental health problems resulting from violence, as compared to those who have lost their lives (Krug et al., 2002). It is important to provide prevalence rates of violence within the Caribbean to establish the context of violence within the region where my research will be conducted.

**Prevalence Rates of Violence in the Caribbean (Regional Perspective)**

Twenty-seven percent of the world’s homicides occur within the Latin American and Caribbean region, even though this area accounts for 8.5 percent of the world’s total population (Munoz, 2012). The trend of violent crimes is increasing throughout the Caribbean, and is associated with high disparities of gender inequality, the distribution of wealth and income, political competition, the drug trade, and gang-related violence (Harriott, 2012).

While there are country variations in the structure and complexity of crimes within the region, for the purposes of this thesis and the focus on dating violence, I will address forms of violence found in intimate relationships. Rape as a form of sexual violence is experienced at a higher rate in the Caribbean than the average 102 countries in the world (Harriott, 2012). The higher rate of rape indicates gendered violence to be a major issue within the Caribbean. Domestic violence is also prevalent within the region. Respondents in the UNDP Citizen Security Survey in 2010 indicated that they had
experienced domestic violence ranging from 6 percent in Jamaica to 17 percent in Guyana (Harriott, 2012).

**World Prevalence Rates of Violence in Adolescence**

The world report on violence and health in 2002 reported the global prevalence rate of violence in adolescence under youth violence, which incorporates those between the ages of 10 to 29 years (Krug et al., 2002). These statistics include persons above the age of adolescence as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) and who are over 10 years old. However, in the absence of updated information, it does provide some context to the scale of the issue. For example, in 2000 an estimated 199 000 youths died at the hands of other youth (Krug et al., 2002). For every youth killed by violence, an estimated 20 to 40 persons sustained injuries that required medical attention (Krug et al., 2002).

**Adolescents and Violence in the Caribbean (Regional Perspective)**

The Caribbean has a relatively young population with 64 percent of people under the age of 30 years (Harriott, 2012). Therefore, the scourge of violence can have detrimental effects on the prosperity and future of Caribbean nations. Even though the region has high crime rates, the Caribbean Human Development Report indicates that violence perpetration is not widespread amongst its youth within the region (Harriott, 2012). Rather, the youth that access the justice system are displaying behaviours that require care and protection from abuse, neglect, abandonment, or having run away from home (Harriott, 2012, p.46). For example, the report indicates that 52 percent of Jamaican girls and 23 percent of Jamaican boys who appeared in courts required care and protection (Harriott, 2012). However, these numbers do not include those persons under
the age of 18, does not account for crimes that have not been reported, or non-violent crimes. Therefore, the numbers may be higher for young people. Prevalence rates for violence in youth within both the world and regional reports, have omitted dating violence, which affects the social fabric of healthy relationship development into adulthood.

**Dating Violence in Adolescents: Prevalence Rates**

Canadian and American studies account for mixed rates of adolescents’ experiences with violence within dating relationships as either perpetrators or victims, varying from 10 to over 40 percent (Glass et al., 2003). The variations in the prevalence rates of adolescent dating violence are due to inconsistencies in definitions of adolescence, dating violence, and measurement tools (Hanson, 2002; Haynie et al., 2013; Hokoda et al., 2012; Glass, 2003 Teten et al., 2009). Unlike violence in adult relationships, perpetrators of adolescent dating violence tends to be both boys and girls with the reason, severity, and type of abuse related to the developmental stage as well as gender (Hokoda, Martin Del Campo & Ulloa, 2012; Wolfe et al., 2005). Regardless, we know that adolescents are dating and experiencing violence at unsettling rates, but many do not recognize these violent incidents as abuse within a dating relationship, which has a negative impact on their overall health (Symons et al., 1994).

**Impact that Different Forms of Violence Have on Health and Society**

The world report on violence and health points towards the social determinants of health in defining how violence affects the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, age, and work (WHO, 2015). This report classifies violence into three main sections namely, collective, interpersonal, and self-directed (Krug et al., 2002). Each of these
forms of violence impact population health in different ways, but influence each other to the detriment of the society in which it occurs. As stated earlier, violence thrives in the absence of democracy, respect for human rights, and good governance (Mandela, WHO, 2002). Collective violence damages both public and private institutions such as health care, trade, and businesses (Krug et al., 2002). This disruption due to violence produces conditions for increased poverty and income disparities, gender inequality, interpersonal and sexual violence, as well as numerous psychological and behavioural problems that can lead to further violence (Krug et al., 2002).

It is well documented in North American studies that dating violence leads to poor health outcomes, affecting the social determinants of health for both perpetrator and victim regardless of gender, race, or class (Glass et al., 2003; Hanson, 2002; Sutherland, 2011; Teten et al., 2009; Volpe et al., 2012). Smoking, alcohol, illicit drug, and eating disorders are some of the substances and practices that have been documented in relation to dating violence for victims (Glass et al., 2003). There is also a greater chance of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicidal ideation from dating violence (Glass et al., 2003; Haynie et al., 2013; Sutherland, 2011; Volpe et al., 2012).

Abused girls are four to six times more likely to become pregnant as compared to girls who have not been abused (Silverman et al., 2001). Furthermore, girls are 3 times more likely to have been tested for sexually transmitted infections (STI) and HIV, and diagnosed twice as likely with an STI as compared to those who did not experience dating abuse (Glass et al., 2003; Sutherland, 2011).
Different forms of violence affect the individual, the community, and society, by creating inequities in health where it is endemic.

**Impact of Youth Violence on Caribbean Society and Health**

Because a large portion of the Caribbean’s population is relatively young (Harriott, 2012), youth violence and crime have negatively impacted several sectors in the development of the Caribbean (Harriott, 2012). Overall youth crime costs the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) nations\(^1\) between 2.8 percent to 4 percent of GDP annually (Harriott, 2012). For example, in 2002, Guyana had 425 youth between the ages of 15 to 24 years convicted of a crime, the Caribbean human development report indicated that it cost the country a total of $70,672,498 US (Harriott, 2012). This number might seem excessive for less than 500 people however; it includes direct costs, forgone earnings, forgone tourism revenue, and opportunity costs (Harriott, 2012). Furthermore, this number does not include those youth who committed crimes but were not convicted, those less than 15 years of age, or the non-monetary costs of youth violence. Therefore these costs are potentially far greater.

The social and political costs of youth violence are equally detrimental to the health and human development of future generations. The continued cycle of violence, lower quality of life, and the “labelling, marginalization, and exclusion of at-risk or problem youth from participation in governance, the economy, and society…[can] encourag[e] negative stereotyping, which can be internalized by youth, causing

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\(^1\) CARICOM is a unified community of twelve Caribbean islands, along with Suriname, and Guyana that established a common market to build ties amongst member states and create a more competitive and prosperous region. For further information go to http://www.caricom.org/.
frustration and fuelling aggressive behaviour” (Harriott, 2012, p.50). These larger systems have a fundamental role in eliminating ideologies that perpetuate violence.

**Moving Beyond Individual Responsibility for Dating Violence: Addressing Violence as a Social Issue**

Violence prevention requires recognition of the social narrative in a specific community. Several strategies are required to have an impactful and sustainable effect. Hence, understanding potential avenues for preventing dating violence in adolescence has to include the community, which reflects an understanding that violence prevention has to move beyond individual responsibility. Beginning violence prevention initiatives with community perspectives such as parents, teachers, and adolescents in Guyana reflects this position.

Guyana is the fourth smallest country in South America, bordering Brazil, Venezuela and Suriname along the Atlantic coast. The country’s colonial history is steeped in violence and has created a multi-cultural and multi-faith population (Beaie and Phil, 2007). Slaves and indentured labourers from Africa, India, China, and Portugal, were brought onto the land of the indigenous Amerindian communities in Guyana (Beaie and Phil, 2007). The main religions are Hinduism, Christianity, and Pentecostalism, with the two major ethnic populations being Indo-Guyanese at 43.5% and Afro-Guyanese at 30.7% (Beaie and Phil, 2007). The intersectionalities of race, religion, gender, heterosexuality, and different class structures create a complex environment to address an issue such as dating violence, even though domestic violence has been regarded as a national problem (UN Women, 2011).
Exposure to community violence in Guyana is widespread. Myers (2012) found that among those interviewed only 23% felt safe where they lived, and 33% were ‘a little concerned’ about violence and crime in their communities. When asked if a member of their household had been a victim of violence, 25% reported that within the past 6 months a family member had been a victim of physical assault (10%), sexual assault (4%), armed violence (2%) and multiple violent experiences (7%) (Myers, 2012). There appears to be little difference in the sense of community security from the *Women Researching Women* study conducted over 15 years ago. Twenty to forty percent felt at risk of being a victim of violence, and more than 60% took precautions within their community to prevent being raped, followed, robbed, assaulted, or having their property stolen (Peake, 2000).

UNICEF has cited that adolescents within Guyana face a host of challenges living within the country, as the destruction of traditional family and community structures caused by emigration and poverty have contributed to their daily struggles (UNICEF Guyana Website, n.d.). Additionally, UNICEF has also stated that adolescents lack the opportunity to participate in decision-making about their own development and civil society, which is further complicated by exposure to violence, a lack of opportunities, and the spread of HIV/AIDS, especially among young girls (UNICEF Guyana Website, n.d.).

A lack of professional and financial resources has further complicated an already critical situation in Guyana, where the focus for addressing violence has largely been reactionary. While programs focus on adolescent girls, the same focus is not on boys who are viewed in a fixed position as perpetrators. The numerous health issues resulting from dating violence indicate a public health issue that requires primary health promotion
initiatives and interventions to teach adolescents and the surrounding community healthier relationship practices.

**Community of Perspectives: Parents, Teachers, and Adolescents**

Parents play a key role in shaping how adolescents use or respond to violence. North American research has shown that witnessing and experiencing violence in the parental home, parents instructing adolescents to respond to situations with violence, and parents lack of or over involvement in teenagers decision-making contribute three factors in increasing risk factors for exposure to dating violence (Glass et al., 2003; Foshee et al., 2010; Knoster & Haynie, 2005; Pflieger & Vazsonyi, 2006; Sullivan et al., 2012; Symons et al., 1994; Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). The importance of the parental role is demonstrated by literature explaining how a parent’s behaviour can increase the risk of dating violence. However, there is a lack of information regarding how parents understand dating violence in adolescence, as well as how their role can impact the prevention of this experience in Caribbean communities such as Guyana.

During adolescence a substantial amount of time is spent in school, meaning that aside from parents and friends, teachers have significant interaction with adolescents. There is a body of research that indicates that schools can have positive impacts on adolescent behaviour, however, this is related to their feeling of belonging within their schools and may not be true of all populations (Lerner et al., 2005; Ryzin, 2011; Theokas et al. 2005). Nevertheless, it can create a buffering impact for vulnerable youth. The recognition that the school environment may be suitable for violence prevention is reflected in the numerous initiatives that are school-based globally (Crooks, Wolfe, Hughes, Jaffe & Chiodo, 2008; Foshee, Bauman, Ennett, Suchindran, Benefield &
Linder, 2005; Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2013; Madeni, Horiuchi & Lida, 2011; Mancey, 2008; Miller et al., 2012). Therefore, understanding what influences school administrators’ and teachers’ desire to address dating violence is pertinent to improve or create future violence prevention initiatives.

Peer influence is an important factor in dating violence, friendships being the most studied area next to the family (Crosnoe & Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2011; Giordano, 2003; Galliher, Welsh, Rostosky & Kawaguchi, 2004). Friends have been found to have both negative and positive effects on their peers. Literature has noted that girls and boys who are friends with those who perpetrate violence, or who have more exposure to those peers who engage in violent behaviours increase their odds of partaking in dating violence in American studies with diverse populations (Foshee et al. 2010; Glass, 2003; Haynie, Silver & Teasdale, 2006).

Friendships can also offer an opportunity to obtain advice on relationships; however, when the information relayed is confusing, or contradictory it can create a barrier for active responses and the avoidance of potential conflict situations (Sullivan et al., 2012). Therefore, because friendships have been shown to influence partner selection, opportunities for dating, exposure, and participation in violence, (Foshee et al. 2010; Glass, 2003; Haynie, Silver & Teasdale, 2006) adolescents cannot be excluded from this study.

The Study Aim

Addressing dating violence in adolescence can be approached in several ways. A common view is to focus on identity development and individual risk factors as central to the elimination of this public health issue (Crosnoe & Kirkpatrick Johnson, 2011; Foshee
et al., 2010; Pflieger & Vazsonyi, 2006; Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Steinberg & Morris, 2011; Sullivan et al., 2012; Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006). However, this study explores dating violence through a community perspective.

Shepard & Zelli (2011) indicate that approaching violence prevention at the community level has potential for transformation of social norms and structures that cause or contribute to domestic violence, it can potentially support and strengthen adolescents, families, schools, and communities, and promote change at a grassroots level. Community engagement and participation in research can also direct the development of tailored approaches that previously were neglected by narrow Western models in explaining issues such as violence within relationships (Nickson, Dunstan, Esperanza & Barker, 2011). To approach adolescent dating violence as a community problem means that in this study, I acknowledge that the phenomenon under study is collectively produced in Guyanese society, that individual behaviour change is difficult when systems and structures naturalize or justify violence, but I also acknowledge that a community approach handled incorrectly could hinder future partnerships by creating a distrusting relationship between community and researchers (Bridgewater et al., 2011).

My motivation to conduct this study is to improve the health of adolescents in Guyana; the first step though is to create a more comprehensive understanding of adolescent dating violence in the hope that future preventative initiatives will benefit from specific data provided through this research.

My aim is to explain and analyze community perspectives on adolescent dating violence in Guyana. To achieve this goal, I have chosen to answer two particular questions. My first question is focused on understanding how discourses on age, gender,
sexuality, and race are used to explain this phenomenon. Secondly, I question how violence prevention can be addressed in this environment.

**Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is organized into seven chapters, with the introduction being chapter one. The second chapter provides a critical literature review of dating violence in adolescence with specific focus on Guyana. This chapter also articulates the current gaps in research on this topic from a community perspective and accounts for the complexities of communities within communities.

The third chapter presents a critical theoretical understanding of the development of Caribbean heterosexual relationships, with an intersectional analysis of gender, race, class, sexuality, and age in a Caribbean context. Through this chapter, Guyana’s colonial history is discussed exploring the systemic nature of violence that continues to perpetuate an environment in which adolescent dating violence is reproduced.

The fourth chapter outlines the methodology and methods that were utilized in this study as well as my plans for knowledge translation. I detail how my study has been completed in a rigorous manner. Chapter five is the first of two result chapters that focuses on participants’ perspectives on gender roles, domestic violence and adolescent dating. Chapter six presents participants’ perspectives on adolescent dating violence and approaches to how it can be prevented. The seventh chapter includes my discussion, conclusion and recommendations. The discussion is organized into two major sections. The first section illustrates the complex entanglement of systems and discourses that contribute to this phenomenon, while the second section considers how adolescent dating violence can be addressed more effectively through the decolonizing of key social
systems. Lastly, I conclude this thesis with my final thoughts and address implications for research, policy, and practice.
Chapter Two

Global Literature Review on Dating Violence

The literature on dating violence in adolescence has increased significantly over the past decade, primarily with English written literature and research produced in North America. To understand this phenomenon I began my search reading extensively on many different factors including how adolescence is defined, how dating relationships contribute to the development of adolescents, healthcare workers roles and dating violence, and dating violence prevention programs globally, all of which (amongst others) can play a part in contributing to how dating violence is produced, understood, and approached. One area that I believe to be particularly important is how the community views and understands dating violence in adolescence. In attempting to answer this question, I had to enter the literature from various angles, as there is a limited amount of information on what the community thinks.

In keeping with public health principles, primary prevention is concerned with eliminating the problem before it presents itself. Ending it before it starts means examining how dating violence is produced and reproduced. In search of this broad understanding, community perspectives can be an entry point into the social determinants of health, indicating resources available within a community or, most importantly, their absence.

This literature review also speaks to the various tensions and nuances of approaching violence from an intersectional lens when the analysis can begin and often end at the individual level. The individual level definition is important as it provides a basis for what is considered dating violence, and therefore how to proceed forward in undertaking this issue. However, it cannot fully capture the complexities of structural systems that also impact someone’s involvement in such relationships. Moving beyond this individual level is important as it
acknowledges that these relationships are experienced in environments full of contradictions with regards to violence.

In this chapter, I begin this review at the individual level focusing on how adolescents define dating violence globally. I then move onto considering how communities see and understand dating violence and domestic violence globally. Including domestic violence was necessary due to the dearth of information pertaining to how communities understand dating violence in adolescence. I then look at Guyana. Specifically, I concentrate on community perspectives of domestic violence within the country to understand the environment in which adolescent dating relationships and subsequently violence occur. I chose to do so by examining community perspectives on adolescent dating violence through blogger comments on adolescent dating violence newspaper stories, as well as what is available through government and NGO reports. The last section of this review takes a more in-depth view of how structural violence impacts domestic and dating violence, and then I conclude this chapter with an overall discussion of key points.

Adolescent Perspectives of Dating Violence: A Global Review

Currently there remains a lack of information about how adolescents within Guyana understand violence within their intimate relationships. However, several countries around the world have studied this issue, providing a global context.

Description of Search Strategies

This section incorporates twenty-seven peer-reviewed studies and one NGO report from 11 countries around the world. Sixteen studies were completed in various cities and states within the United States, two articles each from Canada, Australia, South Africa, and the United Kingdom, one study each from Thailand and Israel, and the final study included Sweden,
Germany, and Belgium. Articles included in this section were found in the SCOPUS, JSTOR, and Google Scholar databases using the search terms adolescents, teens, youth, dating violence, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, perceptions, attitudes with the Boolean operators and and or. This section was also expanded to grey literature regarding Guyana, as no articles about Guyanese adolescents’ perceptions of dating violence were found. One NGO report about adolescent mothers in Guyana was identified.

In the papers reviewed, the range of ages described for adolescence is 12 to 24 years. This is reflective of the current discussion on what constitutes adolescence and there are conflicting views based on ethnicity (Cooper, 1999; Steinberg & Morris, 2001) and developmental theories (Harder, 2012; Furman & Shaffer, 2003; Steinberg & Morris, 2001; White, 2009) on how this life stage is understood.

Researchers Definitions of Dating Violence

We obtain our knowledge based on how information is presented to us, by whom, and through context. These experiences shape how we understand topics such as violence. A perfect example of this is how I can now look back on my own experiences with violence and see how they have shaped my understanding. What I have found is quite similar when looking at how adolescents definitions of dating violence are articulated in the literature. Methodological decisions by researchers shape how participants view this issue (See Table 1). I should be more specific in stating that methodological choices by researchers shape the discussion on dating violence in studies, which subsequently results in how these issues are presented to us. By this I mean that even though researchers place limits on how they define violence, it does not necessarily mean that this is what adolescents believe. Simply, adolescents are responding to the limits that have been placed on how violence is defined for that particular study.
CHAPTER TWO: GLOBAL LITERATURE REVIEW ON DATING VIOLENCE

When comparing articles that provided definitions of dating violence for adolescents with those that did not, when no definition was provided, many adolescents understood it to be a combination of physical, psychological /verbal, and sexual violence. Many researchers who defined dating violence a priori did so in a narrow way, for example, by describing it as physical violence. For this reason, it is important to read this literature with caution as many researchers are shaping this field by reinforcing the centrality of one aspect of dating violence over other forms (Hilton et al., 2003; Mueller et al., 2013; Murphy & Smith, 2010; Sears et al., 2006; Reeves & Orpinas, 2012; Stueve & O’Donnell, 2008; Ulloa et al., 2008).

In Guyana, domestic violence and gender-based violence are the common terms used to define violence within relationships (Insanally, 2006; Myers, 2012). Myers (2012) defines domestic violence as including physical, sexual, psychological/emotional, and economic abuse. In this study these terms suggest that exposure of violence can occur within the familial home or at the hands of an intimate partner within a home (Myers, 2012). This indicates that adolescent relationships, which are often more casual (Furman & Shaffer, 2003), are not considered in a definition of violence within relationships.

**Adolescents Definition of Dating Violence**

In all 28 studies, adolescent participants had varying understandings of what behaviours could be considered dating violence (Table 1). Part of this, as I indicated in the previous section, can be attributed to how the definitions are presented by researchers. However, the wide-ranging understanding of abusive behaviour in qualitative studies (Table 1) also shows variation in what is considered dating violence based on gendered ideas of masculinity and femininity. In Glasgow, Scotland, girls and boys between the ages of 15 to 18 years defined dating abuse as being “physical, mental, sexual, and verbal” but there were contradictions and ambiguities based
on whether the violence was right or wrong (McCarry, 2009). Even though participants indicated that physical violence was not acceptable, both boys and girls stated that violence was justified if a girlfriend provoked her boyfriend by doing something he objected to (McCarry, 2009). Adolescent boys within a study on American teenagers from Georgia indicated the complete opposite view, stating that at no time is dating violence ever justified when the perpetrator is a boy abusing a girl (Reeves & Orpinas, 2012).

These examples reflect larger societal norms of gendered roles that remain steadfast in a hetero-patriarchal society even though we continue to challenge them. The fact that adolescents within the literature still ascribe to these roles and demonstrate confusion on this issue by stating violence is unacceptable, but then justifying it by a perceived wrong behaviour as McCarry’s (2009) study indicates, is not surprising when considering that several studies within this review point towards a system that provides conflicting messages about dating violence.

Adolescents reportedly obtained knowledge of gender roles, acceptability of violence, and dating behaviour from television and media portrayals (Bowen et al., 2013; Chung, 2007; Herrman 2013; McCarry 2009; Ulloa et al., 2008). An example of the consistently taught gendered ideas of manhood and masculinity was reflected in boys stating that they were not encouraged to speak about their feelings or problems in Sears et al. (2006) study. In contrast, adolescent girls verbalized a feeling of embarrassment or stupidity in telling someone about being in an abusive relationship due to the increased awareness of domestic violence (Gallopin et al., 2009; Martin et al., 2012; Redhawk Love & Richards, 2013; Sears et al., 2006).

These examples provide us with important information regarding our efforts to eliminate violence. First our efforts to engage boys and men in meaningful ways has to reflect an understanding that we (society) contribute to silencing them when we do not offer them greater
opportunities to speak about their experiences, and challenge them on definitions of masculinity that we have created. Secondly, the message of women empowerment has been received, but in these cases has had an opposite effect, which contributes to silencing girls within the adolescent population. In our (society’s) efforts to empower women we need to think more critically about whether the idea of empowerment is in response to our (patriarchal society’s) past positions of regarding this as a women’s issue. If this is the case, then our focus needs to turn towards greater examination of societal norms such as masculinity and femininity and how they continue to be reproduced. In doing so, we can further expose how we view this issue one dimensionally which forces for example adolescent girls to feel “embarrassed” or “stupid” about being in an abusive relationship (Gallopin et al., 2009; Martin et al., 2012; Redhawk Love & Richards, 2013; Sears et al., 2006).

**Intersectional Approaches to Dating Violence Definitions**

To this point the literature has revealed that adolescents define dating violence in relation to ideas of gender, violence, and community. Essentially, adolescents are defining an intersectional experience of dating violence that points towards greater systemic issues outside of their control. These adolescents also illustrate an oversimplification in the understanding of this issue when the analysis ends at describing how they define violence. By doing so, it absolves systems that interact and reinforce conditions of inequality based on age, gender, location, and race.

The question then becomes whether researchers who are presenting these ideas of adolescent dating violence are doing so in an intersectional way. If intersectionality is defined in a manner that means, for example, that x group of people living in x area believe dating violence is displayed physically, then the current literature is limited in its use of this concept. Ideas of
race and gender have been used predominantly for demographics to describe the sample population, but rarely does it delve into how ideas of race and gender impact class and experiences of violence. In fact, only one article addresses discrimination and how it impacts dating violence (Steuve & O’Donnell, 2008).

In this regard we can do better and move beyond simply identifying or describing these characteristics in relation to violence, to critically analyzing how these socially constructed characteristics impact how adolescents experience violence in relationships. Now one could argue that ideas of race and gender were not the focus or question of particular studies, or those studies simply cannot cover everything. However, I would challenge this in stating that race, class, gender, and age have to be included in every question we seek to answer, as those who are impacted by public health issues such as violence do not experience these phenomena outside of one part of their identity.

Moving beyond the recognition of violence in relationships, some adolescents provided an intersectional understanding of violence by illustrating how the violence within their relationships had been shaped or impacted by ideas of gendered roles and community violence (McCarry, 2009).

**Global Review of Community Perspectives on Adolescent Dating Violence**

**Description of Search Strategies**

This section provides current information from empirical and grey literature on community views of adolescent dating violence. Scopus, OVID, Pubmed, JSTOR and Google Scholar databases were searched using the terms, parents perceptions of adolescent dating violence, schools perceptions of adolescent dating violence, community views on adolescent dating violence, teachers and adolescent dating violence, teachers perceptions of adolescent
dating violence, parents and adolescent dating violence, community views and adolescent dating violence, community context of dating violence, and dating violence in the community. Seven articles were considered appropriate for the goals of this review focusing on community and societal views of dating violence. To expand my search using the same databases, I also incorporated terms such as; religious leaders perceptions of adolescent dating violence, religion/religious leaders and adolescent dating violence, church and adolescent dating violence with zero results for all terms in all five databases.

The searches primarily revealed American studies, therefore search terms Caribbean adults views on adolescent dating violence, Caribbean and dating violence, were used with no success in obtaining further articles in Scopus, OVID, Pubmed, JSTOR and Google Scholar databases. UNICEF’s website was also searched using the same search terms and one report was included in this review from a Caribbean regional study focusing on violence of people under the age of 18. To expand and contextualize community perspectives beyond the limited amount of articles found, seven other peer-reviewed papers were included focusing on community perspectives of domestic violence.

**Community Perspectives on Adolescent Dating Violence**

I began a great deal of my reading focusing specifically on adolescents and was expecting to see similar ideas voiced in the community perspectives as stated above in the previous section. What I am presenting here helps to build an even more complete but complex picture of how difficult it is to address issues of violence and youth, and more importantly, why focusing only on the adolescent (which was my original plan) is in itself limiting because it creates the idea that adolescent dating violence occurs in a silo.
For me, one of the most important points was articulated in a group of 51 African American men and women of diverse professional backgrounds and community positions in Seattle, Washington (Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004). They discussed domestic violence and its implications within the African American community with a subset of this larger group (numbers not provided) focusing on dating violence in adolescence (Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004). Not only did they acknowledge this as a community problem, but believed that former generations were responsible for the demise of the youth generation by not passing down a collective concept of community (Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004).

This collective concept of community is very important as it points towards how dating violence is viewed as a result of failed larger systems and not necessarily an individual flaw. It also provides a sense of how some communities see history as being very much connected to how the current climate is for the development of relationships. This idea of a collective approach was presented in several other studies where school personnel, parents, and other community agencies for legal and protective services worked together in dealing with youth who had been exposed to violence. But there is a difference here. The collective in Bent-Goodley & Williams’ (2004) study refers to a collective identity based on ethnicity, whereas the collective responsibility in these studies refers to one that is constructed based on profession and relationship to the adolescent (Gonzalez-Guarda, Cummings, Pino, Malhotra, Becerra, & Lopez, 2013; Khubchandani, Price, Thompson, Dake, Wiblishauser, & Telljohann, 2012; Khubchandani, Telljohann, Price, Dake, & Hendershot, 2013).

One might question why this is important. When you consider the history of African Americans within the United States, race was a signifier of difference. In advancing the betterment of their rights and civilities it was understood that to advance one is to advance all.
This mindset was required because based on race African Americans were seen as less than their white American counterparts. Bent-Goodley & Williams (2004) state that violence was seen as a form of survival in their intimate relationships and within the larger community. I point this out because it impacts power differentials, continues to perpetuate binaries of us and them, as well as a public/private dichotomy of where violence is dismissed based on difference.

For example, Khubchandani et al. (2013) indicated that most nurses believed dating violence was a problem in their schools but that their school fared better than other US schools on average. This perspective was also articulated in Martsolf, Colbert, and Draucker’s (2012) study of young adults between 18-21 who had experienced dating violence as teenagers, and professionals from the fields of health, education, justice, social work, and religion. Martsolf et al. (2012) indicated that both groups believed the communities where they lived and worked generally were completely blind to adolescent dating violence. Others described a partial blindness where violence was considered a phase and not serious because of the age of the victims or perpetrators (Martsolf et al., 2012). Lastly, participants explained a selective blindness where if they were not directly affected then it did not exist (Martsolf et al., 2012).

Even though the overall rhetoric on domestic violence is that it occurs irrespective of class, gender, race, or geographical borders – it clearly is not always understood that way, but seen as a problem of specific communities or groups of people based on deeply rooted ideas of race. This perceived idea by the greater society can put particular adolescents based on a combination of the above characteristics in a situation to experience more systematic abuse.

In Akers, Muhammad, and Corbie-Smith (2011) study, they sought to identify neighbourhood features that encourage or protect African American adolescents from early sexual involvement to reduce disparities in HIV rates in two rural counties in North Carolina,
United States. Their results indicated that not only was there inadequate community monitoring of adolescents’ activities, but that adults felt powerless to change local entertainment businesses (not specified) exploitation of adolescents sexuality for financial gain (Akers et al., 2011). If adults are unable to appropriately monitor adolescents and feel they are unable to advocate for them, the likelihood of them preventing dating violence is marginal. This points towards the intersections of economics, age, sex, and race as exploiting these adolescents can be considered a form of violence. Therefore, the focus on adolescent dating violence by this community is silenced.

Here is where the argument becomes even more complex. The link between community violence and other forms of violence has been made, but this does not necessarily provide us with information on how dating violence is understood. For example, the report on voices of Caribbean youth from UNICEF which included representatives from Belize, Barbados, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Haiti, and Grenada (population mean and ages not provided) discussed violence in the Caribbean and demonstrated an acknowledgment of various forms of violence in their community without accounting for violence within dating relationships (“Voices of Caribbean”, 2005). Even though violence in the home and family was highlighted as a type of violence affecting the Caribbean, dating violence was not explored. Therefore, it is unclear if when compared to other forms of violence, dating violence is not considered as serious.

In another sense, community violence can be related to dating violence, but it cannot be assumed that because there is a relation between community and dating violence that the community condones dating violence in adolescence, or any violence for that matter in their community (Malik et al., 1997). Malik, Sorenson, and Aneshensel (1997) studied the effects that community violence had on dating violence in adolescents from 5 schools within Long Beach
Unified School District in California. The focus of this study was on the violence that occurred in the community and its relation to dating violence, and not necessarily what the community’s perspectives were on dating violence in adolescence (Malik et al., 1997). Nevertheless, this study did determine that the exposure or involvement in community violence was related to being involved in dating violence. However, we must question why particular communities have greater exposure to violence and carefully scrutinize answers that are solely focused on blaming entire communities.

Community perspectives are complex mainly because there are communities within communities. Adolescents can access many different communities at once all while experiencing the discriminatory and protective factors that communities can offer. When we say community perspectives I believe it is important to continually challenge where this community fits in society and what factors impact their perspectives on dating violence. From this section it is clear that dating violence is not always considered to be an individual problem because some of those who are involved in abusive situations are considered to be part of larger communities based on race and class that first determine how they are defined. Therefore, the community perspective provides important information into how preventative initiatives should be approached based on their ideas of community and understandings of the causes of violence.

**Review of Community Perspectives on Domestic Violence and Adolescent Dating Violence in Guyana**

In this section I wanted to provide a picture of the current situation for addressing dating violence in Guyana. The ability to notice that a people’s perspectives are missing derives from the recognition that a discussion has already begun. Guyanese community perspectives on adolescent dating violence are first presented by examining domestic violence and how
adolescents have subsequently been included in these initiatives. I then look at how adolescent dating violence is observed and understood in the community through newspaper blogs.

**Description of Search Strategies**

The information in this section has been obtained from grey literature resources that were available online. Therefore, this section is limited to those sources and may not be exhaustive of all information available on this topic in Guyana by those organizations that are accessible only in person. Both governmental and non-governmental websites were searched. Namely, the Ministries of Health, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, as well as, Labour, Security, and Social Services, UNICEF Guyana, and Help and Shelter. Using the search terms domestic violence, adolescents, teens, community perspectives with the Boolean operators and or 11 reports and two articles were obtained.

Further searches were conducted in Kaieteur News and Stabroek News that are newspapers available online using the search terms dating violence, teens, domestic violence, teens killed, teen killed by boyfriend + Guyana with Boolean operator and, three news reports were selected with a large number of blogger commentaries. Searches were also conducted in SCOPUS, JSTOR, and Google Scholar using similar search terms, which did not result in articles appropriate for this review.

There were several major themes found throughout the reports on domestic violence that provide some ideas as to how the community has approached this issue. Domestic violence is approached through recognition of systemic violence in Guyana. These results are provided below.
Social and Economic Conditions of Domestic Violence

All 11 reports represent collaborations between governmental and non-governmental sectors, where community outreach included police, social workers, community advocates and activists, religious leaders, teachers, health workers, and community volunteers (see Table 2). These working relationships demonstrate the recognition that violence prevention within a community is complex requiring the effort and support of all social sectors. However, working relationships between and with sectors has also proven to be a challenge. For example, it was acknowledged during information sessions with magistrates, court staff, social workers, and counsellors that the lack of communication between agencies impedes the effectiveness of their work by handling cases outside of their jurisdiction (Jackson & Kissoon, 2010).

Table two also displays collaborative initiatives with NGOs providing funding, the longest program or project lasted for a period of four years. The contribution of funds from international sources provides insight into three factors. Firstly, it is unclear whether the lack of funding from the governmental sector is an indication of the value attributed to eliminating domestic violence on the political stage or whether the government simply does not have enough financial resources. Secondly, the dependence on NGO funds means that the ability to create a sustainable and consistent focus on the elimination of violence, which includes a properly trained judicial system, is made more difficult. Last but not least, the dependence on outside organizations for funding continues to keep Guyana in a position where the country is not able to efficiently manage their health problems independently – this means that a preventative approach is less likely to be effective. This is evidenced by the disconnect between legal policies and implementation.
To deal with this, Guyana has taken a three-pronged approach to address the inconsistencies of law enforcement. Namely, there has been increased awareness of the Domestic Violence Act, training of police officers, court workers and other frontline staff, as well as counselling, legal advice, and court escorts in some reports (see Table 2). These efforts demonstrate identification of the importance of legislation to deal with domestic violence, but also the fact that they are not being implemented appropriately. For example, there remains a wide variation in competency regarding domestic violence with some police officers having a wide range of experience in comprehensive training while others have none as described in the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security led initiative (Jackson & Kissoon, 2010). These laws and protocols have little significance if they are not fully implemented as indicated by the Ministry of Labour, Security, and Social Services (“Eliminating violence against women”, 2014).

What this tells us is that professions within the judicial system that are meant to protect victims of violence can silence them. Guyana has acknowledged this but does not have the resources to consistently train and improve the implementation of this system. Furthermore, this is not a simple dichotomy of police versus victim. The intersections of class, gender, and power remain steadfast in discussions with social workers, police, and court officials in dealing with perpetrators (Jackson & Kissoon, 2010). Police officers indicated that dealing with “big ones”, who are those in society of affluence and power, was problematic (Jackson & Kissoon, 2010, p.5; Mancey & Kissoon, 2010). These perpetrators were beyond reproach, and due to the layering system of power and inequalities, a police officer warning a person in a place of power could impact his or her own economic situation negatively (Jackson & Kissoon, 2010). Therefore, police officers can be in various positions simultaneously where they are supposed to be the
protector but can also be a victim. This presents an example of one specific profession, but represents a larger matter where people in Guyanese society can be perpetrators but also victims based on class, gender, and/or race. Problematizing domestic and dating violence can therefore not be explained in binaries of victim and perpetrator.

Another major theme within the focus on domestic violence was the concerted effort to include men in outreach efforts on eliminating domestic violence in Guyana. One study obtained mixed results from men where some became more aware of domestic violence and its negative implications on women’s health and their relationships, while others felt this increased awareness resulted in a loss of control in their homes (“Reducing gender-based”, 2011). Communities believed that more efforts needed to be exhausted, to tailor the approaches in reaching men to ensure a more effective outcome (“Reducing gender-based”, 2011).

Similarly, in discussing the needs of the perpetrator in a training workshop for social workers and counsellors, there was recognition that an increased effort was needed in educating men and boys about abusive behaviour and its relation to masculinity (Mancey & Kissoon, 2010). Mancey and Kissoon’s (2010) workshops articulated the relationship between masculinity and violence that was indicated by men in the elimination of domestic violence project (“Reducing gender-based”, 2011). Furthermore, it provided an understanding about how men are defining their masculinity in relation to women and why irrespective of the awareness campaigns and efforts to eliminate domestic violence in Guyana, it continues to persist (Myers, 2012).

These studies provide two important points. First, that domestic violence in Guyana is not just understood as a women’s issue, and secondly that engaging different groups of people within the community (such as boys and men) cannot be effectively done through the same
approach. Additionally, approaching communities through different community organizations (such as faith based) can also provide an entry point into the understanding of violence.

Six documents addressed religion or faith-based organizations as essential for initiatives (See Table 2). The belief in God and the faithfulness to a religion in Guyana influences perspectives regarding patriarchal ideas of the family. As participants in Jackson and Kissoon’s (2010) report indicated, “pray and stay” prevents a victim of abuse from leaving an unhealthy relationship. This statement indicates the faith that God or a higher power will deliver one from negative circumstances and therefore there is no need to leave (Jackson & Kissoon, 2010). Leaving an abusive situation would be a symbol of a lack of faith in God and your dependence on man, both literally and figuratively, which is bound to fail. Therefore, including faith-based organizations into domestic violence initiatives would open discussions with church and mosque leaders on why these beliefs are detrimental to women’s health and potentially a risk for those who stay.

The interpretation of religious scriptures is considered a key component in contributing to the persistence of domestic violence in Guyana but is also seen as a fundamental component of its elimination. For example, Habeeb (2004) provided a Muslim perspective of domestic violence for Guyana. In her article she provides several passages from the Quran and the prophet Mohammed stating that women are to be treated with respect and love, denouncing any form of violence against any human being. The Guyanese community have acknowledged that religious beliefs can have both positive and negative effects on domestic violence efforts, evidenced by the inclusion of religious leaders into initiatives and the discussion thus far on faith and domestic violence. To ensure a message of consistency, religious organizations and leaders have been included in domestic violence initiatives. The challenge arises in respectfully questioning the
interpretation of scriptural passages as Habeeb (2004) did as well as patriarchal ideas in religion and the church in preventing domestic violence in Guyana.

**Landscape of Domestic Violence**

Guyana’s response to domestic violence has been inclusive of all 10 regions throughout the country (“Help and Shelter integrated”, 2007). The effort to inform various communities within different geographical locations in the country is demonstrated by six of the reports working in multiple regions and the remaining five reports working in various cities from Hague, a rural community to the capital city of Georgetown (Table 2). Within the projects completed in Georgetown they often had participants from other areas outside the capital city (Jackson & Kissoon, 2010; Mancey & Kissoon, 2010).

The range of geographical areas targeted demonstrates an acknowledgement that domestic violence is a national problem and, a desire to work towards eliminating it in all regions of the country collectively. It also points towards an understanding that one mass approach will not have the desired impact, and therefore tailoring the needs and wants of various communities is essential. The implications of living in a rural or urban area within Guyana, poses its own challenges to this issue and highlights how geographical location can impact health.

Access to particular areas in Guyana was identified as posing a problem in two projects as flooding and lack of funding for transportation inhibited outreach (“Help & Shelter integrated”, 2007; Mancey, 2008). Some communities also lacked adequate roads and portable water, which was lobbied for and successfully received through an initiative program focused on eliminating gender based violence (“Reducing gender-based”, 2011).

There are marked differences between living in rural and urban areas in Guyana. For example, an awareness project completed in 4 rural communities identified that some of the
smaller communities only had community-based organizations that were faith based (“Reducing gender-based”, 2011). The existence of only faith based community organizations indicates a lack of basic infrastructure and social services due to poorly functioning local government systems (“Reducing gender-based”, 2011). Furthermore, a lack of confidentiality was identified as one of the risks of life in a small community (Jackson & Kissoon, 2010), and community members also identified boycotting businesses and walking out of meetings where a person of affluence was identified as being abusive on a community level (Jackson & Kissoon, 2010). However, it is questionable how often this would occur in a resource-limited community (Jackson & Kissoon, 2010). Similarly, in another project a lack of adequate resources was identified, as there were no rehabilitation programs for perpetrators (Jackson & Kissoon, 2010).

Three studies alluded to other forms of violence such as crime and robberies, child abuse, violence in schools from teachers to students and vice versa, as well as racial violence (“Counseling, counseling training”, 2010; “Final report to”, 2008; “Reducing gender-based”, 2011). However, contextualizing the complex and on-going backdrop of violence in Guyana was made clear in a final report to the United Nations Violence Against Women (UN VAW) trust fund on actions to eliminate violence against women (“Final report to”, 2008). In this report, Red Thread, a women’s organization, interviewed older men and women who had experienced racial violence following political elections in 1961-1964 and the period after 2001/2002 (“Final report to”, 2008). The ongoing violence delayed the beginning of this project, and the heightened racial anxiety as well as concern for the safety of researchers within the field, focused the discussions on a period occurring 40 years prior to the start of this project (“Final report to”, 2008).
The inability of Red Thread to engage the community at that time about the current political and racial conditions that resulted in violence points towards the challenges of addressing violence when it occurs. Furthermore, the heightened emotion of re-living the accounts of brutality and violence over 40 years ago on men and women based on race, points towards the impact that community violence can have on individuals and their relationships.

The landscape of domestic violence in Guyana is challenged by access, lack of resources, and unending community violence in multiple forms that is influenced by contemporary historical racial conflicts. All of these factors including social and economic conditions impact the environment in which adolescents form their relationships and experience violence.

The Presence of Adolescents in Domestic Violence Initiatives

Two of the reports included in this review focused specifically on targeting adolescents in schools through an awareness campaign on domestic violence and evaluating a curriculum titled health and family life education (HFLE) to adolescents (“Evaluation report piloting”, 2013; Mancey, 2008). Adolescents indicated that manhood and womanhood was defined as fathering or mothering a child, and that gender roles were clearly defined as men making money and decisions, while women are loyal and passive (Mancey, 2008). It is unclear how adolescents understand their masculinity and femininity outside of these aspects and therefore if violence in relationships is recognized as such if these components are not present (i.e. child/financial need-support).

For example, after adolescents completed a program focusing on reducing gender-based violence, it was indicated that they were able to identify abuse within the home, among family members, and from teachers, but there was no indication that violence in dating relationships among peers was recognized (no percentages provided in report) (“Reducing gender-based”,
Furthermore, it is unclear whether the Guyanese community continues to foster rigid views of gender roles in their attempt to decrease domestic violence. It was indicated that men and boys are to be educated that abusive behaviour is not needed to define masculinity (Mancey & Kissoon, 2010) and the aim of other projects was to reduce gender-based violence by increasing awareness of violence against women, girls, and children (“Reducing gender-based”, 2011). The importance of educating all individuals goes without question, however doing so without creating a binary of victim and abuser is difficult.

In evaluating the health and family life education curriculum, teachers indicated that they felt they were “getting too much into the business” of students who emotionally expressed being sexually abused, and refused to teach curriculum that they termed “sex education”, until the curriculum was further explained to them (“Evaluation report piloting”, 2013). This belief disputes the notion of educating adolescents on abuse and points towards the intersections of age and the public/private dichotomy of abuse. The idea of violence in adolescence being a private issue however is not consistent in all communities as two projects indicated that youth should have greater involvement in activities (“Counseling, counseling training” “UNFPA Project”, 2011). It was also indicated in the same report that youth were the most responsive group to work with as those experiencing violence in a relationship were not willing to speak (“UNFPA Project”, 2011). It is therefore unclear whether the belief exists that youth in general are not experiencing violence in their relationships.

These two initiatives display concerning perspectives from the community in regards to adolescent dating violence. The communities, when focusing on domestic violence, were inclusive of various community members (including professions such as teachers), who were responsive and interested in building awareness on domestic violence. However, the conflicting
perspectives presented in this section express a disconnect between acknowledging that adolescents can be experiencing violence within relationships now as opposed to teaching them about domestic violence as a subject that they might experience later.

**Dating Violence in the News**

Within this section on Guyanese community views on dating violence, I will present three newspaper articles from Stabroek News in 2013 about teenagers who have been killed by the person they were romantically involved with. Kaieteur News online was also searched, however stories of relationship violence pertaining to teenagers did not have comments from community members and therefore were not included. The description of each story will be followed by Guyanese blogger’s quotes on the story. It is assumed that those individuals who are commenting on the stories are adults, however the ages, race, profession, gender, or whether they are parents or not, are not assumed unless provided by the writer.

On August 9th, 2013 Stabroek News reported a 17-year old girl from Diamond Housing Scheme a neighbourhood within the East Bank Region, was beaten and stabbed to death by her 18-year old boyfriend (“Schoolgirl murdered”, 2013). The boyfriend’s sister invited the girl to their home stating that her boyfriend was sick (“Schoolgirl murdered”, 2013). Thirty-three people commented on this story online. I have selected three perspectives presented below.

Society is changing and people r thinking differently. Including children. They r now open to more outside behaviour and thinking. One can only notice the characters they worship and how some parents does not have much control over them in any way. Some of these children lack guidance and people to sit and talk to. All Western behaviour and thinking, r now anchored down in the Guyana society. Things will not get better. But, if one look at how some other countries deal with similar problems, there is still hope. Some children need role models to look up to. Society has to get a grip on the situation. R.I.P. to the victim. The boy was too hot headed and will have to pay the price.
This quote reflects how polarizing the issue of dating violence is in Guyana. In one sense this blogger recognizes that Guyana is changing, but also believes things will remain the same by stating ‘things will not get better’. The effects of globalization and the access to other cultures is seen as having both positive and negative effects in Guyana, but overall Guyana is responsible for the state of this 17 year old, who is still referred to as a child. A second quote reads:

Pal your comment is so much of the way I feel. I walked away so I know what I am talking about. When are these useless parasitical hypocrites in parliaments do SOMETHING to stop senseless carnage in Guyana. When are some of these animals going to be put down. In the past 8 days, 4 such incidents from innocent children to harmless women. This one really hurts. She is only 16 years. People have to be taught to respect and FEARRRRRRRRRRRRR the LAW! Break some necks for heaven sake. Let them feel the pain! I am so hurt!

While this blogger quoted the wrong age, this person’s perspective also focuses on society but emphasizes the lack of trust in the political leaders and having respect for the justice systems. Nowhere does this person indicate an increased need for respecting girls and women. This person refers to the abuser as an animal, demonstrating a perspective that those who commit such acts are not human, which can create narrowly defined ideas of who an abuser can be. This comment also reflects several others bloggers on this story who believe violence to be the appropriate justice for those who inflict violence on others. This demonstrates a conflicting idea of the appropriateness of violence in solving disputes or disagreements. The last comment reads:

Iggi these young men appears to be taking their que from the older men who are doing the same thing, it appears as though it is a copy-cat affair. At eighteen my friends and I had girlfriends with the emphasis on friends, so when we were dumped unceremoniously by one there were backups, it was not the right thing to do but we never entertained any thoughts about hitting any girl friend so the killing thing was extinct. My heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved and I pray her soul finds Eternal Rest. As for the young man he must be made to pay for the allegations made against him in a court of law.
This comment is in response to another man named Iggi who indicated that Guyanese society was being ruined by “weakened boys pretending to be men and wanting to own rather than love their women” (“Schoolgirl murdered”, 2013). This man reflects on his own experiences with women when he was younger, but does not recognize that his treatment of women as disposable objects perpetuates disrespectful behaviour towards women that can lead to abuse. Additionally, the idea that women did not experience abuse in the past is an idealized and inaccurate account of past generations.

On December 26th, 2013 Stabroek News reported a 17-year old girl who was killed by her ex-partner, an Amerindian settlement off of the Mahaicony River (“Moraikobai teen girl shot”, 2013). At the time of this press release the murderer had not been found (“Moraikobai teen girl shot”, 2013). Seven comments were written below this story. Three of those comments are provided below.

Guyanese acting very lapse and unconcerned too long now about crime and public security apparently killers running Guyana now. Arrest all killers, street and white collar, all Families must be protected, SN [Stabroek News], would U guys kindly start the act of encouraging Love among Guyanese, on your front page simply say, 'All Guyanese must Love and Protect each other', eight words - ask your editor, thanks and Happy Holidays. Again, SN [Stabroek News], make Guyana better or a message saying 'Every Citizen in Police Mode' look, listen and make notes plenty Guyanese need to be in jails. No Guyanese - none should be tekking [taking] advantage on another Guyanese, jail the bullies. Guyanese needs peace next year is 2014, stop treating Guyanese like idiots...the powers that be....

In this comment the blogger expresses his/her disappointment with the inadequate justice system and the lack of community unity that could have prevented this girl from being killed. The blogger demonstrates two deeper issues, first, that Guyana was at one point a collectivist culture which demonstrates why behaviours or beliefs regarding individual gain has crippled this country. Secondly, the violence that is experienced in these dating relationships is related to
violence at all levels in Guyana. This person acknowledges through this comment that violence is not only present in particular neighbourhoods but is systemic in Guyana. This person ends their comment indicating that the Guyanese community are aware of the leaders not working for the people, even though they (leaders) may not believe Guyanese are paying attention “Guyanese needs peace next year is 2014, stop treating Guyanese like idiots...the powers that be....” (“Moraikobai teen girl shot”, 2013).

Another comment reads “Guyana needs a big prayer service...it is a pity the former ‘bossman’ had restricted the unfettered 'TV' airing of Religious programs” (“Moraikobai teen girl shot”, 2013). It is unclear who the “bossman” is however it would not be absurd to assume the “bossman” is a previous political leader. This person’s comment indicates a belief that the lack of religion in Guyana is responsible for the demise of this young girl and that it can also be a solution through a higher power. The last comment presented states:

Testosterone power Obie. Not rational, only emotional. Some Men cannot tek lef [Men can’t take a woman leaving them]. See. Then, no schooling, goat head, Number one. At this rate of killing in Guyana, the population may now be impacted. Shotgun the girl with he big gun because the other no good. When will they ever learn that a woman is NOT ANY ONE’S POSSESSION - a thing - she is a Human like his sister or mother. I only hope the police accord him due process, police style.

Within this quote the blogger clearly faults the man’s inability to perform sexually by stating “Shotgun the girl with he big gun because the other no good” as his reason for shooting his ex-girlfriend and that he would have to be acting out of emotion with no education to believe a woman is a possession. This indicates the belief by this blogger that a man expressing emotion has negative outcomes. To be a man means showing less emotion and that dating violence only occurs in classes of people who have less education, which contradicts a bloggers view in a previous comment.
On January the 14th, 2014, Stabroek News stated that within the Kuru Kuru village off of the Soesdyke-Linden Highway parents of a 14-year old girl found her body in a creek by their home (“Girl found murdered at”, 2014). It was suspected that she was murdered by her boyfriend of 2 years who was 28 years old (“Girl found murdered at”, 2014). According to Stabroek News the mother indicated that her daughter had been hit by her boyfriend in the past and had relationship issues, but none the night before her daughter was murdered (“Girl found murdered at”, 2014). Fourteen comments were written below this story on the newspaper website by bloggers. Three of the comments are included in this review.

Mothers, mother your children. Hold onto them until they are equipped for adult relationships. At 16 this child should have been happily enjoying her teen years under your watchful eyes, not shacking up with a big hardback monster. I hope the police find him and throws him up under the jail.

This blogger has the wrong age of the victim, but demonstrates the perspective on parenting to be the responsibility of the mother. Another blogger also blames the mother questioning how this could be allowed, but also asked where the father was. The identification of strong legal repercussions was indicated by many other bloggers who shared similar sentiments and/or believed this person should be killed. The mother’s comments also show a lack of awareness for the potential increase in the severity of violent acts in abusive relationships. Another person writes:

One parent prevents a child from engaging in a relationship with a grown man, and the child commits suicide. Another parent allows a child to engage in a relationship with a grown man, and the grown man kills the child. What a conundrum for parents in general, but for poor parents in particular! I reserve any judgment of this child's parents, but I offer my sympathies and condolences to them.

This quote demonstrates another major health problem that Guyanese adolescents and parents face which is suicide (Rudatsikira, Muula, & Siziya, 2007). Furthermore, the difficulty
of decision making with two negative options for parents when adolescents date or are exploited in relationships with adults in Guyana is highlighted by this comment that is also seen as further complicated by financial constraints.

And what have the PNC done to promote what u are talking about i.e Peace? Why blame PPP for everything. Why not blame bad parenting. Which good parent would allow a man to sleep over in same house with their 14 year old and knowing that they are lovers?

This quote is in response to another person who indicated that the leading political party, the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) is to blame for the melee that has befallen Guyana. The person then asks about the opposition party the People’s National Congress (PNC) and then settles on looking at the parents for blame. It is important to note that these two political parties are also divided by race. The party in power (during the time of this story) was predominantly Indo-Guyanese supported, whereas the oppositional party is predominantly Afro-Guyanese supported. Therefore, the potential of blame being placed along racial lines is probable. One might also question how issues such as dating violence are impacted when political rhetoric as seen in this comment overrides the actual issue.

These articles and quotes are not reflective of all Guyanese society, but do give some perspective on how dating violence in adolescence is a complex issue seen as a failure of larger systems such as the political and justice systems as well as parents. While dating violence does reflect political elements, specifically the politics of gender, one might question whether the overtly politicizing of bloggers comments that are meant to focus on racial divisions and power address the issue of dating violence. Nevertheless, these quotes reveal that Guyanese society views a shared responsibility for its adolescents and considers violence against women a major problem that is reflective of the failing justice, political, religious, cultural systems, and parenting in Guyana.
Structural Barriers of Adolescent Dating Violence and Domestic Violence

Up to this point, I have discussed adolescent and community perspectives of dating violence globally and perspectives of domestic and adolescent dating violence in a Guyanese context. Throughout all of these sections I saw an underlying thread weaving through people’s perspectives – this being the systematic nature of violence. I wanted to explore these ideas more thoroughly and went back into the literature to seek out a better understanding. Within this section I present my findings from 15 articles, which are grouped into major themes of structural barriers. These barriers faced by adolescents relate to those experienced as an adult facing domestic violence. Therefore, this section problematizes the two forms of intimate violence comparing and contrasting how dating violence in adolescence is often embedded in some of the overarching issues of domestic violence.

Whose Community? Race, Racism, Gender, Age, and Domestic Violence

Race, racism, and gender are aspects of domestic violence that are woven into every component of the social and economic conditions, even if not acknowledged by the communities who are affected. While I discuss race, racism, and gender, specifically here all of these issues intersect the other structural barriers I discuss.

Articles focusing on community perspectives of domestic violence demonstrate the relationship between race, gender, and structural barriers in the United States and England (Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004; Gillum, 2008; Gill & Rehman, 2004). Gillum (2008) examined how domestic violence survivors navigated community services for 12 African American women as well as two African American service providers in a large urban Mid-western city (name not provided). Women indicated that they felt a burden to prove their abuse, because the idea existed that African women experience more abuse and are therefore used to it as compared to white
abuse survivors (Gillum, 2008). Gill and Rehman (2004) expressed similar experiences for South Asian women in London, England. The Newham Asian Women’s project was created in 1985 to serve women from this community who had not found refuge in mainstream services for white women (Gill & Rehman, 2004). African-American participants in Bent-Goodley and Williams (2004) also expressed the effects of living within a racist society in the United States as seeing men within the African American community in Seattle internalizing oppression and defining their manhood through violence.

Bent-Goodley and Williams (2004) further indicated that in order to deal with domestic violence within the African American community, the historical impacts of slavery require consideration, as well as its contemporary presentation in negative media images of African Americans that continue to promote negative stereotypes, especially of women. These stereotypes also perpetuate a cycle of violence where abuse victims remain silent because of concern with contributing to the negative stereotyping of the community, which in turn condones the violence and further continues it throughout the community (Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004).

Participants in all three articles did not believe that the mainstream services offered in their communities or its service providers were genuine in their desire to aide the situation of racial minority women, and therefore, participants created initiatives for their respective communities (Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004; Gillum, 2008; Gill & Rehman, 2004). Bent-Goodley and Williams (2004) participants strongly indicated that African American communities needed to create and work by their own definitions of domestic violence. Adolescents within these marginalized groups are further marginalized by age where already limited or insensitive resources would have to account for the developmental stage of youth.
Akers et al. (2010) demonstrated the structural implications on African American adolescents’ health. Adolescents within both rural cities in North Carolina, United States lacked recreational programs within their community and access to neighbouring communities based on finance, leaving them and their peers to engage in sexual practices that were unsafe (Akers et al., 2010). Adolescents who were racially diverse within Martsolf et al.’s (2012) study saw community prevention or intervention programs as unavailable, inappropriate, or helpful but impersonal.

As McCall and Wittner (1990) state, “Who speaks and who is heard are political questions, a fact that is especially apparent when people in positions of low status and power find their voice” (p.47). Not all people within a community have equal opportunity to be heard because their voices are impacted by race, gender, and age. Therefore, whose community should be considered when understanding the presence or accesses to community resources that can impact community perspectives on violence.

Silence of Abuse: Justice and Domestic Violence

The distrust or inconsistency of the justice system was clearly articulated in 11 studies (Akers et al., 2010; Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004; Gillum, 2008; Gill & Rehman, 2004; Jordan, Martsolf et al., 2012; Morrow, 1994; Reed et al., 2008; Schmetz, 2006; “Voices of Caribbean”, 2005). In the United States and England the experience with police and the judicial system was based on race (Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004; Gillum, 2008; Gill & Rehman, 2004; Jordan, n.d). For example, Bent-Goodley and Williams (2004) indicated that due to the perception of African American men being more violent, there were more incarcerations with stricter sentences and women were not seen as victims and therefore ignored. Participants in Gillum’s (2008) study articulated similar viewpoints, and Jordan (n.d.) stated in her discussion
on the role of the black church in the African American community that there is a negative relationship between the African American community and the judicial system.

African American women indicated that police were not taking their reports seriously, and when women defended themselves against their abusers they received worse penalties (Gillum, 2008). Gill and Rehman (2004) found that South Asian women in London also required advocacy against rape, immigration laws, the rights for women who had been imprisoned for killing their abusers, as well as institutional racism through protests. As Gillum (2008) indicated, African American woman were being punished for fighting systems of patriarchy that were also racially discriminate, meaning women remained in situations that were abusive to protect their abuser and themselves from a racialized system.

Similar findings of skepticism were also seen in Caribbean populations. Schmeitz (2006) in her discussion on addressing violence against women in Suriname with the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) acknowledged that the elimination of domestic violence had to move beyond shelters and clinics. Morrow’s (1994) study on addressing domestic violence on the island of St. Croix expressed similar sentiments, where a community organization titled Women’s coalition advocated and supported women through the criminal justice system with legal proceedings, indicating a lack of trust in the justice system.

Schmeitz (2006) noted that in their evaluation of training outcomes in Suriname, numerous members of the police force were not taking appropriate action with domestic violence cases, because they were not classifying domestic violence as a crime (Schmeitz, 2006). However, Schmeitz (2006) also indicated in further evaluations that there has been an increase in reporting of domestic violence by police in Jamaica and Suriname, which could reflect changing perceptions.
Caribbean youth also indicated that police contributed to the crime within the community by involvement in illegal activities and police brutality against vulnerable communities including youth (“Voices of Caribbean”, 2005). In addition, they indicated that legal frameworks were not sensitive to the needs of juveniles and that there were inconsistencies of laws based on age (“Voices of Caribbean”, 2005). For adolescents in Reed et al.’s (2008) American study who have already had extensive exposure to violence, crime, and police in their communities, it would not be irrational to assume a distrust of police. Furthermore, parents in Gonzalez-Guarda et al. (2013) American study cited the lack of support from those in places of power such as politicians and police as negatively affecting their ability to help their teenagers.

**Economic Instability and Domestic Violence**

Family life circumstances and service delivery are affected by economic instability. For adolescents, the impact of economic instability can be seen in two ways. Firstly, parents in Gonzalez-Guarda et al. (2013) study expressed difficulty in maintaining their Hispanic customs of family solidarity due to the surrounding environment and the demands placed on them from “single-parent households, economic hardships, work stress, separations of children and their parents during immigration process, and the absence of positive role models” (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2013, p. 7-8). Similarly, parents in Akers et al. (2011) study stated that adolescents were not supervised due to travel associated with job security and pay.

Secondly, adolescents in the Caribbean (“Voices of Caribbean”, 2005) and the United States (Akers et al., 2011) stated that a lack of job opportunities or access to money lead to an increase in crime. For example, in Akers et al. (2011) study adolescents who had no access to recreational activities or access to resources as they were in a different community indicated that no money means “nothing else to do but mack-daddy and trick” (p.97). The introduction of the
intersections of economics, age, and sex are essentially perpetrated by a larger system that has limited resources in particular communities based on race.

Community organizations indicated that a lack of funding for programs has hindered their service to communities regarding domestic violence and dating violence in adolescence (Akers et al., 2011; Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004; Martsolf et al., 2012; Muturi & Donald, 2006). To combat this, Gill and Rehman (2004) indicated that communities have to consolidate local and national partnerships and coalitions. This was recognized and done in Muturi and Donald’s (2006) discussion on violence against women and girls in Jamaica. They indicated that particular agencies did not receive funding; therefore they pooled financial resources together to address violence against women collectively (Muturi & Donald, 2006).

The Women’s Coalition in St. Croix (Morrow, 1994) was able to develop and sustain a program that targets every aspect of domestic violence including primary, secondary, and tertiary intervention, due to adequate federal funding. However, this experience appears to be the exception in the documented experiences of women in this review. For example, African American women in Gillum’s (2008) study indicated that stereotypes based on colour affect one’s ability to obtain housing. Bent-Goodley and Williams (2004) and Gill and Rehman (2004) stated how a lack of employment, poor educational systems, inequity in pay and wealth cause violence within the home or prevent women from leaving abusive situations.

**Community Cohesion for Community Success**

The idea and/or recognition of community cohesion are present in all 15 articles even if not explicitly stated. Within this section there are examples of how community cohesion can positively impact a particular community, how when the community is not working cohesively it
impacts the outcomes of initiatives focusing on dating or domestic violence, and what aspects of a cohesive community have not been consistently accessed.

Bent-Goodley and Williams (2004) and Muturi and Donald (2006) recognize that in the African American and medium and low-income countries, social and community networks are important in transferring values, beliefs, and social system norms. The breakdown of this idea and sense of community has resulted in an upsurge of community violence (Malik et al., 1997; Reed et al., 2008; “Voices of Youth”, 2005) where even knowledge and history cannot be passed down from elders to youth, as the violence in the surrounding community has made community elders feel uncomfortable to be around youth (Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004). This can only have negative impacts on youth to be further removed from their own history.

Furthermore, a community that lacks cohesion cannot provide appropriate services. For example, in Khubchandani et al. (2012) and Khubchandani et al. (2013) studies, there was inconsistency with nurses and school counsellors’ knowledge and training of dating violence in adolescence. This could further reflect structural disparities where particular school boards receive more funding, and therefore training of its staff, than others. These inconsistencies with services were also highlighted in health and judicial services for domestic violence based on race (Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004; Gillum, 2008).

However, one community organization that has been cited as important and influential in African American communities in the United States and Caribbean communities is the church (Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004; Gillum, 2008; Jordon, n.d.; Morrow, 1994; Muturi & Donald, 2006). Jordon (n.d) discussed the role of the African American church in domestic violence. She stated that the black church is the longest consistent organization in the African American community where important issues within the community are addressed (Jordon, n.d.).
A disconnection from the spiritual realm was seen as a contributing factor of domestic violence in the African American community from people who participated in Bent-Goodley and Williams’ (2004) study. However, women in Gillum’s (2008) study voiced their uncertainty with the conflicting messages of going to the church and God for help, and being told to return to their husbands because the ideas of patriarchy are more important. Jordon (n.d.) also acknowledged this stating:

“The ‘yoke of silence’ in the name of the racial solidarity also weighs upon the black church community. The silence of the church regarding the ‘abuse of women’ is in conspiracy against the total liberation of the African American community. An African American woman is expected to ‘suffer in silence’ for the sake of others; When she assumes this role on the black church, she is elevated to the level of Martyrdom” p.17

Therefore, while the African American church is seen as an important and stable structure within the community, patriarchal beliefs have to be questioned. As Jordon (n.d.) states this can be done by challenging the dominance of male leaders within the church and discussing and explaining passages within the bible to eliminate the misinterpretation of scripture.

**Summary of Global Literature Review**

Globally, adolescents’ perspectives on dating violence provide important information about how the movement on changing gendered roles and eliminating violence are trending in society. Their voices and perspectives indicate that further work is required in establishing consistent messaging on the unacceptability of violence and patriarchal gendered roles of men and women. Furthermore, their perspectives challenge future research to fully consider the complexity of their lives and not limit their experiences based on their age. Adolescents are recognizing that their environments affect every aspect of their life, including their relationships.
When asked, adolescents also go beyond limited definitions of violence. Their voices reflect the complexities researchers face and challenge us to continue questioning how our studies may silence members within our own communities.

Community perspectives on dating violence and domestic violence globally, articulate the intersections of economics, religion, legal frameworks, and social class. These societal factors cannot be approached individually with behaviour change. Rather, the systems that have created environments that perpetuate violence need to be challenged. A positive consequence of this realization is the diversity in ways communities have chosen to approach violence prevention inclusive of all social sectors.

Guyanese communities are active in their quest to eliminate domestic violence with limited economic and human resources, challenging steadfast beliefs of patriarchy, gender roles, and conflicting beliefs about violence. The persistence of NGOs and women’s organizations have created an environment in Guyana where it is now possible to approach issues such as violence in adolescent relationships because of the foundation that has been established on this issue (Clarke & Kertzious, 2007; “Counseling, counseling training”, 2010; “Final report to”, 2008; “Help and Shelter integrated”, 2007; Mancey, 2008; Mancey & Kissoon, 2010; “Reducing gender-based”, 2011; “UNFPA Project”, 2007). Even though we can problematize the relationship between international aid and health in Guyana, without the perseverance to obtain these financial resources to continue prevention and awareness campaigns, the possibility to question adolescents’ lives within the realm of domestic violence would not be achievable.

Guyana’s approach to domestic violence also reflects a collectivist society, where the saying, it takes a village to raise a child, can be appreciated in the projects and initiatives that incorporated parents, teachers, social, health, education, and law professionals (Clarke &
Kertzious, 2007; “Counseling, counseling training”, 2010; “Eliminating violence against women”, 2014; “Evaluation report piloting”, 2013; “Final report to”, 2008; “Help and Shelter integrated”, 2007; Jackson & Kissoon, 2010; Mancey, 2008; Mancey & Kissoon, 2010; “Reducing gender-based”, 2011; “UNFPA Project”, 2007). However, different groups within a community (i.e. adolescents) may have to be approached in a tailored way to engage them fully and this viewpoint is not straightforward or without problem.

In the changing perspectives on domestic violence, there are clear tensions and contradictions regarding how adolescents fit into this discussion – in some cases people believe the responsibility of violence seen within adolescent relationships is a reflection of a failed system, whereas others do not believe it is their issue. These two viewpoints also demonstrate differing starting points for various communities, which is important to recognize when considering how to approach or understand dating violence in adolescence. To narrow this gap between perspectives which can lead to a better relationship of policy and practice, and greater discussions with communities are required.

An area that has not garnered much attention in the reports on domestic violence in Guyana is how race factors into violence. Guyana has been committed to building awareness on domestic violence in various communities speaking about why it is wrong, however, there is little discussion on the complexities of a racially divided nation and how this affects people’s ability to navigate systems and interact with one another. Only one report discussed race in a context outside of demographic classification, which reveals an area requiring greater analysis in relation to dating violence and how the concept of race impacts the village concept of togetherness.
The ideas of race amongst other divisive characteristics display the complexity and intricacies of addressing adolescent dating violence within communities that are found in larger communities. Adolescent relationships are surrounded by a matrix of political, judicial, religious, social, and health factors that irrespective of city or country, are affected by a larger system impacted by ideas of race, gender, class, and violence. While it would seem logical to place the adolescent within the center of these competing and overlapping systems, it is not reflective of the reality in which they live.

The literature in this review has consistently challenged what is meant by community and in that definition who is excluded. Whether it was South Asian women in London, African-American communities in the United States, or rural communities within Guyana, there was a clear acknowledgement that in a larger system, their communities were not represented in the prevention and response to violence. Recognizing that domestic violence is a community problem creates a space to assess others within a community, such as adolescents, that have not been represented well in the discussion on this issue.

**Final Thoughts**

Community perspectives are important in understanding adolescent dating violence and the minimal amount of information reveal an area for further exploration. However, how community is defined and who is involved within the community requires critical analysis. Adolescents within Guyana belong to communities based on age, race, geographical location, class, and gender that are not all exclusive. Accounting for the intersections of all of these are important when attempting to obtain a deeper understanding of adolescent dating violence and violence prevention.
Chapter Three

Historicizing the Intersectionality of Violence Through Gendered Relations in the Caribbean

“You cannot oppress a consciously HISTORICAL people. And once a people UNDERSTAND the nature of their role in history, they will not permit themselves to be oppressed.”

– Dr. John Henrik Clarke

I believe it is not only important, but also necessary to understand how our contemporary environment is shaped by historical events. It is neither by chance, nor by choice, that I situate understanding dating violence in adolescence through this lens. Rather, an innate need exists in my own process of growth and development to understand my history, which has led me many times over the years to the land of many waters². This chapter not only foregrounds the current state of adolescent relationships, but also in many ways is in part a self-exploration of understanding my ideas of blackness and gendered roles as it relates to violence in the Caribbean. I am a creation of this very history that I will discuss, which is important to acknowledge. Therefore, I read and write this literature simultaneously as a descendant of an Afro-Guyanese family and as a researcher.

In the coming pages, I am focused on presenting key analytical points in our understanding of intimate violence that arise from examining periods within Caribbean history. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to present an exhaustive chronological history of events. Therefore, this chapter will analyze the social history of the production of violence in relationships by expanding our thinking beyond an oversimplified dyad between men and women.

First, I begin with the concept of discourse explaining why it is important to my work. I then move onto the concept of intersectionality and how this study is situated within a critical social theory paradigm. This transitions us into the founding moment of the modern Caribbean that began with extraordinary violence where the concept of othering was produced in this region. I then discuss how the regime of indentureship brought in a new relationship of difference. Understanding how gender is linked to ideas of race across these historical periods is necessary, and furthers our discussion of the continuous and consistent othering of Caribbean populations through a Eurocentric system of values. I conclude this chapter articulating the system of otherness and how my research moves us a step beyond current thinking on adolescent relationships and violence in Guyana.

**The Concept of Discourse**

The concept of discourse is central to understanding why I have chosen individual and societal aspects of adolescent dating violence to examine. There are several different definitions of discourse and I have chosen to guide my thinking on this concept through a sociological lens (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013). Specifically, I consider Foucault’s (1972) definition of discourse as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. In addition, discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention” (p.49). Thus discourse is about what can be said and or written, as well as who speaks, when they can speak, and the power dynamics that determine the authority of discourse (Foucault, 1972).
In analyzing particular discourses (i.e. race, gender, class, age) through a historical context, I consider how “social relations, identities, knowledge and power are constructed in spoken and written texts” (Crowe, 2004, p.55). As I will show in this chapter, dominant discourses influence the understanding of adolescent dating violence and its prevention because it considers how language is used as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1995). Through a critical lens, I recognize that discourses alone are not powerful, but rather power is infused into who uses dominant discourses and how they are used to sustain particular hierarchies (Foucault, 1972; Jager, 2001; Wodak, 2001).

Therefore, discourse contributes to subjective positions, constructs social relationships between people, and contributes to the creation of systems of knowledge and beliefs (Fairclough, 1992). In this sense, it is imperative to understand words and actions in context and context is created through historical, political, institutional, economic and social environments (Fairclough, 1992). This chapter and the following results and discussion chapters addresses the dominant discourses on domestic violence and adolescent dating violence through the social factors listed above.

**The concept of Intersectionality**

The concept of intersectionality developed by law professor and activist Kimberlé Crenshaw addresses the multiple oppressions that women of colour and other marginalized populations experience within a larger system. She states, “when we don’t pay attention to the margins, when we don’t acknowledge the intersection, where the places of power overlap, we not only fail to see the women who fall between our movements, sometimes we pit our movements against each other” (Crenshaw, 1994, p.118).
The margins Crenshaw is referring to in this quote are social spaces that are also embodied and come to signify inseparable dimensions of who people are, and include a person’s race and gender. However, within a larger system these two connected elements have been considered separate from one another to further larger agendas of class and oppression. Crenshaw expresses the urgency of re-connecting these dimensions in an intersectional way to challenge us to consider how our own complacency to these contrived one-dimensional views of ourselves, contribute to the disenfranchisement of other groups of people, and not recognizing and accepting difference within our own communities.

Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality foregrounds structural and systemic relations that shape how women are seen, felt, and heard (Crenshaw, 1993). Using examples of how violence against women was experienced in locations of music, law, social services, and discourses on antiracism and rape, Crenshaw provides a contextual and temporal account of violence against women that can be used to better understand the landscape of this phenomenon in the United States (Crenshaw, 1993).

In my quest to map the margins of how violence has been structurally and systemically reproduced in Guyanese relationships, it is important to explore adolescent dating violence beyond dyadic level explanations and engage with the complexity of social relationships and historical elements that shape interactions with peer groups, families, and the wider community. Extending Crenshaw’s analysis to Guyana, I incorporate a historicized frame through a critical theory paradigm, which provides a means of looking at historical and cultural accounts in critiquing current social phenomenon (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).
In considering this historical framework, the main question I intend to explore is how does the colonial past provide clues that might help us to make sense of current adolescent experiences of dating and violence? To explore this question I use postcolonialism and feminism as critical theories to guide my thinking in connecting the contemporary environment to historical events.

Postcolonialism analyzes the effects colonization continues to have on populations, by questioning the complexities and overlapping oppressions experienced by marginalized populations, and confronts the dominance of Western science by involving race and class in the discussion of social disparities as an aftermath of colonial rule (Bhabha, 2004; Reimer-Kirkham & Anderson, 2002; Racine, 2011). A postcolonial feminist epistemology includes ideas of gendered roles and patriarchy in the discussion of overlapping oppressions, with the prime objective of making difference visible and recognizable in non-oppressive ways (Reimer-Kirkham & Anderson, 2002; Mishra, 2013; Racine, 2011).

**Historicizing Race as Difference**

The point of European entry into the Caribbean marked the beginning of repeated and spectacular violence to the environment, peoples, and economies of this region (Higman, 2011). The decimation of indigenous populations in the name of European discovery and exploration resulted in indigenous populations responding with violence in the defense of their land and way of living (Higman, 2011). The viciousness and ruthlessness of colonial rule did not stop with the attempted destruction of these populations, but intensified with the violent transplantation of Africans to the Americas,
including Guiana\textsuperscript{3} where they were reduced to less than human status, considered property to be used (Haynes, 2012; Higman, 2011). Enslaved Africans were violently abused, raped, beaten, mutilated, and executed (Higman, 2011).

The repeated rebellions of enslaved Africans that were thought to almost be endemic of the region also pitted Africans against one another (Beckles, 1989). In Jamaica the Maroons – escaped enslaved Africans who set up their own communities - negotiated treaties with the British that enabled a limited form of recognition in exchange for their returning runaway slaves to plantations (Beckles, 1989; Craton, 1980). This can arguably change the psyche of a people where the violence inflicted on them then turns into a form of survival, and thus normality required to live. Violence, in essence, becomes a requirement of life.

The purposeful othering\textsuperscript{4} of indigenous populations and enslaved Africans in this process negatively defined difference based on race and gender. Race and gender deemed any other ethnicity biologically inferior to that of Europeans to create a fixed hierarchical structure of a slavery system (Beckles, 2003; Higman, 2011; Mama, 1997). This idea of the biological inferiority of enslaved Africans was what Haynes (2012) describes as a Western biology that naturalizes the binary of human and savage.

In her analysis on the work of Sylvia Wynter, Caribbean feminist scholar, Tonya Haynes (2012) provides her understanding of race and gender, which I find helpful in articulating how these ideologies center Western man and other others. Wynter indicates

\textsuperscript{3} Taken by the Dutch, three colonies of Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice would fall under British rule and be unified as British Guiana by the early nineteenth century. Guyana was known as Guiana prior to the country’s independence in 1966.

\textsuperscript{4} The concept of othering is discussed in postcolonial feminism which explicated how Western ideology centers itself and places all others in the outskirts of society. See “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988) for further reading on the misrepresentation of third world women’s experiences under Western feminism.
that she refers to gender and race as genres, genre meaning kind, so that gender and race are meant as a kind of man (Thomas, 2009). If race constitutes an inadequacy, then all other characteristics related to the idea of race further impact the negative perception of a group of people in society. The gender of Afro-Caribbean men and women during this time were/are co-constituted by their race, establishing a particular social position. Haynes argues that to challenge the gendered power relations that have been created, it cannot be approached from within this same point of view, but rather outside it (Haynes, 2012).

**Shared oppressions and the creation of racial difference between marginalized populations.**

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the events chronicled here are not a complete history, however, the regime of indentureship that would emerge in the post-emancipation period provides another margin if you will of difference. Indentureship would deliver hundreds of thousands of immigrants from China, Portugal, and especially from India to Guiana after the abolition of slavery in 1838, to cultivate and process crops once produced by enslaved peoples. In Bahadur’s (2014) *Coolie Woman*, which chronicles her own great-grandmother’s voyage from India to Guiana, and hers from Guyana to the United States, she highlights the attempts by colonialists to erase the diverse histories and skills of Indians under the epithet *cooler*. Under this guise an entire people were made into an “indistinguishable, degraded mass of plantation labourers

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5 One interpretation of “Coolie” suggests that it originates from the Tamil word Kuli which means wage or hire. After the abolition of slavery, the British used this term for the workers now hired under indentureship (Bahadur, preface, xx). This word continues to be used as a derogatory term in the Caribbean to describe someone of Indian descent.
without caste or family” even though the system of indentureship took a diverse group of skilled workers from India (Bahadur, 2014).

The harrowing accounts of indentured labourers crossing the ocean from India into the Caribbean where women were raped, and both men and women were fraught with disease and death is incredibly similar to the descriptions of experiences on slave ships from Africa to the Americas (Bahadur, 2014; Higman, 2011). The contracted labourers, endured conditions on Guianese plantations that also bore similarities to enslaved Africans (Bahadur, 2014). In theory, the indentured status would appear to be better than that of a slave in Guiana, however, this was a civil contract enforceable through the application of criminal law, in which the indentured Indian worker was subjected to violent persecution and unjust imprisonment for violations such as leaving the plantation without a pass (Bahadur, 2014).

The experiences of indentured labourers in Guiana depict a continued callousness in the treatment of people based on the differential and hierarchical racialization of populations. Even though the experiences of both enslaved Africans and indentured labourers read as pages out of a similar book, the latter were purposely brought into Guiana to act as a replacement labour force for newly freed Africans and therefore to set up a new relationship of difference. Such a relation – which attempted to pit these two disadvantaged populations against each other – made it easier for African and Indian to misrecognize their situations as fundamentally different from each other, and to view each other with suspicion. In other words, recognizing the intersectionality of their positions or how under this colonial rule they were both marginalized was to run counter to the dominant colonial order of things. Without acknowledging the dire situation of
each other, the Africans and Indians who populated Guiana “pit[ied] their movements against each other” (Crenshaw, 1994, p.118).

Historicizing the Intersections of Race and Gender as Difference

The treatment of African women during slavery and Indian women during the time of indentureship, provide clear examples of how ideas of race were related to notions of gender in the production of hierarchized difference during these periods. In the colonial system of unequal power relations, African women held the most complex, contradictory, and important position(s). Enslaved African women were viewed as labourers equal to men, reproductive agents, and sexually available, because they were not considered as the weaker sex requiring protection (Beckles, 2003; Mama, 1997; Mohammed, 1998). The divisions of labour did not reflect the perception of weakness (Beckles, 2003). Enslaved African women were considered the other to white women – the opposite of demure, physically weaker, and civilized (Beckles, 2003). Plantations required women who could reproduce another generation of labour while at the same time filling the immediate need for labourers (Reddock, 2008). The perception of African women as labourers capable of hard and intensive work also translated into the sexual exploitation of their bodies.

The accounts that have been documented regarding the treatment and labour enslaved women were subjected to in the Caribbean, illustrate that they were viewed as a mystical creature worthy of possession but also holding in their sexuality a power that could render men incapacitated of their own sexual wants. Beckles (2003) and Kempadoo (2003) state that the Caribbean became known as exotic, a region that could be pillaged to satisfy the sexual imagination and appetite of European men. Black
women were considered the property of white men (Beckles, 2003; Kempadoo, 2003). Both authors further state that slave women were used as prostitutes to generate money for owners because of the exoticism of the Caribbean, and among those who exploited these women were other women who were wives of the colonizers (Beckles, 2003; Kempadoo, 2003).

Race, gender, and sexuality were read as being fixed because regardless of what work black women did (often rented out as nannies, nurses, cooks, washerwomen), the role always assumed sexual benefits (Kempadoo, 2003). This sexual prowess that somehow left men helpless was strong enough to result in the raping of enslaved women, but not strong enough to bear power over her own body. The idea that sexual benefits were assumed means that it was taken for granted, a perk or bonus of a purchase. An enslaved man or woman’s body was not seen as human but rather as an animal (Beckles, 2003). In the case of women, their bodies could be used to reproduce other slaves as well as to quench sexual appetites (Beckles, 2003). Black women were seen solely as profit-making property, where the intersections of economics, sex, power, and gender, silenced her.

Examining the lives of African women during the time of colonization reveals the impossibility of creating or maintaining a family when their bodies were valued based on race within the larger system of slavery. This same system that reduced the wholeness of their being to the colour of their skin, also did so to enslaved African men in the creation of the black male stud as impregnator of enslaved women, creating further barriers to constructing families (Kempadoo, 2003).
The system of indentureship was no different in defining the gendered roles of Indian women based on ideas of race. Colonizers would explain this through the overly sexual and “dubious character…well outside the boundaries of ‘decent’ colonial womanhood” that they believed Indian women embodied (Kempadoo, 2003, p. 171). This description of Indian women during indentureship reflects the othering of a racialized group based on gendered ideas of whiteness and womanhood without acknowledging how indentureship itself placed Indian women in intersecting exploitative positions.

The sex ratio disparity of men and women on plantations in Guiana created an environment where women were able to engage in some negotiations of gendered relations, however, this was not commonplace (Bahadur, 2014; Trotz, 2003). While some women were able to exercise their right to choose a mate, secure their safety, and navigate this indentured system to their benefit as a form of sexual agency, other women found themselves in dubious situations.

Indian women, while recruited first and foremost to restore the order and stability on plantations working alongside Indian men, were not valued as labourers capable of hard work; their wages reflected the notion that they did not provide the same level of work as Indian men (Higman, 2011; Reddock, 2008; Wahab, 2008). Even though there are accounts of Indian women working the same amount of hours on plantations in Guiana, they were still paid less (Wahab, 2008). This positioned women at an economic disadvantage where the dependence on Indian men was a strong reality, and “translated into a greater degree of marginalization and dehumanization as Indian women were constituted as a racialized and gendered underclass” (Wahab, 2008, p.7).
It has been documented that the recruitment of women from India was also a patriarchal process where the interests of men as husbands over-rode the possibilities of women migrating for work (Bahadur, 2014). Coupled with the belief that decent Indian women would not leave their homes, husbands, and country to embark on working abroad, the women who migrated were considered to be of lower caste, and therefore described in the above quote (Bahadur, 2014; Higman, 2011). Bahadur (2014) provides accounts of women using indentureship to escape abusive treatment of partners, as well as famine, and dire situations in Indian villages that were negatively impacted by imperial capitalism. The stereotype of submissive servant that often befalls Indian women is challenged in these accounts during indentureship. Women actively chose to leave their current situations in India for the unknown lands of Guiana and the Caribbean, taking on new husbands en route to the islands (Bahadur, 2014).

Even though the labour of Indian women was not valued under the system of indentureship, the importance of their sexuality to that system was recognized, and colonizers used this as justification for colonial management (Bahadur, 2014; Mohapatra, 1995; Trotz, 2003). According to Prabhu Mohapatra (1995) within the Indian communities there was an increase in the murders of Indian women, which were explained by colonial powers as deriving from women’s immoral and lecherous sexual behaviour driving Indian men into rages of jealousy resulting in their death. Women’s resistance to the patriarchal and subservient position they were relegated to in this system of indentureship was defined in colonial terms as a moral laxity, which always held them accountable for their own death (Trotz, 2003).
This simplistic description of action and re-action by Indian women and men is what Mohapatra (1995) describes as absolving the system of indentureship from its role in producing this violence. By projecting violence as innate to the Indian community and the natural consequence of the sex ratio disparity, it positions the causes of this violence as Indian women’s sexuality. In this picture, the colonial rule is justified in civilizing the other who was scripted (by nature) as being morally deprived (Wahab, 2008). The civilizing and respectability of Indian women’s sexualities was reconstructed in the housewife by institutional arrangements that positioned colonial officials in charge of restoring sexual contracts between Indian men and women (Mohapatra, 1995). Wahab (2008) indicated that by reconstructing Indian women as respectable subjects, European patriarchy (while maintaining the power to control Indian patriarchy in the name of moral governance) provided Indian men limited control over Indian women’s bodies and mobility.

The similarity between the treatment of indentured labourers and slaves was unmistakable. The purposeful othering through the systems of slavery and indentureship created unchanging ethnic identities as Trotz (2004) describes “the contrasting and ahistorical stereotypes of the submissive Indian housewife and the independent black matriarch” (p.23). These beliefs of one another continues to contribute to the intersectional matrix of oppression (Collins, 1986), which both ethnic groups face. Intersectionality is therefore a point of departure for the Caribbean and also generative when understanding violence in this region. Periods and events throughout history provide margins to explore, that perhaps, we have not considered when understanding contemporary issues such as adolescents and the prevention of violence. Race and
gender cannot be separated from any discussion on violence, as both of these
characteristics are fundamental in how people experience this phenomenon, and navigate
a system that has been constructed and held in place with violence.

Securing a Eurocentric System of Otherness

The idea of family in the Caribbean is a focal point to consider when examining
how the system of otherness has been held firmly in place through associating gender,
race, and class, to the Eurocentric, hetero-normative, patriarchal institution of a nuclear
household. Family is the one institution that no one can escape, and therefore provides
ample opportunities for systems of oppression to other groups of people. Sheller (2012)
in her discussion of citizenship, Caribbean freedom, and erotic agency indicates that
normative performances of masculinity and femininity, which in this case I am relating to
the traditional Eurocentric concept of family, effectively restricts certain people and
sexualities based on intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and class. Sheller (2012)
further states that citizenship, legal protections, and rights of citizenship enacted through
sexual relations, provides a position from which to exploit or criminalize those whose
non-normative relationships fall outside of the defined boundaries of sexual
respectability. An example of this would be the mass marriage movement during the
1940s in Jamaica (Robinson, 2013; Trotz, 2003). This campaign was focused on
targeting a specific group of working class black people who were living together in
long-term relationships that were considered to be illegitimate (Robinson, 2013).

The black family was considered a weakness to the “civilized” social fabric of the
British West Indies because their family arrangements did not reflect the male-headed
breadwinner and housewife (Robinson, 2013). Arrangements between black men and
women were considered to be highly promiscuous and immoral as often times women were financially responsible, and the permanent unmarried cohabitation was considered a threat to the social stability of Caribbean society (Robinson, 2013). On an imaginary continuum of normalcy, (an unspoken modernized version of civility and savagery), marriage was considered the idealized form of intimacy, and on the opposite end of the continuum, visiting relationships that were previously known as concubinage before the 1950s (Robinson, 2013).

These new ideas of classifying intimacy created new levels of difference by purposefully contrasting relationships against one another. Colonial administrators believed that once black families gained economic stability and matured, their intimate relationships would reflect this betterment by moving from visiting or common-law relationships to marriage (Robinson, 2013). This idea of family is therefore a way of othering people based on intersections of race, class, and sexuality in a hetero-patriarchal manner where the colonial powers must once again save black families from their perilous ways. In the center of this picture are the majority of Caribbean women who head their own households, but because their family structures do not resemble the nuclear Eurocentric idea of family, are silenced through their divergent practices (Trotz, 2003).

Continuing the illegitimacy of these unions maintains a class structure based on race that indentured labourers were not impervious to. Robinson (2013) indicates that Indian labourer relationships were classified under Christian marriage, registered Indian marriage, and unregistered Indian marriage. Labourers whose marriages were conducted under customary Hindu and Muslim rites were not officially recognized (Trotz, 2003).
The changeable and contextual way in which Indian marriages were classified in the colonial state, was not only determined by marriage laws but also by judges and state officials, which could have resulted in the denial of particular types of marriages as Trotz (2003) indicated. Trotz (2003) further states that these stratification processes seen with both racialized groups of people, have impacted the majority of Caribbean peoples by disempowering them because they do not fit into the hegemonic representations of families.

Examining the Eurocentric idea of the family and how it relates to racialized Caribbean communities allows us to see how colonialist values continue an oppressive system based on intersections of race, gender, and class that often may go unquestioned when considering contemporary issues such as violence. Crenshaw (1993) states, “where systems of race, gender, and class domination converge, as they do in the experiences of battered women of color, intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles” (p.1246). While Crenshaw is discussing women of colour within the United States, her argument suggests the layers of limitations that are present in attempting to explain one group of people based on another’s ideal. The current and steadfast concept of the perfect family continues to measure or other people based on middle class status.

Peake and Trotz (1999) further indicate that the ideal of the housewife focused academic research (and therefore knowledge production) on explaining those Caribbean women whose sexual and domestic arrangements did not reflect this ideal. Therefore, these ideas of the family and a woman’s role mean that Guyanese women remain in
situations that are abusive to fit the prototype of a normal family, which has no consideration for the historical development of Caribbean families. Furthermore, the patriarchal family structure has limited the possibilities women have to remove themselves from abusive relationships, and Trotz (2004) encourages us to consider how the understandings and experiences of domestic violence may be impacted by the different living conditions that Afro-Guyanese, Indo-Guyanese, and Amerindian women face daily. Ideas of hetero-patriarchal normalcy are the landscape on which we must think about dating violence in Guyana and the contemporary Caribbean, and this discussion would not be complete without considering how Caribbean scholars have theorized relationships between men and women as Peake and Trotz (1999) described above.

**Respectability and Reputation: The Colonial and the Caribbean**

Caribbean scholars interested in understanding gender dynamics in a postcolonial period have debated the idea of respectability and reputation. One theorist that has been central to this discussion was sociologist Peter Wilson. In his seminal ethnographic work in Providencia, he asserted that there were two competing value systems within Caribbean societies and those value systems had a gendered dimension (Wilson, 1973).

According to Wilson (1973), respectability was a colonial value system defined through Eurocentric norms and values that attempted to maintain class hierarchies primarily for women through social institutions such as the church, education, and the home. Wilson believed that women were more prone to Eurocentric values because of their positions during slavery as concubines and domestic slaves (Besson, 1993).
Wilson (1973) described reputation as a dichotomous value system to respectability and indicated that the value system of reputation was reflective of a more egalitarian system that recognized status and differences, but did not rank one over the other and was based on anti-establishment values and activities. Men in Wilson’s (1973) study developed their reputation through practicing brotherhood in political and legal matters, control over family land, and strived to be known for their virility and sexual prowess. In essence, reputation opposed class hierarchies and emphasized men who were in an othered class, a value system that they could belong to without materialistic possessions.

However, there have been several critiques of Wilson’s work focusing on his description of Afro-Caribbean women as passive followers of Eurocentrism. Notably, Besson (1993) provided indisputable examples of Jamaican women whose lives did not reflect Wilson’s (1973) claims. She indicated that women in her study had the reputation of being market hagglers, were often trustees for family land, and their family lives were the opposite of Eurocentric values as women often had children out of wedlock in their younger years and only chose to marry once in middle or old age (Besson, 1993). These examples illustrated that Wilson’s theory on respectability was limited and not reflective of a vast majority of Caribbean women whose independence were also constructed through reputation (Besson, 1993).

Moreover, critiques of Wilson’s work also highlighted the centrality of men in his theory. Green (2006) indicated that because Wilson’ theory defined reputation through the informal cultural and expressive practices, he failed to acknowledge that men held a privileged position and benefitted from the formal Eurocentric system with regards to
property and marriage. Green (2006) further attests that even though Wilson describes reputation as being egalitarian he did not consider that “the male pursuit and construct of ‘reputation’ might be mediated by ideologies and practices of male supremacy and female subordination” (p.10).

Furthermore, past literature has also shown that Caribbean men operated in both value systems. For example, in Marshall’s (1959) semi-autobiography story of Barbadian immigrants to Brooklyn, New York, she describes a man who was a leader in the Association for Barbadian Homeowners and Businessmen. Women in the community considered him to be an orator and he supported all Barbadian’s having an equal chance at being successful in Brooklyn – rejecting any sort of hierarchy. However, he also promoted values of respectability, as he believed that it was impossible to survive in Brooklyn without an education and hard work. Being a part of this organization represented a respectable lifestyle as people joined wanting to provide a better life for their children and to prove within America that Barbadians could achieve anything. Therefore, when men had more familial responsibilities the value system of respectability became more important.

Wilson’s theory and subsequent critiques are important when examining the various elements that contribute to the present phenomenon of adolescent dating violence. The concepts of respectability and reputation provide further basis from which the relationships between men and women have been understood within a Caribbean context in a postcolonial period.
Past Community Approaches to Domestic Violence in the Caribbean

The advancement in laws to protect women against domestic violence arose from a period in history where an enhanced consciousness of Caribbean identity and history were coupled with the expansion of education including women, a temporarily growing economy, and influences from women’s movements locally and internationally (Lazarus-Black, 2007). Grassroots women’s organizations ensured that domestic violence was/is considered a political issue because its presence is a representation of inequality within the Caribbean (Antrobus, 2006; Baksh-Soodeen, 1998; Barritteau, 2003; Deare, 1995; Trotz, 2007). The identification that the governing state laws required re-gendering as opposed to gendering, acknowledged that the laws before were not neutral or objective, but have always been gendered in masculine ways (Lazarus-Black, 2007).

Guyana’s governing bodies have acknowledged and participated in these global initiatives to end violence against women, such as the International Women’s year in 1975 by the first UN conference on women, followed by the adoption of the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in 1979, the decades to celebrate women in 1985 and 1995 respectively, and annual initiatives promoting the elimination of all forms of violence against women (Antrobus, 2006; Phillips, 2010). Guyana’s domestic violence act has been in place since 1996, followed by the prevention of discrimination act in 1997, and the sexual offenses act in 2010 (UNIFEM, 2011). However, the lack of enforcement by police officers undermines the success of these laws, and underscores the importance of addressing violence prevention on a structural level to create consistency within a society that will promote change.
The 2013 report on human rights for Guyana shows that legislation in an oppressive and persistent patriarchal system continues to perpetuate the *othering* of victims of violence through silencing them (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor [BDHRL], 2014). In this report the judicial system convicted 28 of the 102 people charged with rape (BDHRL, 2014). In the same year, the report also indicated that out of 89 people charged with statutory rape, only four were convicted (including persons charged in preceding years) (BDHRL, 2014). The court records for domestic violence read slightly better but still point towards a dangerous gap between legislation and implementation. Two hundred and seventy-nine cases of domestic violence were filed in 2012 with a little over half (143 persons) convicted (BDHRL, 2014). This is not to say that organizations are not aware or agitating against these reports.

As an example, we can consider the controversy that arose when internationally known R&B singer Chris Brown was not permitted to perform in Guyana in the same year this report was released. Guyanese women’s organizations protested against this entertainer due to the 2009 assault of his girlfriend Rihanna (“Chris Brown’s forthcoming”, 2012). These organizations believed that allowing Chris Brown to perform sent the wrong message to the Guyanese community about domestic violence, and convinced a government that had allowed tax break exemptions for this performance to reverse their decision (“Chris Brown’s forthcoming”, 2012).

Had these women’s organizations not taken a strong stance against this performer, it is clear that domestic violence was easily separated from the potential economic benefits that the government would possess. Previous tourism minister Irfaan Ali stated in his promotion of this endeavour that, “The show is expected to bring a number of visitors to the
country’s shores…. we don’t only want to attract Guyanese back home, but to also leverage this to expand our tourism, as it will not only attract visitors, but see spending of foreign currency, creating opportunities in the local business environment,” (“R&B Star Chris”, 2012). The intersections of domestic violence, economics, and power remain steadfast in Guyana.

As seen in the Chris Brown situation, the protesting of this concert by women’s organizations opened a dialogue on how the state does not always consider the significance of their decisions and actions on propagating compliance towards violence against women. As Alexander (1997) indicated in her discussion on domestic violence, marriage, and the state, the state in their laws and legislations view domestic violence as separate to their public responsibility, which can be seen in this situation.

In the following year, Simona Broomes, president of the Guyana Women Miners’ Organization who had rescued several women and teenagers from being trafficked throughout the hinterland regions of Guyana, was arrested for questioning. The crime chief brought Mrs. Broomes into a police station regarding an alleged assault against a human trafficker that had previously assaulted Mrs. Broomes, and was charged with trafficking people (“Simona Broomes arrest”, 2013). It is assumed that any allegation against an assault should be investigated, however, the fact that they would arrest Mrs. Broomes for questioning has been deemed, “vindictiveness to disrupt the course of justice” (“Simona Broomes arrest”, 2013, para 1). The judicial system that was incredibly efficient in arresting Mrs. Broomes is the same system Guyanese women “…refuse to report [their] abuse, claiming that the police never bother with [their] complaints, because they [the police] always contend …is man and wife story” (“The
When a woman who has and continues to rescue other women from abuse is in custody faster than most other criminals in Guyana there lays a grave problem. It demonstrates that legislation means nothing when ideas of gender, masculinity, and femininity remain fixed.

These examples force the state to take notice of the injustices ever present in the system. However, recognizing these flaws does not provide any guarantees as Jacqui Alexander demonstrates in her work.

In her seminal work on feminist and state practices regarding sexuality in the Bahamas, Alexander (1997) provides an example of how the system perpetuates the economic relations between men and women. Alexander (1997) indicates that laws on domestic violence and matrimonial proceedings in the 1970s and 1980s in the Bahamas, were concerned primarily with ensuring that patriarchal power remained steadfast. The economic responsibilities and power by way of property ownership were given to the husband and women’s legal rights were non-existent in marriage due to coverture (Alexander, 1997). The systems in which Caribbean relationships continued to develop over time have perpetuated economic inequality, where women are viewed in a subordinate status within an intimate relationship and society.

Examining more closely the laws on domestic violence, Alexander (1997) also provides insight into how these laws continued to perpetuate the hetero-patriarchal normality of relationships while *othering* those that deviated from this definition. Alexander (1997) provides accounts of how legislators debated whether homosexuality and lesbianism is deemed a crime or a moral sin, and whether in this understanding how rape and domestic violence laws relate. It is only in the consideration of parliamentary
ministers and police that the laws of buggery and sexual violence do not apply, as a minister said “…I can’t accuse honourable members of parliament of committing criminal offenses…the rules prevent me from doing so even if I wanted to…” (Alexander, 2007. p.80). Even though state legislators articulated the politics of location – in this case being class, it did not guarantee that homosexuality would not be considered a criminality. In essence, social class absolved the same act that would be considered a crime to those who are considered lower in society. The undertones of a continued process of colonization to civilize the Caribbean is present in Alexander’s (1997) discussion on state laws, and points out another margin of difference based on the genre of the Eurocentric man.

In Guyana, Bibi Shaddick, a past Minister of Home Affairs, displayed in her actions that sexual violence and the right to a fair and judicial process is not available to all citizens in Guyana (Bergner, 2008; Ramsaroop, 2006). When provided with information and pictures regarding a pornography ring where young women were drugged and raped on camera by members of prominent Guyanese families (including her nephew), she responded by saying that the pictures looked consensual (Bergner, 2008; Ramsaroop, 2006). Her comments displayed the perversity of violence systemically in Guyana where those in power speak about ending violence against women, but continue to pedal this notion that violence against women only includes certain types of women. Additionally, her comments reflect violence as a private issue where a public figure such as the Minister of Home Affairs bears no responsibility, and how women can silence and other other women.
Bibi Shaddick’s comments and actions should not be considered rare or an isolated incident; they are reflective of a larger issue. Guyanese women are in a minimum of two subordinate groups by race and gender that often times pursue conflicting political agendas (Crenshaw, 1993). Trotz (2004) recaps a turbulent period in Guyanese history during political elections in 1997 and 2001, where violence against women was accepted as a valid attack between African and Indian communities on the basis of differing racially charged political views.

The representation of women, and inflicting violence to women’s bodies were seen as an attack on a community and its ability to reproduce itself (Trotz, 2004). Women did not oppose violence when inflicted on the opposite racial group, and the idea of violence against “our” women, assumed that violence within a race was not occurring or as important (Trotz, 2004). The political consequence in Guyanese politics is that one analysis often implicitly denies the validity of the other without considering that either women or people of colour or adolescents, intersect and relate to one another in everyday life (Crenshaw, 1993; Trotz, 2004). This means that the potential will continue where one group’s plight to resist certain structural and systemic oppressions, will in turn reproduce subordination of another group (Crenshaw, 1993).

An inevitable result of violence is its impact on health, which exposes communities to structural oppressions. As an example we can consider how health and domestic violence are considered on a political stage. The main focus is on behaviours such as alcohol consumption, promiscuity, unwanted or teen pregnancies, and mental health problems (Halcon et al., 2003; McIntosh, 2013; Peake, 2000). Health is then narrowly defined as individual physical behaviour without accounting for other societal determinants of health.
Essentially, violence in relation to health is pathologized where individual responsibility absolves structural involvement. It focuses solely on the scientific aspect of health and does not address patriarchal notions or gender roles, which are fundamental to the health of populations. By concentrating on these health issues, which is presented as a problem with individual behaviour, it absolves social systems and services of any responsibility in maintaining an environment that is conducive to violence.

**Summary**

Throughout this chapter I have discussed the complexity of violence accounting for how men and women in the Caribbean have and continue to experience intersecting oppressions. Intersectionality as presented in this chapter represents the voice of marginalized populations in critically examining characteristics that were at one time accepted. Intersectionality is therefore the response to systemic violence and while this concept enhances one’s ability to critically analyze and seek out other oppressions experienced by Guyanese adolescents, it does not completely guide or explain an understanding of the system that has caused this latter concept to be developed.

The literature on colonization creates a clear understanding of how the system purposefully made violence systemic by othering Caribbean men and women. Systemic violence has perpetuated violence within relationships by creating destitute situations for groups of people based on race and/or gender. Racialized identities of men and women are instrumental in how gendered roles are constructed and have influenced the power dynamics in relationships and society. Gendered roles have been constructed and reinforced through and with violence in a colonial space.
What has been presented in these pages is the consistent attempt to other marginalized populations. Postcolonial feminists indicate that marginalizing people of colour is perceived as vital to the survival of the dominant culture and the act of *othering* is a form of imperial exploitative practice in the colonial space (Reimer-Kirkham & Anderson, 2002; Taylor, 1999). Therefore, social, political, and gendered power relationships as seen in the history of Caribbean heterosexual relationships and the state are dependent on creating binaries such as civility and savagery through ideas of race, gender, sexual respectability, and other images and discourses such as “family” that maintain systems of domination and subordination (Reimer-Kirkham & Anderson, 2002; Taylor, 1999). When we choose to think only about violence as a current event, we do not fully interrogate the margins that have been reproduced to shape people’s experiences.

To conduct any sort of health research in a Guyanese context means to be aware of historical dynamics, complexities of structural and systemic barriers, and not limit the focus only to individual behaviour. It is unclear to what extent Guyanese adolescents understand the link between gendered roles, race, class, sexuality, and dating violence because in past projects, no explicit awareness was presented on the causes of causes, which would include these aspects. However, to address the research questions posed in this thesis, dating violence for Guyanese adolescents requires an intersectional analysis to bring together these different aspects and recognize that all of these characterizations are mutually reinforced to create a subordinate status (Crenshaw, 1993) in the *othering* of marginalized populations.

Moving the study of violence and its health consequences beyond a dyadic level requires a carefully critical intersectional analysis to account for the lives of boys, girls, and the community in Guyana. Therefore, bringing the understanding of intersectionality,
the concept of *othering*, and ideas of race, gender, and class through a historicized frame will help me explore the multiple dimensions of Guyanese adolescents and dating violence.
Chapter 4

Methodology and Methods

Introduction

The overall aim of this research is to contribute to the understanding of adolescent dating violence in Guyana. I hope such understanding will provide support for current work and inform future initiatives and preventative programs on violence. I begin this chapter with an explanation of the chosen methodology, followed by a detailed overview of the study design and sample. Next, I discuss the methods for data generation, analysis and interpretation. I speak to the strategies I utilized to ensure I produced a rigorous qualitative study followed by ethical considerations. I conclude this chapter with a discussion on knowledge translation strategies.

Critical Exploratory Qualitative Methodology

Throughout this thesis I have presented violence as a complex and layered phenomenon that is not easily understood or approached through a single dimension. Preventing dating violence in youth must account for the intricate and intersecting challenges, desires, and hopes that evolve from living in our current world. Orne and Bell (2015) suggest that we recognize our world as multi-logical rather than operating out of a single logic. If our world operates in multiple logics then the ways in which we discern greater understanding must alert us to this very fact (Orne & Bell, 2015).

Qualitative research provides a way to speak to the multiple logics of adolescent dating violence in Guyana by providing an opportunity to listen to the perspectives of Guyanese community members through their own voices and not limit the possibilities of uncovering new findings. The contradictions and complications of real life can be
detailed and appreciated through qualitative research, as qualitative research is concerned with extracting the social meaning people attribute to experiences, situations, texts, and/or objects (Hesser-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Orne & Bell, 2015). In this study, it would not be possible to effectively study the combinations of race, gender, sexuality, and age, and its relationship to adolescent dating violence without speaking directly to the community (Bowleg, 2012; Choo & Ferree, 2010).

I used an exploratory qualitative generic design to delve into the understanding of adolescent dating violence from the perspectives of adolescents, parents, and teachers in Georgetown, Guyana. Exploratory designs are typically used with topics that have a dearth of information, or are being explored through a different lens (Hesser-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Huttlinger, 2012). To date, there has been no study of its kind focusing on the perspectives of several community members’ views on adolescent dating violence completed within Guyana. An exploratory design is ideal to explore emic perspectives on this issue and provide new understanding on the complexity of dating violence in Guyana.

Even though I am choosing to use a generic qualitative methodology in the form of exploratory research – this study is still informed by a set of assumptions, preconceptions, and beliefs that represent a critical theory analytical lens (Caelli et al., 2003). Understanding the world through a critical theory lens means that I am concerned with critiquing and challenging society to transform and/or empower a group of people (Merriam, 2009). Critical research is therefore focused on asking who has power, how it is negotiated, and what structures in society reinforce current distributions of power (Merriam, 2009, p.35). A critical exploratory methodology not only focuses on a topic
about which little is known (such as dating violence in Guyana), but also asks us how power relations privilege certain groups’ behaviour and ideas while discriminating others.

While my research does not utilize one of the traditional methodologies (i.e. phenomenology, grounded theory, or ethnography) typically thought of with qualitative research, the congruence between my research questions, theoretical lens, and methodology have provided flexibility to create a study that is feasible and effective in the Guyanese context while achieving a rigorous and thoughtful design (Caelli et al., 2003; Kahlke, 2014).

Research Questions

My research question is:

How is dating violence and its prevention in adolescence perceived in Guyana?

Due to the emergent and inductive nature of qualitative research, my research sub-questions have evolved in this study. First, I recognized that the second original sub-question (which asked how participants’ perspectives on dating violence differed or related to each other) would be addressed within my analysis as I answered the overall research question. Secondly, as I reflected on my observations and also participants’ perspectives, I recognized that my questions must consider the current environment with regards to violence prevention while also accounting for systemic factors. With this added insight, my final research sub-questions that guided this study were:

a) How is adolescent dating violence shaped by discourses on age, gender/sexuality, class, and race/ethnicity?

b) How could violence prevention be addressed in this setting?
Guyanese Advisory Board

The purpose of this advisory board was to ensure that I had in-country support by those within the community who are active in promoting initiatives to improve adolescent health and violence prevention. Their role was to advise me on culturally appropriate ways to engage the study population and support me in mitigating unforeseen complications in a way that is respectful to the community. There were two board members. Their names, titles, and affiliations are provided below and they have given permission to be named in my thesis:

1. Dr. Janice Jackson – Educational Psychologist and Anti-Domestic Violence Advocate
2. Clonel Boston – Coordinator at Women Across Differences, a non-governmental organization focused on providing better opportunities for young parents.

Study Design

This critical exploratory qualitative study utilized a multi-method approach using a combination of interviews and focus groups with stakeholders from numerous positions within the Guyanese community. I outline how I achieved this below.

Pre-Fieldwork Preparation

Prior to contacting the principal of the school where my study took place, I chose to familiarize myself with the local context over the summer of 2013. The goals of this trip were to become acquainted with local activists, non-governmental organizations, agencies and community organizations that focus on domestic violence. One of my committee members (AT), who is Guyanese, familiar with the political climate and grass
roots organizations and well respected in the field of gender studies for the Caribbean, was instrumental in introducing me to key people.

Initially my pre-fieldwork trip was planned for two months. However, my trip was cut short when I became a victim of gun violence and needed to return to Canada for further medical care. Irrespective of the shortened trip, this time in Guyana was incredibly useful, as I met with people in the domestic violence arena, specifically, Dr. Janice Jackson who later became an advisory board member for this study. Additionally, I was also able to make contacts within the adolescent division of the Ministry of Health and established a working relationship with the Chief Education Officer who provided permission at a later date to access the secondary school where my study was completed.

Moreover, even though the pre-fieldwork preparation was not funded and there was great personal sacrifice to undertake it, I felt it was crucial to get to be known by key stakeholders and members of the school system in Guyana, allowing them to understand my non-judgemental approach in relation to the local context and the caring ethos I was trying to establish for this study. Many of the people who I met during this trip and heard of my injuries remained in contact with me when I returned to Canada and vowed to help me with my work. When I returned to Guyana after my injuries healed, I believe that I gained greater trust and respect from the community who did not believe I would return.

**Access to the Field**

This study was completed in a public secondary school located in Georgetown, the capital city. This high school was selected out of the possible 31 public high schools in Georgetown for several reasons. The current principal of the high school expressed an eagerness and willingness to advance understanding on this issue, recognizing that
relationships and exposure to violence impacts students’ health and education. In acknowledging the links between violence, health, and education, this principal has already taken steps to engage students in discussions on these topics. For example, this principal had informal group discussions with young girls regarding self-respect and treatment of their bodies after noticing poor behaviour (not specified) of the female student population prior to this study. Therefore, both students and the principal have awareness about the occurrence of gender-based violence and domestic violence in Guyana.

Entry into all public secondary schools for students is determined by the common entrance exam, and not geographical distance from the student’s home. The high school’s student population (and by default their parents) offers a diverse racial, religious, and social background among low and middle-income families. Since it is not one of the top ranking academic schools in Georgetown, students from affluent areas tend not to attend it.

**Inclusion Criteria**

The high school had approximately 700 students enrolled during this study (personal communication, December 2014). During the fieldwork portion of this research, there were over 300 students between the ages of 14 to 16 years in forms 4 and 5 (personal communication, December 2014). Boys and girls in this age group represented diverse ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds that could have been included in this study. I selected the 14 to 16 year age group as it is within the age category defined by the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO) where adolescents are those persons between the ages of 10-19 years (Brazier, 2011;
World Health Organization [WHO], 2015). Teachers working in the school and parents of students in forms 4 and 5 were eligible to participate.

**Recruitment for Interviews**

Initially, I planned to complete 5 interviews with adults in the first two weeks of data collection. My plan was to use the principal of the high school to guide the recruitment for the interviews with school personnel. I planned to interview the principal, the school counsellor, who is also responsible for reporting abuse to the Ministry of Education, a teacher, and two parents.

I had chosen to utilize the established relationships the principal had with her staff, and the parents of her students, as my entry point into the community as a form of snowball sampling. I felt this was the most feasible way to obtain the interviews as organizing this study from outside of the country created limited opportunities to build trust within the community. However, when I arrived in country the principal was on vacation, but had arranged one key informant interview with a teacher. This teacher was able to recruit two parents as a form of snowball sampling. She also suggested I interview the vice-principal, as his perspective would provide a different viewpoint than the principal. Therefore, I completed 6 interviews in total. As a token of appreciation for participating in the interviews, interviewees received $3700GYD ($20CAD).

**Recruitment for Focus Groups**

In total, 30 people were recruited for 8 focus group discussions (See Table 3). The focus group categories were divided into parents, teachers, boys, and girls. The recruitment for focus groups occurred simultaneously to the interviews. I aimed to invite 10 people for each focus group expecting to recruit a participant group of 8 people. A
group larger than 8 participants may limit each person’s opportunity to speak and be more difficult to control with a topic such as dating violence (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Table 3: Number of Participants for each Focus Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants for Focus Group A &amp; B</th>
<th>(n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Girls</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Boys</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher recruitment

At the time of fieldwork, there were 43 full-time staff teachers working at the school where the study took place. Once I received ethical approval from the University of Toronto, I emailed a flyer (Appendix E) to the principal 2 weeks prior to my arrival to the school. This flyer was to be placed in the teachers’ lounge at the high school. However, due to the principal’s schedule this was not done. Therefore, the vice-principal suggested I make an announcement about my study in the teachers’ lounge when most teachers were at their desks, during my first week in Guyana. After this announcement, I distributed letters informing teachers of my research on each of their desks (See Appendix F). Teachers were advised to return this letter to the main office where an envelope was placed if they were interested in participating. I expected that focus group discussions for teachers would occur after school hours or on weekends. However, due to other familial, work, and volunteer commitments teachers opted to participate in focus groups during school hours using a spare period in the afternoon that was conducive to
their teaching schedules. Eight teachers were provided with refreshments and $3700GYD ($20CAD) as a small stipend.

**Parent recruitment**

Five parents were recruited through letters sent home with students in 2 Form 4 classes and 2 Form 5 classes. Each class had approximately 30 students, so 120 letters were sent home with students. Students were asked to return the letter a week after it was given. The letter explained the study and provided an option for participation (See Appendix G). Those who returned the letters indicating yes for participation were eligible for the study. School staff also recruited two parents when they came to the school to attend to matters concerning their teenagers. Since I made the decision to only recruit one person from each household, if I received households where both parent and teen wanted to participate, I selected parents purposefully to ensure an ethnically diverse group of parents that were a combination of men and women. This meant that the son or daughter of parents selected were not eligible for participation in this study. For example, since I had limited numbers of fathers interested, I chose the father from a home where both the father and son were interested in participating. Focus group discussions occurred in the library on school grounds after school hours. Seven parents in total were provided with refreshments and $3700GYD ($20CAD) as a small stipend for participating in this study.

**Student recruitment**

Students were recruited at the same time as the parent recruitment with letters sent home in 4 classes. I was able to recruit 10 girls and 5 boys for focus group discussions. Eight boys returned signed invitation forms, however, only 5 showed up to group
discussions. Once focus groups were underway, I had several other girls wanting to join the focus group but by that time the focus groups had already been completed. Initially I had planned for student focus groups to occur after school so as not to interfere with class schedules. However, after speaking with school staff and students, it became apparent that focus groups after school would not be feasible as students had after school lessons and other familial responsibilities. Fifteen students were provided with $1700GYD ($10CAD) as a small stipend and were given refreshments.

**Study Sample**

Study participants were selected through a purposive sample of teachers, parents, and students from the high school. My goal was to have a sample of both men and women that were racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse for each group of participants. Initially I sought to invite between 37 to 45 people for interviews (n=5) and focus groups (n=4 groups of 8-10 people). I planned to have approximately 25 adults and 20 adolescents. I ended up recruiting a total of 36 participants for interviews (n=6) and focus groups (n=30). In total 21 adults and 15 adolescents participated. In qualitative research studies, the sample size must be small enough to allow for deep exploration of themes, but large enough to uncover multiple meanings and research data saturation (Merriam, 2009; Sandelowski, 1995). This sample size provided opportunities to explore the understanding of dating violence through many voices while still being manageable for in-depth analysis.

**Participant Demographics**

While this study took place in the capital city at one school, participants represented a multitude of communities from rural and urban settings. Participants
traveled from rural villages such as Golden Grove, Paradise, Non Pariel, and Buxton, located on the East Coast, Harmony and Best Village located on the West Coast, Herstelling on the East Bank, Wales on West Bank, Plaisance and Ogle, suburbs of Georgetown on the East Coast, as well as urban communities within Georgetown such as Sophia, Kitty, Cambellville, Lodge, Albertown, and Albouystown.

Twenty participants self-identified as African, fourteen participants self-identified as being of mixed race with two participants explicitly stating they are mixed with Amerindian and African and one participant indicating he/she is mixed with Portuguese. One participant self-identified as East Indian and one other participant did not answer (see Tables 4-7). The majority of adult participants (n=15) stated that they were religious and Christianity was the religion that they practiced (See Tables 4-5). Two adult participants indicated they were not religious, two stated that they were religious but did not specify the religion they practiced, one person stated “general” as their religion, while another indicated she/he was Adventist.

There were eight men and thirteen women that ranged in age from 19 to 57 years old and also had varying educational levels from elementary school (See Table 4) to post-graduate education (See Tables 5 & 6). Only two adults were unemployed (See Table 4). Most adults (n=17) were parents, ten were single and had never been married, eight were married or living in a domestic partnership, two were separated, and one adult was engaged. Out of the ten adults who indicated their relationship status was single, three did not have children.

Ten adolescent girls and five adolescent boys participated in this study (See Table 5). Most adolescents were 15 years old (n=8) and eleven adolescent girls and boys
reported that they were Christian. Three adolescents stated that they were not religious and one adolescent did not answer.

**Table 4: Parents’ Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>3 (42.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>2 (28.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>2 (28.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 (28.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5 (71.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>3 (42.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>4 (57.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>6 (85.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, Not identified</td>
<td>1 (14.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>1 (14.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>3 (42.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>1 (14.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade/Technical/Vocational Training</td>
<td>2 (28.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>5 (71.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>2 (28.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single, Never Married</td>
<td>4 (57.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married or domestic partnership</td>
<td>1 (14.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>2 (28.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (14.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 (42.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 (28.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 (14.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5: Teachers’ Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>1 (12.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>1 (12.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>5 (62.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>1 (12.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 (37.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5 (62.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>5 (62.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>3 (37.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 6: Adolescents’ Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>3 (37.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>1 (12.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventist</td>
<td>1 (12.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, But not identified</td>
<td>1 (12.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Religious</td>
<td>2 (25.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college credit, no degree</td>
<td>1 (12.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Degree</td>
<td>6 (75.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduate</td>
<td>1 (12.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single, Never Married</td>
<td>4 (50.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married or domestic partnership</td>
<td>4 (50.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Children</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (37.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (12.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 (37.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 (12.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7: Interview Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1 (6.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>8 (53.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>6 (40.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5 (33.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10 (66.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>8 (53.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>6 (40.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not identified</td>
<td>1 (6.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>11 (73.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Religious</td>
<td>3 (20.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>1 (6.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Study Implementation

Data Generation

I have chosen to title this section data generation as opposed to data collection, which is the common term used in research studies to acknowledge that data are neither produced nor collected. Rather, data are generated through the exchange of information between the participants and myself as the researcher, symbolizing a co-creation of knowledge. During the data generation process, qualitative studies can use a combination of methods. For the purposes of this study, I used a combination of interviews and focus groups. I had planned to complete the interviews and focus groups in two phases, using key informant interviews as the first phase to help me think more deeply about the second phase, which were focus groups. However, due to participant’s schedules some interviews and focus groups did not occur in succession.
**Interviews as Method**

Interviews are a common method in qualitative inquiry that can produce rich information on the studied topic. Interviews are described as open, semi-structured, or structured (Merriam, 2009). Each of these interview techniques can elicit different forms of information depending on the goals of the study. Semi-structured interviews were ideal for this critical exploratory study as it provided a blueprint to guide the formulation of information with enough flexibility to explore possibilities that may be presented by participants (Merriam, 2009). The interviews provided information on emergent and dominant views pertaining to the Guyanese community about the understanding of adolescent dating violence and identified the kinds of information that enabled me to begin to understand the multiplicity of viewpoints that create adults’ perspectives.

Merriam (2009) indicates that the wording of questions should always be a main consideration because it can ensure that the desired information is obtained. Questions should be worded in language that is familiar to the interviewees (Merriam, 2009). I reviewed the interview guides with the Guyanese advisory board for language and appropriateness for the Guyanese context and those changes were made prior to me completing the interviews.

Asking good questions, practice, and reformatting the interview guide as required can aid in obtaining useful information. Qualitative researchers suggest different typologies of questions to use in interviews to guide the researcher (Merriam, 2009). In creating my interview guides, I have carefully considered the audience for each interview and used Patton’s (2002) 6-question style (See Table 8) to help prepare my questions.
Table 8: Patton’s (2002) 6-question guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patton’s 6-question Guide</th>
<th>Examples from Interview/Focus Group Guides</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Experience and behaviour questions that are focused on what a person did or does.</td>
<td>Currently, what would you do if you know a student is in an abusive relationship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Opinions and values questions are focused on what interviewee’s think about something.</td>
<td>Can you tell me what the best way for you to learn about healthy relationships as you describe earlier? What needs to be included in this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Knowledge questions obtain a participant’s actual knowledge about a situation.</td>
<td>What kinds of violence happen on school grounds?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sensory questions try to obtain more specific data about what was seen, heard, or touched and are similar to experience and behaviour questions.</td>
<td>I would like you to finish these sentences for me. A healthy relationship; a) Looks like…. b) Feels like…. c) Sounds like…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Feeling questions</td>
<td>Do you feel comfortable speaking to your kids about dating?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Background or demographic questions</td>
<td>Will be collected through a questionnaire at the end of each interview and focus group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, while I felt Patton’s (2002) question guide was useful in developing my interview guides, I questioned the order of Patton’s (2002) questions. After careful consideration, I reorganized the questions to begin with people’s concrete experiences, followed by their feelings, then addressed their opinions, values and ideas, and lastly, what they felt should be done (See Table 9). This order provided rich discussion in my interviews by building comfort and confidence in answering questions and then moving onto topics that posed some uneasiness and discomfort. Interview guides are provided in Appendices A, B, C, and D.
Table 9: Revised Patton 6 Question Style Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patton’s 6-question Guide</th>
<th>Examples from Interview/Focus Group Guides</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Knowledge questions obtain a participant’s actual knowledge about a situation.</td>
<td>What kinds of violence happen on school grounds?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2. Sensory questions try to obtain more specific data about what was seen, heard, or touched and are similar to experience and behaviour questions. | I would like you to finish these sentences for me. A healthy relationship;  
   d) Looks like….  
   e) Feels like….  
   f) Sounds like…. |
| 3. Feeling questions | Do you feel comfortable speaking to your kids about dating? |
| 4. Opinions and values questions are focused on what interviewee’s think about something. | Can you tell me what the best way for you to learn about healthy relationships as you describe earlier? What needs to be included in this? |
| 5. Experience and behaviour questions that are focused on what a person did or does. | Currently, what would you do if you know a student is in an abusive relationship? |
| 6. Background or demographic questions | Will be collected through a questionnaire at the end of each interview and focus group. |

There is some debate amongst qualitative researchers regarding the usefulness of asking “why” in an interview. Patton (2002) believes that this question can lead to speculations about causal relationships and dead-end responses. Merriam (2009) agrees that the question of “why” may lead to speculations, but also can suggest a new line of questioning. I am inclined to agree with Merriam (2009) especially when regarding my topic. For example, when I asked why girls should not date in one interview, I was able to understand the importance of sexual respectability to adult perspectives on dating violence. In another interview, asking a participant why he/she felt going to the creek to swim was not an acceptable activity for teenagers enabled me to understand the varying degrees of conservatism that defines what is respectable. Listening to the
participants verbalize their own ideas regarding dating violence provided different areas to explore which I would not have considered.

Interviews were conducted on school premises in the principal or vice-principal’s office and the library. Interview sites (or locations) provide “a material space for the enactment and institution of power relations” (Elwood & Martin, 2000, p.650). Elwood & Martin (2000) point out that critical methodology must also acknowledge how participants relate to the space and furthermore how they are situated within the complex power dynamics that are present within that site. I chose the school as the location for all interviews because it was familiar to the participants and positions myself as a person entering their space where they are the experts. This location was also considered to be practical and feasible for participants’ as they travel there to work or for parent teacher meetings.

Along with location, the length of interviews is also important. The length of interviews can vary and depend on the participants, topic, and methodological approach (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). These authors suggest that providing an approximate length of time for interviewees is considerate and allows participants to plan their day (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). Interviews can last anywhere from 30 minutes to 3 hours, but suggest an hour and a half with the expectation that if participants are engaged they may want to stay longer (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). For this reason, I informed the participants that they should plan to be at the school for an hour and half, but was prepared to speak with them for 2 hours. My interviews ranged from approximately 30 minutes to 2 hours. There were several factors that influenced the length of interviews. First, I found that most of the school officials were speaking from their dual roles as
parents and as school officials, which resulted in lengthier conversations. Other factors that influenced the interviews were my comfort level as a new researcher and an awareness of time constraints. As I became more comfortable in the interviewer role, I began to ask other questions in the natural course of the conversation and recognized the difference in earlier interviews that inevitably were a bit shorter to the latter ones.

Focus Groups as Method

Focus groups comprise of a group of people interacting while discussing an issue that share similar backgrounds and can provide a variety of perspectives on a particular issue (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Macnaghten and Myers (2004) state, “focus groups work best for topics people could talk about to each other in their everyday lives but don’t” (p.65). Using focus groups as a data collection method means I recognize that decisions, perspectives, and knowledge can often be made in a social context that can come out of discussions with other people (Patton, 2002). The social interaction between participants is as important as the answers they provide to the questions asked (Lehoux, Poland & Daudelin, 2006).

I conducted 8 focus groups in total and moderated every focus group. I enlisted Ms. Clonel Boston, an advisory board member, as the observer for every group discussion as Krueger and Casey (2009) recommend that one person moderate the discussion, while a second person takes detailed notes. They further state that a second person can increase the accumulation of information (Krueger and Casey, 2009). I chose Ms. Clonel Boston as the observer as she has extensive experience leading focus group discussions with teenagers.
To obtain information to answer my research question, I divided the sub-questions into two focus group discussions. The first set of focus groups with parents, teachers, and adolescents discussed research sub-questions A (Table 10). The second set of focus groups with parents, teachers, and adolescents answered sub-question B (Table 10). The goal of having two focus groups to answer those two sub-questions was to have enough time to explore each of those topics thoroughly.

**Table 10: Focus Group Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Topics</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research sub-questions A</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research sub-question B</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key topics were combined in the first set of focus group discussions (See Appendices H, I). Combining these questions by using a real life story of dating violence within the Guyanese community allowed participants to explore ideas of race, gender, sexuality, class and age. By doing so with each group, I compared what they thought and saw similarly and differently about the situations presented. The second focus group discussions focused on articulating what they (parents, teachers, adolescents) saw as important in creating preventative initiatives on violence (See Appendices J, K).

Participants completed demographic questionnaires at the end of focus group discussions (See Appendix L, M).

Focus group guides were reviewed based on the responses from the key informant interviews that were completed, as well as from the advisory board for language and appropriateness for the Guyanese context. Ms. Boston and I also debriefed after each focus group discussion and made changes to the guides based on participant responses.
For example, we found that speaking about men and women’s roles was a recurrent topic in the first focus group discussion with teachers. For this reason, we chose to create an icebreaker exercise to begin the second set of focus group discussions speaking about gender roles with all focus groups. This became an important component of my analysis and interpretation.

When planning focus groups, it is essential to account for the possible power differentials that can occur when mixing participants (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Participants may be reluctant to talk if they are in a position they believe is less powerful, which will impact the quality of information gathered from these groups (Krueger & Casey, 2000). I chose to separate the adult groups based on their relationship with adolescents. Both parent and teacher groups included a combination of men and women. The focus groups with adolescents were purposely divided by sex as my literature review has pointed towards gendered ideas of dating violence (Hilton et al., 2003; Reeves & Orpinas, 2012; Sears et al., 2006). I also chose to select students whose parents were not participating in the study to eliminate any feelings of uneasiness that parents may find out their responses.

Focus groups were held on school premises similar to the interviews. My decision to hold the focus groups at the high school reflects the same thought process as explained earlier. I planned for focus groups of 2 hours as Patton (2002) and Krueger & Casey (2009) state that these discussions typically occur for one to two hours. My focus groups lasted between 1.5 hours to 2.5 hours. The teachers’ focus groups were the longest running focus groups at 2.5 hours. I believe this was due to the established working relationships between the group of teachers that participated, creating a familiar
and comfortable environment. Even though teachers explicitly stated they could not stay after school, both focus groups ended up running past school hours and participants were engaged in the discussion and not ready to leave. Both parent focus groups ran for 1.5 hours. I noticed the different dynamics between the teacher and parent groups. Parents took a bit more time to feel comfortable in the group and to share their opinions. Some parents were more comfortable than others from the inception of the group discussions, but all parents participated as time went on.

I learned that teenagers became uninterested and fidgety after 1 – 1.5 hours. I ended the first round of focus groups once I saw body language changing and too many side conversations occurring in the girls’ focus groups. However, when I announced I would end the discussions teenagers vocalized their disappointment. I also observed the discussions amongst girls were markedly different than boys. Asking one question to the girls group produced numerous different angles and topics. For example, when I started the first focus group with the ice-breaker, it lead to different stories and examples of situations they knew about or had encountered and after a period of time, I had to lead them back to what we were discussing. However, I found that when boys were asked a question they answered the question directly without much deviation, which required more probing on my behalf.

Using focus groups does not come without its challenges. Krueger & Casey, (2000) provide a list of considerations that should be contemplated prior to deciding on this method. In pondering the 10 points provided (p.25), two specific topics are salient to my study (Krueger & Casey, 2000). First, the possibility of the environment becoming emotionally charged, if people become polarized on an issue; secondly, if participants
chose to divulge personal information, I could not ensure their confidentiality (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Discussing violence has the potential to create these two scenarios and I experienced this during fieldwork. There were points of contention in all groups that elicited strong emotional responses as participants disagreed and challenged dominant discourses. At the beginning of the focus groups, I read a preamble that addressed the potential for disagreement and that this was expected and accepted as long as it remained respectful. I believe this set the tone for the group discussions and on very few occasions, (specifically with the adolescents) did I step in to offer clarification of ideas so that the disagreements did not cease the discussion. Several studies that used focus group discussions in the literature review noted differing opinions, however, a good moderator can decrease these tensions by returning participants back to the focus of the research (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Patton, 2002).

In addition, every group discussion resulted in participants sharing personal stories of their own experiences with violence after I reviewed the informed consent and limits to confidentiality, these actions reminded the participants of implications of disclosure. Furthermore, there were other challenges I faced not listed in Krueger and Casey’s (2000) 10-point list. I quickly learned that flexibility was key to running successful focus group discussions. For example, none of my focus groups started on time, some started between thirty to forty minutes late. Additionally, there were other events out of my control, such as police entering into the library to speak with a parent who was participating in the focus group discussion, because her son had been accused of a theft on school property and other parents needing to bring their young children to the focus group discussions because of child care issues.
Focus groups can also be viewed as a positive space especially to those who may find one-on-one or face-to-face interaction intimidating (Madriz, 2002). Since focus groups take on a collectivist approach rather than an individualistic one, it can become a safe space to share ideas, beliefs, and attitudes with people who are from the same socioeconomic, ethnic, and gendered backgrounds (Kitzinger, 1995; Madriz, 2002).

For example, a mother in the parent focus group spoke about her daughter being sexually active. She told the group that she sat down with her husband, her child’s father, her daughter, and her daughter’s boyfriend and explained they needed to practice safe sex. By this mother speaking openly about her daughter being sexually active, she contributed to removing the stigma and shame that is associated with ideas of female respectability and sex. Additionally, the focus groups were also useful as peer education with teachers as one participant’s comments of the societal impact on how adolescents experience sex and relationships, suggested to others to look beyond adolescents behaviour to understand how the social world impacts youth in ways that are troubling.

Focus groups are also ideal for adolescent participants as group conversations imitate the way they converse and interact at this developmental stage. Giordano (2003) and Galliher et al. (2004) state that intimate relationships often begin in group settings.

**Limitations**

This study was completed in a school where HFLE curriculum was being taught and was also selected based on the interest and co-operation of the principal. While the working relationships between management and teachers was somewhat strained, the working relationships between teachers was quite good which resulted in open dialogue between male and female teachers. However, assuming that all schools would be able to
engage in similar discussions with men and women would have to be with consideration
and assessment of the school environment. Additionally, while I made a conscious effort
to recruit Indo-Guyanese community members, their perspectives are not well
represented in this thesis and therefore these findings may not fully represent their
experiences with dating violence – even though there was much discussion about living
in Indo-Guyanese communities. Lastly, while Guyana has multiple religious faiths,
participants in this study overwhelmingly identified as Christian. Therefore, how other
religions address dating violence cannot be assumed from this study.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The format of documenting a thesis is somewhat misleading in considering the
data analysis and interpretation of qualitative research. While I write about my analytical
and interpretative process neatly within this section, the process of analysis does not
reflect a linear progression (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Kruger & Casey,
2000). Rather, it is an iterative process that began with the development of my research
question, the literature I reviewed in chapter two, and the process in which I generated
my data (Thorne, 2000).

**Analysis in the Field**

I underestimated how intense my fieldwork would be and the heightened
awareness and active listening that occurred during my 5-week trip. I thought I would be
able to transcribe and analyze transcripts in between interviews and focus groups. Kruger
and Casey (2000) believe that doing data analysis while collecting data improves
collection by pointing to areas requiring further exploration. Furthermore, the likelihood
of feeling overwhelmed by the sheer amount of data collected at the end of the study, was
a realistic possibility that Merriam (2009) alluded to in her discussion on data collection for qualitative research.

However, these perspectives do not account for also feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained in the field. I found that Kruger and Casey’s suggestions were difficult to achieve, as working with participants’ schedules meant I completed several interviews in one week, sometimes two in one day. Additionally, I was keenly aware of my presence within the field, as somewhat of a disruption and felt that taking notes while on school grounds would remind people that they were being studied and further impact power differentials. For this reason, I chose to take complete notes of what occurred during the day once I returned to my hotel in the evening. These field notes became an important part of my analysis as they documented my observations about the school environment and relationships between parents, teachers, and adolescents outside of the interview or focus group settings. I also used these notes to record and work through my emotions and ethical dilemmas as a researcher in a research field where participants’ lives were complex.

**Analytical Devices**

Once I returned from my fieldwork, I realized that I needed a period of time away from my research to re-charge for analysis. I used this time to reflect on my trip and speak with fellow doctoral students about challenges and successes of my fieldwork. To achieve analytical and interpretative depth, I utilized several analytical devices, which I will discuss below.
Reflexive transcription practice.

I chose to use a Guyanese based transcription service for my recordings. Bucholtz (1999) and Tilley (2003) indicate that transcription is a political process influenced by personal perspectives, experiences, and opinions of the participants whose voices are captured in the text. Bucholtz (1999) indicates that it may be impossible to have a completely objective transcription. These perspectives encouraged me to think more critically about my transcripts and the process of transcription to understand how the recordings are re-presented and in this process somewhat altered.

Bucholtz (2000) provides two questions in her paper presented by Green et al. (1997) that guide her thinking about transcription as an interpretive process and as a representational process. Bucholtz (2000) states, “At the interpretive level, the central issue is *what* is transcribed; at the representational level the central issue is *how* it is transcribed” (p.1441). I used these two questions to engage in what Bucholtz (2000) calls a reflexive transcription practice. This meant that I listened to the recordings against the transcripts and recognized that in some instances even though I had asked for verbatim transcripts, transcriptionists had changed the Guyanese creole vernacular to common English. In other instances the transcriptionists had interpreted what participants said and transcribed their interpretation rather than the participant’s words. Listening to the recordings while reading the transcripts made me aware of the difficulty in creating a verbatim record.

For example, the transcript cannot account for the inflections in a persons voice and may not always capture the side commentary and conversations that could be heard during the focus group discussions. I found that listening to the recordings enabled me to
picture the interview and focus group settings once again and feel the emotions that were in the room. Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) state, “…analysis takes place and understandings are derived through the process of constructing a transcript by listening and re-listening, viewing and re-viewing…transcription facilitates the close attention and the interpretive thinking that is needed to make sense of the data…” (Pg. 75).

I listened to recordings and read the transcripts several times. First, I focused on checking the accuracy of the transcript and used the second reading to focus on including emotions such as laughing or kissing teeth, which is a sound made with one’s mouth that is used to express annoyance. I took this time to also write analytical memo’s regarding participants’ body language I observed in relation to the discussions that were occurring, and discussed this with my supervisor and committee. Whereas I thought the analysis of transcripts would be focused solely on the content, I have recognized the importance in understanding and accounting for the process of formulating the data through transcription, which is not an objective or value free process.

**Coding.**

After re-reading and editing my transcripts against the audio-recordings, I began the process of coding my work utilizing Dedoose software, a web-based application for qualitative and mixed-methods research. At this stage of my analysis, I used coding as a strategy to reorder my data in new and different ways. During this process, at times I felt I was multiplying my data rather than reducing it, initially working with well over 100 codes. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) indicate that the process of coding can reduce data but also complicate it, by expanding and teasing out data to reach new levels of
interpretation and create new questions. This at times became a daunting task as I moved through this process writing memos and working through my coding.

At the advice of my supervisor, I entered my data from three different angles before settling on a combination of two approaches. First, I tried to enter the data organizing my coding through my research questions. However, when I attempted to code from this angle I quickly realized that the transcripts did not fit neatly into these categories and I was concerned I might miss out on potentially new information, simply by focusing my coding too early. Next, I attempted to code the transcripts line-by-line, thinking that this approach would resolve my concern about missing information and allow me to code everything and then sift through the codes to look for similarities. However, I found that it was not completely useful for me as it compartmentalized people’s comments in a way that was not helpful during analysis. When looking at the coded lines in Dedoose without the transcript for context, the lines lost part of the meaning and I felt could easily be misinterpreted.

Therefore, I then entered the transcript looking at blocks of data. For example, I read one person’s full statement and then looked for the main themes. Other times, I looked at the flow of conversations in the focus groups and considered several persons’ statements and the flow of conversation in my analysis. This, I found, was a suitable option that enabled me to understand the context of the person’s comments. I then also read the transcripts in their entirety and wrote out analytical notes on the paper copies of the transcripts. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) state that entering coding from multiple approaches enables the researcher to create a framework based on what the researcher is interested in and these approaches do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive. At
this stage the analysis moved beyond description because the grouping of codes came from interpretation and was a lengthy process (Merriam, 2009). I then completed the same process with the rest of transcripts and merged the lists of codes together to create a classification system that became the categories and themes for my study (Merriam, 2009). My coding framework (see Appendix R for a portion of the classification system) is a combination of codes from segments, as well as line-by-line coding when particular ideas stood out to me. The framework included in Appendix U is the final version and was re-worked on paper (See Figure 1 & 2) with input from my committee.

**Figure 1: Coding System – Chapter 5**
Writing as analysis.

I learned that writing itself was a form of analysis as I began to write up my results. Sandelowski (1998) states, “writing is a mode of discovery that takes researchers where they should be by the time they get to the write-up: ‘beyond’ their data” (p.376). This process also reflected my theoretical lens and a critical exploratory methodology as I used intersectionality as a tool of analysis to ensure that the complexity of dating violence was thoroughly explored, accounting for various structures of power in society (Christensen & Jensen, 2012). How adolescents, parents, and teachers are positioned and how they position themselves in categories of age, race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity contribute to both their understanding and the community’s understanding and experiences with violence.

Working with an intersectional analysis did not come without its challenges. I risked the possibility of treating social categories (i.e. race, gender, class) as if they functioned according to identical logics while working with many categories (Christensen
& Jensen, 2012). Choo and Ferree (2010) also indicate that power should be viewed as relational and therefore focusing on processes and relations in intersectional analysis is more useful than viewing these classifications as categories. This also means that pursuing the macro level factors was just as important in understanding the relational effect of violence. As MacKinnon (2013) states “intersectionality focuses awareness on people and experiences hence, on social forces and dynamics that, in monocular vision, are overlooked” (p.1020). To use this approach within my data analysis challenged me to continuously look for the overlapping and missing links in understanding dating violence in adolescence.

**Verification of Analysis**

One of the tenets of a rigorous qualitative analysis is to ensure that the emerging data is trustworthy. Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olsen and Spiers (2002) indicate that verification in qualitative research is “the process of checking, confirming, making sure and being certain” (p.17). They further attest that while the process of verification occurs throughout the course of the study (which I expand on further in the next section), in qualitative analysis “data are systematically checked, focus is maintained, and the fit of data and the conceptual work of analysis and interpretation are monitored and confirmed constantly” (Morse et al., 2002, p.17). To achieve this I integrated three different strategies during my data analysis and interpretation.

First, at the beginning of my analysis, I enrolled in a qualitative analysis and interpretation course, which provided me with increased knowledge and opportunity to work with my data through different analytical devices and choose which ones suit my method of analysis. During these four months I learned to work with uncertainty and
“make strange” what I may have taken for granted as tacit knowledge. Through this experience I was able to maintain my focus and hone in on information that was specific and new to the Guyanese environment.

Secondly, I met with my supervisor regularly to review my coding system and definitions. At the beginning of these meetings Dr. Gastaldo and I reviewed portions of transcripts and coded them together, discussing where there was divergence in our interpretations. The ongoing meetings with my supervisor provided important feedback and I used these sessions to review my codes, re-read transcripts and refine the coding system.

Once Dr. Gastaldo and I were satisfied with the coding system, we then met with my PhD committee and discussed the coding system further until a finalized coding system was completed. Once this was completed, I continued to meet with my supervisor and PhD committee during the write up of my analysis enhancing my confidence in the rigor of my analysis.

**Rigour in Qualitative Research**

Research that aims to effect change in either theory or practice must be meticulously conducted. In qualitative research, this is achieved by presenting insights and conclusions that accurately present the experiences and perspectives of others (Merriam, 2009). It is imperative that readers, who can be researchers, practitioners, professionals, and other community members, have confidence in how my study was conducted and the results arising from the research. To ensure the use of information from this study by all stakeholders, the transparency of research decisions are provided
through the practice of reflexivity, credibility, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Reflexivity**

In qualitative research, the researcher is a central instrument for data generation and analysis. The reflexive exercise of constantly examining how knowledge is actively being constructed and how the presence of the researcher impacts every aspect of the research is called reflexivity (Finlay, 2002; Houghton, Casey, Shaw & Murphy, 2013; Merriam, 2009). It should be an ongoing process throughout the research, notably in three defined areas: pre-research stage, data collection, and data analysis (Finlay, 2002).

The process of reflexivity began when I decided to conduct this research. It has not always been easy, rather, it has become uncomfortable at times, as I challenge my own ideas and perspectives and remember experiences that would impact my decisions and analysis – experiences that had become a faint memory, but have reappeared in the forefront of my thinking as I immersed myself in the research on adolescents and dating violence. I have alluded to these personal experiences briefly in the introduction to this thesis.

As I continue to build my knowledge on postcolonial feminism(s) and Caribbean history, I have been able to re-read the literature on dating violence with a more critical eye thinking more deeply about how many aspects of everyday life are not challenged in a larger system of socially constructed ideas. Whereas before it was difficult for me to make the link between theory and real life, I can see more clearly how my chosen theory of postcolonial feminism(s) with the concepts of intersectionality and otherness can aid in
a more comprehensive analysis that push beyond the limits of how violence is presently understood.

These ideas have also developed through many discussions and informal conversations about my research ideas with the Guyanese community and its diaspora, my fellow PhD students, and my committee. In these interactions I am constantly challenged to think more deeply and critically, which enhances my study. Since the beginning of this process, I have kept all drafts of chapters and two notebooks, which chronicle my decision making and thoughts demonstrating how my ideas continue to evolve.

As I continued on to fieldwork, analysis and interpretation, I had a heightened sense of awareness of the importance of remaining reflexive and I considered not only the notes I was taking, but also the impact of where I chose to journal my decisions and ideas in the field, as I mentioned previously. The reflexive process enabled me to critically question my presence and understand why I appeared so familiar to the participants in this study. Within the field and throughout analysis my reflexive practice has helped me to contend with the inevitable frustration that arises from the messiness of analysis and interpretation.

**Credibility**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility of qualitative research signifies that the research was conducted in a believable manner. This credibility can be achieved through triangulation of sources and methods. Source and method triangulation occurred as I spoke with 3 different groups of people from the Guyanese community and used interviews, focus groups, and demographic questionnaires for data collection.
Member checking is used to verify that the information provided by participants is accurate which provides greater credibility to research (Harper & Cole, 2012). Member checking was completed informally throughout the interview and focus group discussions during the normal course of observation and conversation. During the interviews, this occurred by clarifying statements made by interviewees and providing an opportunity at the end of the interview for the interviewee to give final thoughts. As the moderator of the focus groups, I clarified points that arose throughout the discussion that were unclear – or points that created some contention within the groups. Additionally, I consulted with the observer of the focus group discussions and together we were able alter the guides and use the second round of focus groups to clarify some outstanding ideas.

**Dependability**

Dependability is concerned with accurately describing the researcher’s steps in the study (Houghton et al., 2013). Meaning that the reporting of the research process should be adequate for other researchers to trace each step even if there is disagreement on the findings. Houghton et al. (2013) suggests that this can be accomplished through a comprehensive audit trail including:

a) Full transcripts checked for accuracy against tape recordings.

b) Accounting for the key methodological decisions and describing the impact of positionality.

c) Showing coding schemes to readers.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to whether the findings from one research study can be transferred to another context or situation, while still maintaining the meanings from the
study (Houghton et al., 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). For this to occur contextual information and theorization has to occur in order for the reader to make an informed decision as to whether the information is useful in a different context (Houghton et al., 2013; Merriam, 2009). Even though the concept of transferability has been quite controversial in qualitative research, I believe my study will be useful to other populations of adolescents within Guyana, the Caribbean, and Canada. The contextual descriptions that have been presented within qualitative studies described in the literature review provided opportunities for comparisons and critiques as to how context is important in understanding issues such as dating violence. My study does the same.

**Ethical Considerations**

All studies have ethical considerations that are important for the integrity of the research. The protection of study participants from harm, the idea of informed consent, and the right to privacy need to be addressed prior to the commencement of the study (Merriam, 2009). Even though these are considered beforehand, issues can arise in the field that must be resolved. Below I will address the common ethical considerations for my study.

**Ethics Approval**

Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Toronto Health Sciences Research Ethics Board. The Chief Education Officer for the Ministry of Education in Guyana indicated that this ethics approval was sufficient to complete my study in this school. I received three letters of welcome and support from the Principal of the study school, the Board of Directors for the high school, as well as a letter from the Chief Education Officer. Those letters were included in my ethics application.
Power Differential

There are power differentials that interplay in my research. In my interaction with adolescent boys and girls, I was aware of my position as an adult researcher who was also a foreigner. Being a foreign researcher had potential to be intimidating for adolescents. For this reason, I chose to hold the focus group discussions in a location familiar to participants. Paying attention to the structuring of the focus group meeting areas (chairs positioned in a circle) and being in a group of their peers were ways that I addressed the power differential, which I believe helped to alleviate some of those feelings. Additionally, I positioned myself as a foreigner who needed help understanding the phenomenon as it occurred in Guyana and adolescents had local knowledge that I needed to understand. Lastly, I decided to hold the adolescent focus groups last, which meant that students became familiar with seeing me on school property and this time provided opportunities for them to interact with me in a non-formal manner. However, even though I implemented these actions, power differentials remained in place, as students never addressed me by my first name. Rather, teenagers addressed me as Ms., Ms. Ruth, and one student addressed me as Aunty Ruth.

With respect to the adult interviews and focus groups, there could have been a perceived power differential because I am a foreigner who is highly educated. To mitigate those feelings I chose to introduce myself and begin building a rapport with the school principal and teachers prior to beginning the study in a logistics trip to Guyana in February 2015. This of course was done in a limited time frame (1 week), but did provide me with an opportunity to introduce myself to most of the teaching staff, school officials, and the head of the parent teacher association, about the aims of the study and to
who I am. During the fieldtrip, I was able to build a rapport with staff through informal discussions and walking around the school periodically to make myself visible. When I conducted the interviews and focus groups staff were already familiar with me and knew that I was a descendent of a Guyanese family. However, I continued to position myself as a foreigner who needed help understanding the phenomenon even though they were aware that I had some familiarity with the setting.

**Potential Risks and Benefits**

The principal, students, parents, school counsellor, and teachers, were asked not to divulge or discuss personal experiences of dating violence in the interviews or focus groups, as there were limits to the confidentiality of information disclosed. The discussions centered on speaking about dating violence in Guyana in general. However, these conversations while not personal did trigger psychological responses, such as feelings of discomfort, sadness, anger, and/or frustration. To mitigate this risk, the school counsellor was available for students. I also handed out a list of free resources that were available in Guyana to students, parents, and teachers if they require further help. Two students asked for the number of the focus group observer (Ms. Boston) who works for Women Across Differences, a program that helps teen mothers by providing supports to finish high school and develop skills for economic advancement. However, those students never followed up with Ms. Boston. This was an important lesson I learned. In future studies, if I have participants that show interest in obtaining social services, I will ensure that the social service representative also has the contact information to follow-up with those individuals.

There were also potential social risks in conducting focus groups. There was a
possibility that students, parents, and teachers may discuss the content of the focus group discussions, which can impact the privacy or reputation of other members. This was minimized by fully explaining confidentiality issues to all focus group members. By signing the consent form, each member acknowledged a responsibility and respect for each group member’s privacy.

There were no tangible benefits to students, parents, and teachers by participating in this research study. However, there was a potential for the community to benefit by an increased awareness of dating violence within the community, which would create openness for future opportunities for prevention activities – this became evident as participants indicated that they used the information discussed in the focus groups in their classrooms and personal lives.

**Informed Consent**

Teachers, parents, and students were provided with information letters prior to commencement of the study (See Appendix F & G). Parents were required to sign a consent form for their children to participate in this study. Informed consent forms for interviews with the principal, teacher, school counsellor, and parents are in appendix N.

Prior to all focus groups, the objectives were discussed and all participants signed a consent form and had the option to decline participation (See Appendices O, P & Q). I read out the consent form in some focus groups if I was made aware that some participants had a low literacy level. All focus groups were briefed on focus group etiquette to provide a safe and open space to express and share ideas on the study topic.
Confidentiality

All participant identifiers were removed from the transcripts. Results of the interviews and focus groups are kept in my computer secured by password, and only the doctoral committee members had access to the information. Data were stored and transported from Guyana to Canada on two password protected encrypted USB flash drives. Two encrypted USB flash drives were used to prevent loss of data in case of accidental destruction and one was erased once returning to Canada and completing transcription. Hard copies of field notes and my reflexive journal were kept secure in my locked suitcase, which was located in my room that was locked. Once I returned to Canada those notes I have kept stored in a locked cabinet in my home.

Plans for Knowledge Translation

Knowledge translation is integral to the success of this project. Prior to leaving Guyana, I saw an opportunity to act on one of the emerging themes arising from the field. I recognized that teachers were burned out and wanted them to have an opportunity to learn more positive ways of dealing with their frustration and stress while interacting with students. Providing an experiential learning opportunity through a teachers’ retreat for the high school teachers was my first action to translate some of the findings and knowledge I saw emerging from my research. See Appendix S for a copy of my proposal that was accepted by the Ministry of Education. Additionally, recognizing that the school system is only part of a larger system required to combat dating violence, I advocated for a national violence prevention protocol in a meeting with the President of Guyana, His Excellency Brigadier David Granger (see Appendix T).
I also plan to create two community reports. The first report will be a 2 to 3 page summary of the study results in plain language for parents and students. A second report of 3 to 5 pages with more technical language will be presented to the Ministry of Education and all school staff.

This study provides knowledge not only on the study topic, but also on the processes of global health research in a low to middle income country. Therefore, I would like to present my findings in various conferences focusing on violence prevention, global health, and qualitative inquiry if feasible.

Furthermore, there are a small number of nursing researchers who focus on dating violence prevention in Canada. Therefore, my membership as a graduate student with multi-disciplinary research networks such as PREVnet (a Canadian relationship and violence network of researchers), and sharing information through peer-reviewed journal articles will provide further information about dating violence from a nursing perspective.

The knowledge translation activities are not without challenges and limitations, the greatest being the extent of knowledge translation possible due to limited time and funding. However, I continue to seek other opportunities that will enable greater access to the community. Additionally, by working closely with this school and the advisory board the information produced can enter into other community areas and be used in future initiatives with the purpose of finding ways to build healthier relationships in adolescents.

**Possible Impacts of Research**

Approaches to domestic violence within the Caribbean have largely been focused on adults in relation to legislation, legal rights, and programs to empower women emotionally and financially (Bristol, 2010). However these approaches seldom include
adolescents’ experiences and needs. My research will add to the existing body of knowledge on gender-based violence by addressing adolescent boys and girls and community views on how the problem is reproduced and how it can potentially be addressed in a low to middle income setting. The findings from this study will be disseminated throughout the community with help from the advisory board. Future steps will also be discussed with all parties to support the developments of primary prevention and evidence-based programs in Guyana.

Canadian communities of Caribbean descent will also benefit from this study because it increases the understanding of gender relations, the impact of masculinity and femininity on health, and points to culturally appropriate strategies for violence prevention, all of which could be considered with Caribbean immigrant groups in Canada.

**Summary**

To the best of my knowledge, a study including parents, teachers, and adolescents focusing on violence prevention in dating violence has not occurred within Guyana. The development of this research topic has been heavily grounded in the community needs and is timely and relevant to the current environment in Guyana regarding violence against women and domestic violence.
Chapter Five

Living out Gender Norms in Intimate Relationships

There are many underlying systemic factors that contribute to the acceptability and often unquestioned nature of violence that occurs within relationships that are experienced in communities. The production and experience of violence in everyday life arises from these systemic factors that create social norms, which define what behaviours are acceptable. Societal, community, and interpersonal viewpoints are pertinent to articulating the phenomenon of dating violence. I enter this discussion at a societal level, presenting participants’ perspectives on normative masculinity and femininity as macro concepts that are central to the understanding of adolescent dating violence. Next, I will focus on domestic violence within Guyanese society at the community level, highlighting the private and public nature of violence as well as how institutions, such as the church and justice system, play a controversial role with violence. Lastly, I will present perspectives on dating in adolescence as a micro level viewpoint of how gender norms are played out during adolescence with regards to interpersonal relationships.

Gender Roles: Normative Femininity and Masculinity

Once a boy gets more than one girl, it’s fame. But, once a girl gets a lot of guys, it’s shame (G6)

This phrase captures quite succinctly how girls in this study understood the relationship between normative masculinity and femininity in our group discussions. Adolescent boys were also cognizant of the idea of fame and shame as one of the boys used the same phrase in our conversations. To these adolescent boys and girls, the shaming of women is not possible without the dichotomous perspective of men gaining
fame and vice versa. This section will highlight participant ideas on the common gender roles they believe men and women should embody. Although there were dominant discourses in several discussions on gendered roles some participants challenged dominant ideas.

**Gender Roles for Men and Women, Adolescent Boys and Girls**

Asking participants to tell me what roles they felt men and women held in relationships was useful to understand the normative roles that were ascribed to men and women and also highlighted that several participants saw relationship attributes that should be shared. I had originally planned to complete icebreakers in the first set of focus group discussions to ease people into the focus group process. However, after the conversations in the first set of focus groups, my observer and I decided to complete a second icebreaker asking participants what roles they felt men and women should embody. I then documented their responses on large cardboards; see Figure 3, 4, 5, and 6 below.

**Figure 3: Teachers Perspectives of Men and Women’s Roles**
Figure 4: Parents Perspectives of Men and Women’s Roles

Figure 5: Boys Perspectives on Girl and Boy’s Roles

Figure 6: Girls Perspectives on Girls and Boys Roles (Arrows show mutual attributes)
Female Respectability Defined by Sexual Experience

Listening to participants in my interviews and focus group discussions, I understood that women’s bodies are central to the discussion on normative femininity. Specifically, participants described the sexualisation of their bodies as defining the respectability of women, which is also tantamount to normative femininity. In my conversation with one female school official, she described it in this way.

You can only get the highest price if the commodity is in a prime condition.

Right. So they must learn that there are certain things as young ladies you don’t do to this priceless body. It is beautiful, it is clean, and the more beautiful it is, the more clean it is, the highest price you’ll get for it (Interview 6).

I asked this school official to clarify her comments on commodities and pricing. She indicated that she was not referring to finance or women being bought or sold, but rather, that the value of women decreases if they are sexually active. “Girls must know that they are a precious commodity because they are commodities. Somebody is gonna come and have you, right?” (Interview 6, female). Stating that a man will “come and have you” means that girls are taught by other women throughout adolescence that their bodies are essentially not their own, even though (according to her comments) adolescent girls’ bodies hold the most value. In this sense, adolescent girl’s worth is valued by their physical bodies and not being sexually active. All participants told this to me as they acknowledged that there are differences in what is considered acceptable for boys and girls in regards to sex.
In my focus group discussions with girls, one of the girls told the group that some girls essentially encourage boys to be disrespectful because they have been sexually active with several boys.

For example, bai's [boy’s], not all bai's the same. Bais don't just go and take advantage of girls just like that. They get some girls (hear group saying 'ya' true') it get some girls is go and deh with Tom, Dick, and Harry [Some girls have sex with multiple people]. For example, it get a girl, the girl she running bear (pause) is ten of them, the girl was like "All ten of y’all want suck and bugger me" (Loud laughter) [asking 10 men if they want to have oral and anal sex] (G2).

Moderator: It's o.k. It's fine. She can talk.

G2: Right. So now when she do those things, I be around mostly boys. It does be like bad boys and so, so they would shine me on certain itation [shine me on certain itation means explain to her or make her aware of what they think or feel about certain topics]. So the boys would say "You ain't understand that one come in there and fling it up and so." [Fling it up and so means the girl came in and had sex with him] And plus they would shine on how boys would come round you funny, boys would just tell you things and they don't mean it, they just want fool you and is up to you if you want believe them.

This adolescent girl describes two different situations in her comments. In the first comment she speaks about a woman or girl who chose to have sexual relations with multiple people and describes this woman as being the problem and not the boys. She then speaks to a different scenario where boys are telling her they are dishonest in their attempts to have sex and once they have had sex they have no more use for the girl. Her
comments imply that if women choose to be sexually free they are not respectable, but if they choose to have sex with a man who has lied to them they are not intelligent. Some adolescent boys had similar views when I spoke to them. One boy stated,

…Sometimes, I will be truthful to you. We are boys and we cannot stay with one partner, because one wood can’t light a fire (laughter in group). But for the girls that go around getting different boys, we would call them names like ‘dangles’ and ‘whores’ and all those type of names but if boys do it, it would not look so bad. That is why I think the girls should conduct themselves better (B5).

This teen provided these statements without questioning how participating in this name-calling continues to perpetuate a judgmental and unfair situation. By completing his thought indicating “girls should conduct themselves better” demonstrated that some adolescent boys accept normative discourses of women and girls without any recognition of the role they play.

The shaming of women for being sexual beings was seen in many forms. For example, both teachers and students stated that they knew girls who were sent away from their families when they became pregnant. Moreover, in my discussions with parents, one mother told the group that she took her daughter to be checked by a gynaecologist to prove her virginity after her daughter was accused of having a sexual relationship with a bus conductor. As these examples indicate, normative femininity and patriarchy dictate that women should behave in respectable ways, which means no sexual activity.

However, some adolescent girls and women expressed resistance against these ideas of femininity. For example, girls’ identities developed quite quickly in relation to whether they conformed to normative ideas of femininity or resisted it in our group
discussions. One adolescent girl who did not conform to the rigid gender roles attributed to women spoke. She stated,

Ms., I have a lot of male friends and because of that certain people tend to criticize me. Ms. because they see me around a lot of boys and because of that they think, well, ‘she deh with all of dem, and she is this’ [she deh with all of them means dating and/or having sex with all of them] Ms., but I don’t care what they have to say because I learn more from the boys than the girls (G7).

This teen is aware that her actions go against the dominant view of how girls should behave, but she chooses to resist those ideas acknowledging that her relationship with these boys is to understand how they think and to be friends. This is similar to what another adolescent girl (G2) stated above in her comments on befriending “bad boys”.

**Female Respectability Represents Social Class**

Social class was discussed extensively in my discussions with the girls’ focus groups through perspectives on clothing. Adolescent girls comments indicated that clothing is a form of social and class expression, which in turn is related to respectability. Observing group dynamics amongst the girls during this specific topic revealed some participants asserting themselves as respectable, while others questioned and rejected dominant beliefs on clothing. Those participants who spoke from the dominant perspective asserted themselves as an authority and were judgmental in their tone and responses to those who challenged their thinking. One teen girl was particularly rigid in her beliefs on clothing. In the excerpt below she was responding to another adolescent girl who rejected the idea of wearing jogging pants instead of short tights for athletic training. She stated,
But what people tend to say is what is exposed is expired. What you wear tells who you are. So, if you wear something tight or you wear something short they will talk, like oh she’s a freak or oh she’s a hoe (Loud side conversations and wanting to interject into what is being said) (G4).

The choice of clothing was also thought to reflect social class. Another participant spoke about a verbal exchange she had with a woman who she believed was exposing too much of her body. This exchange occurred in a lower socio-economic neighbourhood. This adolescent girl stated,

I was like, “please don’t show it again”. I was like, “if you want respect, you have to show them you respect yourself. And that’s not the way you go around doing things” and she’s like, all ghetto… and the tour was in McDoom cause almost everyone in that area they’re just like that (G5).

This teen aligned herself with the dominant perspective on respectability in the group by indicating that she did not want to be brought back to McDoom. With this comment she chose to distance herself from those who she considered “ghetto” which secured her social position. Additionally, she used this experience to generalize most of the neighbourhood, which demonstrates the ease in which community members can create stereotypes of others based on ideas of social class or gender.

I asked this same adolescent girl to explain her understanding and use of the phrase “acting ghetto” as it often has been linked to broad generalizations of ethnicity. She stated that the woman was cursing and “going crazy all over the place”. When I asked this question, another girl (G4) also responded. She (G4) explained that there is “good and bad attraction” and the attraction women receive is dependent on the choices
women make in clothing. These responses reflect a mindset amongst adolescent girls that foster a mentality of victim blaming. This could be either protective or detrimental for them if they are in abusive relationships. If they dress modestly, they cannot be accused of fooling around. However, if they have attributed clothing and ghetto-ness to “bad attraction” the possibility exists that the fear of being labeled unrespectable could be more important for social positioning than leaving an unhealthy relationship.

Interestingly, girls expressed anger and annoyance with how boys objectified and judged them based on how their bodies looked in their clothing. Yet, they too contributed to this verbal judgment against other girls who dressed in ways that went against their ideas of respectable clothing.

However, three of the girls (G2, G7, G9) disagreed with these ideas outright and resisted the notion that wearing particular types of clothing defines you as a whore or slut as initially stated by another girl (G4). For example, one of the three girls stated,

First thing, you don’t judge the book by the cover. So, when I see people wearing fancy clothes and short clothes? That means they deh in style right, cause I like deh in style. Now you does got to look good. You won’t like when you walking down the road and people say ‘oh God, look the clothes she wearing and she does want play regular girl, bad girl and she look stink’. Hey some people? If you dress bad and look stink people still trouble, they don’t care if you dress good, you dress fancy people gone still get something to talk about you (G2).

In a Guyanese context, to call someone stink does not just mean that they are dirty or unkempt; it also has connotations of vulgarity and/or being sexually explicit. Not all girls have accepted the notion that to wear specific clothing defines women in a way that
impedes them from being respectable. Respectability for these participants is determined by their own opinions of what is fashionable as well as defining their own independence. However, this is not the dominant view. Rigid ideas of femininity produce intolerance and violence against women and girls who do not conform to the dominant ideology of femininity and feminine respectability. Two girls (G4, G8) illustrated how clothing is related to violence by speaking about a situation where they knew boys who continuously beat a girl for coming to school wearing pants. “…we beat the girl last night because she is a female right and she goes to school and she is supposed to be wearing skirt. They tell she if she don’t start wearing skirt they gone beat she…” (G4).

Parents’ perspectives reflected similar dominant discourses of clothing and respectability, especially while in school uniforms. School uniforms reflect social positioning, especially when the uniform is from a top academic institution. Irrespective of which school the uniform belongs to, there is consensus in Guyana that participating in particular behaviours while in school uniforms is disrespectful. However, some teachers challenged the idea that clothing equates to respectability. A male and female teacher, in the teachers’ focus group, disagreed with one another about one of the case studies I used to facilitate discussion on violence in teen relationships. The male teacher (T3) believed that Shaneeza, the victim of the story, was a “good Muslim girl”. When I asked him to clarify what he meant by stating she was a “good Muslim girl”, he stated that she was not in a relationship with the man who killed her and believed the family. The female teacher then responded to this male teacher and offered this perspective.

T7: I disagree with T3. I strongly believe…first of all, I don’t think you’ve ever seen Muslim porn and then you would realize…
Moderator: Sorry, did you say Muslim porn? (Laughing from participants)

T7: I’m not generalizing, but the thing is, it’s not just about the attire…I think the family knows something, but for the purpose of the public and the khimar – the Muslim attire – they kept it covered.

This teacher is rejecting the idea that clothing can be indicative of respectability by introducing the idea of Muslim pornography in relation to clothing. While her comment perpetuates notions of sexual respectability for women and elements of victim blaming (i.e. Shaneeza had a relationship with her murderer), it demonstrates how dominant perspectives of female respectability prevail and impact ideas of social class by her family. Preserving the image of being respectable within the community was thought to be the reason why her parents may have changed the story.

Female respectability can represent a possibility for social mobility as it provides a way of moving into different social circles without finances. Nevertheless, those who do not conform to dominant ideas can be discriminated against. The dominant perspectives on femininity and feminine respectability objectify women by focusing on what they wear, how they present themselves physically and their sexual activities. Adolescent perspectives are reflective of the surrounding community perspectives and indicate that particular beliefs surrounding women’s rights have not been entirely advanced forward.

**Masculinity Impacted by Normative Femininity**

Not engaging in sexual activity was an important factor in defining and being perceived as respectable women, however, I believe this narrative is also fundamental to defining manhood. When women are viewed as sexually naïve in hetero-normative
relationships the perception exists that girls and women require guidance. This then provides an opportunity for men to carry out the role as innate protector and leader. For example, one teen in the boys focus group stated, “…Ms. certain girls like a person or boy that have experience to guide a relationship because if none of the partner does not have experience, how will the relationship work?” (B4).

When women do not conform to the dominant idea of normative femininity, men struggle to find ways of affirming their manhood out of the narrow confines of normative masculinity and women view other women as not being respectable. In the teachers’ focus group, a male teacher explained his interpretation of a phrase often used in Guyana, which states, *tie the heifer, loose the bull, let the bull run free*. This phrase is predominantly understood as parenting advice. The *heifer* refers to daughters. To *tie the heifer* means to keep daughters sheltered and protected by the family or home from men. The *bull* refers to sons who are given more freedom to do as they please. If someone’s son (bull) get’s another person’s daughter (heifer) it means you as a parent have not kept your girl child protected. However, in the excerpt below, a male teacher provided a different interpretation of the saying by interpreting it as instructions for men who feel threatened by women that do not conform to particular notions of femininity. He stated,

According to my upbringing and culture, why the guys would reduce to saying tie the heifer. What they doing is describing actually a sexual behaviour between man and woman. When it comes to the relationship, they actually telling the man what he needs to do when he meet a young lady and both of them are experienced when it comes to sex (T1).
If women have sexual experience, it eliminates one area in which men should dominate relationships. As this male teacher continues to speak, he indicated that a man then looks for other ways to keep the woman in a submissive state to control her so no other man can take her.

As a ten-year old child, this same male teacher witnessed a woman beaten for not completing her responsibilities as a woman (i.e. cooking for her husband, cleaning, looking after the children). He stated, “In that case I did not see it as violence as how you term it, I just see it was a corrective tool to remedy the situation (laughter). That’s what I see it as…” (T1). Men’s ideas of masculinity are heavily dependent on the complementary roles they believe women should play in relationships. In this situation, violence was not seen as such, because of its necessity to keep women in a submissive state as indicated by this teacher. Witnessing a woman beaten for not completing the tasks women should be responsible for provides some insight into how adolescents’ understanding of violence could be shaped in relation to ideas of normative masculinity and femininity. When violence is used to assert masculinity it is not necessarily considered violence.

The Impact of Race and Class on Masculinity

The notion of masculinity was also explained through race. Several self-identified Afro-Guyanese or Mixed-Guyanese participants believed that Indo-Guyanese families raised their sons with a controlling attitude. A male school official stated,

I know of cases (laughs) they [Indo-Guyanese men] would see a girl and like her, and they feel the girl got to be theirs. If she decides to have a nice relationship and then finds out that it is not enough, as soon as she decides to look another
direction, boom, attack; get violent and kill her because…whereas in an Afro-Guyanese you don’t check on that. We grow up different, so although we [Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese] group up as friends, the way these little things…it’s so different…. (Interview 4, male).

In a different portion of the conversation, the same school official who indicated that Indo-Guyanese families raise their sons differently than Afro-Guyanese families explained the masculinity of Afro-Guyanese men through their ethnicity.

Just look the other day in Kitty [Neighbourhood in Georgetown], he came home, see a man in his room and you see what he did? (laughs). If he had come home and he was working hard and he did not reach food he might have cursed and walk out to go and buy a Chinese [food]. Black men, they don’t like to feel intimidated or challenged. Don’t want to know that another man is better than them. So he went back and killed her then killed himself (Interview 4, Male).

In both cases, irrespective of race, women would be or were killed because of patriarchal ideology. When participants used race to denote differences in explaining masculinity, the similarities between ethnicities were more evident then the differences. For this reason, I believe race or ethnicity being used in these contexts does nothing more than sustain longstanding stereotypes. Ethnicity in these instances is not revealing nuances that would be helpful in meeting the needs of individual communities to promote healthy relationships between men and women.

Furthermore, these ideas are passed down to adolescents. The excerpt presented below demonstrates that adolescents verbalize discourses of race in relation to masculinity and violence as scientific fact. In this section of the focus group, boys were
responding to a question I posed asking if there were any differences in how they saw the stories that were discussed in the focus group, because each girl came from a different ethnicity.

B5: Yes that happens, but I do not think that that should happen Ms., because people are facing the same kind of things and they should be treated equal. We should not look at religious background or ethnic background because we are all human beings and it is the same blood running through our veins.

B1: In today's society they may think that the Africans are more, that the Afro-Guyanese are more violent than the Indo family or whatever, stuff like that.

Moderator: Anyone else has any other idea or thoughts? Okay um, so, you were saying B5 that, it should be equal because we all bleed the same blood, but if let’s say you are Afro-Guyanese or Indo-Guyanese or Amerindian, is there a difference in the way in which you experience violence in Guyana?

B5: Mostly Indians Ms. they drink poison. It seems that when you are Indian the best way is suicide.

B1: For Africans, I think they would kill their partner. They just kill. They might not. I think scientists say that East Indians are more likely to kill themselves, but the Africans would kill their partners or whatever. They would just get angry and kill out the partner, but the East Indians would just kill themselves.

B5: I agree with B1 Ms. African people, we are just stupid (laughter). No offense, Ms. they don't know how to control their aggression. Ms. They just want to do what their mind tells them, they don't have a mindset. That is why most times Indian people are right because African people, they don't think.
B2: From the mixed perspective, they would talk around the problem. Anytime.

Moderator: Who would talk about the problem?

B2: The mixed. Like a mixed person, they would talk around the situation. Work things out and they wouldn't let anger take them over.

Moderator: Okay just to get it all together. You are saying that they would talk around it and they wouldn't let…?

B2: Anger. The anger. They would not let the anger take the best of them.

I question participant five’s true belief in his comments in this exchange. He started off by providing the politically correct answer that “we are all the same”, but after I probed a bit more to understand what their real thoughts were, he verbalized a self-hatred discourse in a nonchalant manner. Participant one, two, and five spoke with such ease in expressing colonial ideas of race, which can inadvertently impact their views of masculinity.

Race was not used to explain or define femininity as notably as it was employed to explain masculinity. Irrespective of a woman’s race, patriarchy and sexuality had greater impact on how women understood their femininity and how men defined them. Only one school official (Interview 4, male) referred to race to explain why women would be abused in Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese relationships. However, these reasons related back to a woman’s sexuality as they were focused on reproduction and infidelity.

Social class and economic position was also used to understand how men assert themselves and define their masculinity. As one male teacher stated, social class is also related to race.
A man likes to feel macho, like to feel control, like to feel value, he love to feel wanted and he love to feel as though he is a king. In most cases, especially in Guyana, because of a lot of short comings with our males, especially in the African community, when it comes to money and so on, they don’t reach that position often – meaning they don’t feel that value often so they always have to fight for that masculine role. They have to do things in order to attain that role and I think because of doing to attain that role, violence will be a factor in that also, because to maintain that role certain things are expected of you, and the women normally place that kind of expectation of you and when you cannot measure up to that expectation you will express it differently (T1).

Another male teacher (T8), agreed with this teacher’s perspective. Male school officials also expressed similar sentiments towards male students who challenged male authority more than female authority on school grounds to assert their masculinity.

Rigid gender roles for men and women create a starting point for unhealthy relationships. Participants’ perspectives provide insight into dominant discourses of patriarchy that intersects with race and class. In most cases adolescents have accepted narratives that perpetuate normative femininity and masculinity. Boys are less critically aware than girls in their assessment of how ideas on femininity and masculinity impact their lives. This is not surprising as the current gender arrangement is patriarchal and therefore more beneficial for boys.
**Domestic Violence: A Way of Relating that is Sometimes Acceptable**

I was in a street where a woman used to run out of the house steady. Because of licks [getting hit or beaten] for stupid things, He comes home intoxicated; blows…*(Interview 4, Male)*

Witnessing domestic violence as a community member was common for most participants and was spoken about through personal experiences of either knowing someone who was experiencing abuse in their relationship, seeing their neighbours experience it (as interview four has described), or seeing domestic violence transpire between strangers.

In the focus group with adolescent boys, one teen stated, “There are some parents living on my street that call their children stupid and say they are ugly and some others call their daughters whores, some fathers say ‘you will be a whore just like your mother’…” *(B4)*. These accounts reveal that not only is violence visible at times, but that those who are inflicting violence are not always concerned with hiding it.

Therefore, in this study, I consider domestic violence as also being a form of community violence that challenges the public-private dichotomy that is often discussed in conversations on domestic violence. By this I mean, participants describe a more complex and fluid relationship between the public and private elements of domestic violence where public and private cannot be so easily separated, as a dichotomy would suggest.

**Conceiving Domestic Violence Through Race and Class**

Community location and ethnicity were given as reasons for why domestic violence occurs more in some communities than others. For example, when asked
whether the race of the student impacts how they (the teachers) relate to their students in the teachers’ focus group, two of the teachers spoke about their experiences of witnessing domestic violence in their community and provided the locations of communities as important to the acceptability of violence. In this excerpt two female teachers are responding to a comment another female teacher (T6) made about working with students and disagreed with each other on whether ethnicity is more important than class in determining whether violence is acceptable. They stated,

T7: In an East Indian home, because I come from the country, it’s a little bit, somewhat a cultural thing and they’re a bit more acceptable…I would have had friends who were sent back to their husbands even though they begged to leave and they [East Indians] culture their children that way…

T5: In support of what T6 said it might be more acceptable in certain communities, not just ethnicity but the community, because certainly the East Indian in Albouystown would not accept her husband beating her up (laughter in the group) or the East Indian in Sophia or Ruimveldt; they [Women in these communities] wouldn’t accept it. So it’s really not ethnicity, it’s community. It’s how the community would see things, that’s how they would put it over.

In this exchange, the first teacher provided her past experience of living in a rural community with Indo-Guyanese families. Her explanation of Indo-Guyanese friends being sent back to their husbands and stating that, “they culture their children that way” points toward an explanation of violence in relationships based on race. However, the second teacher challenged this belief by focusing on the area where women lived. She believed that Indo-Guyanese women who lived in certain areas of Guyana were less
accepting of violence in relationships, making location more important than ethnicity. Albouystown, Sophia, and Ruimveldt are predominantly low socio-economic neighbourhoods in Guyana that have reputations of being rougher areas. In one sense, her explanation indicated that she believed women in poor neighbourhoods accepted violence less in their relationships than those who live in higher socio-economic neighbourhoods. However, her explanation can also create additional challenges when women from lower socio-economic neighbourhoods want their experiences of violence to be acknowledged but are not legitimated because of limited ideas of who and where violence in relationships can occur. Additionally, the second teacher’s comment (T5), also points out that the norms within the community can impact the behaviour that occurs within intimate relationships.

This however, is not the only perspective. Not all participants believed that violence is experienced differently in Guyana due to one’s ethnicity or race. Some parents, teachers, and most adolescents did not feel that race contributed to how they experienced violence. They believed that because Guyanese people now live and work in neighbourhoods that are mixed, race does not play a factor in experiences of violence.

**How Domestic Violence is Approached in the Community**

I grew up in an environment, in a village where it was for [domestic violence], and sometimes against [domestic violence]. If the society viewed it as though you’re taking advantage or the person doesn’t deserve it or whatever the case is. But I’ve witnessed cases where…um…the persons in the community say, encourage the man…beat she more (T1).
In this excerpt, this male teacher described the community’s role in domestic violence and demonstrates that in some cases, the community sees domestic violence as justifiable. This example, (along with others in this section) reveals that not only is the community aware of the violence that occurs within intimate encounters, but that the community has an active role in encouraging or discouraging the behaviour. For this reason, I see domestic violence as sometimes including elements of community violence because the community at times is aware of the abuse that is occurring and can play an active role in whether it continues or ceases. However, there is no consensus on whether violence is considered “good” or “bad” and this is reflected in parents, school officials, and adolescents positions when explaining their decisions as a third party witnessing domestic violence.

Contending with violence as a third party is an inevitable experience that many participants discussed when speaking about domestic violence. In this section, participants spoke about the various ways they approach domestic violence as an outsider and also the social institutions that provide information and support or a lack there-of to deal with violence.

The decision to intervene in a violent situation between intimate partners displayed two opposing perspectives. Some participants did not want to get involved in fights between partners believing that they would experience persecution by the couple once they resolved their conflict, while other participants felt compelled to intervene in the violence. One mother stated,

In my neighbourhood there are some violence, but you try not to get involved because they always end up back together and you does end up on the outside as
the bad one. ‘She said this, she told me this’ and you gone talk to the boy or the girl and they gonna end up telling one another and then when you passing, they throwing words you know? So you tend to not get involved (P2).

However, another young mother in the same discussion spoke extensively about trying to encourage a neighbour’s daughter to leave an abusive situation with her child’s father. This mother was concerned because she would see this young woman coming out of her house with bruises frequently. She stated,

The mom [of the young woman being abused] said she doesn’t have time with her because she doesn’t listen to her. I said, whenever you twist it or turn it it’s your child. Because I have a daughter and I don’t like that. So, I would sit and speak to the young lady and she will say, ‘o.k. aunty, I’m not gonna encourage it [encourage ‘it’ means encourage the violence to continue in her relationship]’ (P3).

This mother felt compelled to intervene and speak with the young woman to help her because of what she repeatedly saw occurring. The dismissal of the young girl by the neighbour’s mother may have also played a part in this mother’s attempting to help her neighbour. Based on her comments, people who witness violence in relationships may be more inclined to intervene depending on the relationships they have with both the abuser and the person being abused and how they empathize with the situation in relation to their own lives. This mother related to the neighbour as she would her own daughter. The interest and care demonstrated by her illustrates the closeness that is present between some community members and the genuine desire to look out for one another when violence occurs. This was also the case for a male school official who stated,
…I have some friends that…not that they used to beat them, but they used to say things and I would talk to them. Get another way, a nonviolent way of resolving things. I would even go as far as saying, Budday, if you think you can’t live with the woman, why you going on with that?...(Interview 4, male).

Adolescents’ perspectives on intervening in issues of violence also reflect the inconsistencies that are seen in the community. In my discussions with adolescent girls, one teen stated,

If a man is harassing a woman or let’s say on the street, most people will look at it and turn their faces and say they wouldn’t want to be involved in it because it doesn’t concern them. I’ll say that 59% of the people just ignore it and leave it there (G3).

Her estimated statistic demonstrates that in her perception even though violence in relationships is quite public with regards to location, the incident itself is still considered a private issue by a majority of people. This perspective was also present in people’s perceptions of structural institutions such as the justice system.

**Domestic Violence: A Public and Private Issue**

In my conversations with participants, they spoke quite extensively about their lack of confidence in the police and judicial systems to address violence. Teachers, parents, and adolescents’ described experiences where incidents of domestic violence were not treated as legitimate concerns that police addressed when participants or people they knew sought help. One female teacher stated,

…When you go to the police station, they laugh it off and say, ‘so wa happen? Is yuh husband…why y’all don’t go home and make up’ or ‘don’t worry with she,
she gon give the long, long report and next thing you know she gon home back with the man, don’t bother with she’. So even if you’re serious, they just brush you off and you just have to go back into the situation and accept it…(T6).

Similarly, a mother in the parents’ focus group spoke about her lack of assistance when attempting to obtain help from the police. After the mother explained that her child's father had encouraged her (the mother) to make a report at the police station against her current boyfriend who threatened to kill her while sharpening his cutlass (machete), she stated,

I go at the station, till now the police ain’t come. But, I said ‘if is any murder, y’all gone make sure y’all get a vehicle fuh reach’. Anyhow he [the police officer] said, ‘in case anything, call.’ So how I gon call when I done dead? How I gon pick up the phone to call? (laughter in the group)…. (P3).

While this comment was amusing to some participants, her statement demonstrates the lack of resources available to the police, (she knew the police did not have enough vehicles to investigate her case) when she stated that they would only find a vehicle once a murder occurred. Moreover, it also revealed the absurdity and lack of seriousness by the police officer that dismissed this mother by telling her “in case anything, call” when she has reported a threat of murder. Adolescent girls also told similar stories of women they knew who sought help from police and received little satisfaction.

Adolescent boys and male participants explained that women are not alone in receiving little help from police. Boys and men indicated that men’s reports of violence are not taken seriously either. Rather, they are ridiculed for allowing a woman to assault
them and are essentially told to *man up*. Women are also aware of men’s experiences with trying to seek help from police and stated that women get more sympathy then men for abuse, however sympathy in the majority of cases does not result in significant help in their situation.

These examples illustrate that women and men experience structural violence when attempting to seek help from the police to address domestic violence. Moreover, adolescent girls are in a more precarious situation. For example, one mother described a situation where she sought help from police for a man who was relentless in pursuing her underage daughter. When she went to make a report at the police station, she was informed that the person pursuing her daughter was a police officer.

Even though Guyana has extensive laws against domestic violence, participants’ experiences reflect an understandable distrust in this system. The experiences above highlight that accessing police services for help can at times place participants in positions to be exploited or ignored, even though participants’ acknowledge the police as necessary to stop violence. Moreover, the police was not the only institution that posed challenges for community members. Parents also shared with the group the lack of sensitivity and understanding they have encountered from support group leaders. For example, a mother stated,

Some of them say to people, ‘well I can’t make the woman come or I can’t make the man come’. Sometimes somebody may go to them, a probation officer, to get the person to come and sit down, ‘well I can’t make the woman come, I can’t make the man come’. And they send that person with a notice to serve on the abuser. Now tell me, tell me how under this sun that can be logical? (P1).
This parent expresses her perception of the frustration felt by those who seek help from social services only to be placed in a more precarious situation that could deter people from obtaining the help they need. Teachers also indicated that even though anti-violence organizations have the best intentions to help women leave violent relationships, best intentions do not translate into the financial support needed for families. One female teacher stated,

…of course the community does not accept violence but although they give a list of organizations, some of those organizations don’t even have financial backing to support the women, so the women are thinking yes I’m getting beaten up but where will I go if I leave this man especially if I have three or four children? (T5).

Participants attempt to address violence within relationships in non-violent ways by seeking help from various institutions. However, the perspective that domestic violence is seen as a private issue by those in positions to provide help, coupled with limited financial resources have created scenarios where community members feel abandoned when attempting to tackle violence.

**Domestic Violence Permeates Everyday Living**

While collecting data for five weeks in Guyana, I encountered many newspaper and news reports with stories of women who had been killed by their partners. Reflecting on my time in Guyana, I recognized that having lived through my own experience with violence and being a researcher studying violence probably made me more aware of the stories that were published. However, I questioned how cognizant I would remain of this level of violence had I not had my own previous experiences with violence and lived this
In the excerpt below, a female teacher recognized that sensationalism often drove media reports on stories of violence.

In a lot of these stories that make the news, they didn’t just wake up one morning and say, ‘hey I’m going to kill this girl today.’ These things – there are a lot of events leading up to the death of these [victims]– but those are the stories you won’t ever hear because they are covered or swept under the rug. Because of the shame again, nobody wants to say anything, nobody is saying anything, nobody is getting any help…(T4).

These limited or single story narratives of violence in relationships in the media provide a false idea that only murder or extreme violence (e.g. stabbing with limbs partially or fully severed) defines violence. In this sense, it is understandable the she finishes her comment by indicating that “nobody is saying anything”. Because without media reporting also covering other forms of violence, it creates the perception that “nobody is saying anything”.

Similarly, a male teacher (T3) believed that hardships experienced by community members resulted in a lack of conversations on many social issues, not only violence. Adolescent boys expressed this same viewpoint in our conversations together. Four out of five boys who participated in the discussions indicated this to be the only time they spoke about violence in relationships or had someone speak to them about violence in relationships.

When I discussed domestic violence with teachers and adolescent girls, they revealed that violence to some degree is acceptable, but exceptional violence is
condemned. A female teacher provided an example of what she hears after fatal stories in the news. She stated,

> What I would have heard people saying in society is when a woman is being murdered is ‘owe man [phrase that expresses pity or empathy], they di getting they problems but he shouldn’t a kill she [they were having their problems but he should not have killed her]’. So it means that the violence is accepted but it shouldn’t have ended in murder; they should have worked it out (T6).

“Getting they problems” is a phrase I have heard used many times in Guyana, but does not necessarily mean violence. It could mean a host of relationship problems from minor arguments to infidelity, which essentially hides the issue of abuse. If “getting they problems”, is the language used to indicate an abusive situation it lessens the seriousness of the situation and its potential fatal outcome.

Speaking with adolescent girls also provided insight into how the community speaks about forms of domestic violence that are not covered in the sensationalized media stories. For example, one girl stated,

> but going around the place I hear big people, females talking with each other (pause) well (pause) overheard (laughter in group) females speaking with each other saying they don’t feel loved if their husbands don’t hit them. Seriously, ‘me don’t think he love me cause he don’t nack [hit] me’ (hearing laughter amongst the group of girls)…. (G1).

The girls in the focus group attempted to justify this thinking through the private sphere by stating that women enjoy the intimacy that follows the violence. “… Probably they like the partner hitting them because they like the make up after (loud laughter in
group). You ever heard the song make up to break up?” (G1). This comment indicates that there is a connection between intimacy and violence in which one cannot occur without the other. Violence can therefore be considered a form of intimacy to some women within the community and a necessity within a relationship.

Hearing these discussions in the community and creating an opportunity for adolescent girls and boys to discuss violence, provided some insight into how they process and speak about the information they are exposed to. Adolescent girls are questioning what they hear, which are predominantly patriarchal ideas of men and women’s roles more so than boys. One girl stated,

Ms. violence in Guyana to me seems as something normal to everybody because people would say once I don’t put my hand on she, she won’t get respect for me and I don’t know what sense that make. While some people do like the hitting, certain people like myself would think it’s something wrong to do and they would not want to be around that person anymore to know that well... that person love you and they’re hitting at you and you’re just dating much less when you’re married, what could they do to you? (G7).

But, conflicting ideas of violence result in adolescents questioning whether violence is good or bad which speaks to its pervasiveness and extremeness.

…even if violence is being spoken about, it has to be in what way? It is in a bad way or a good way? Because some people will think it as something good and some people will say is something bad. So most people will leave it unsaid then speak about it (G7).
Violence in intimate relationships is being discussed in Guyanese society but often times, only in extreme forms. Determining whether violence is “good” or “bad” as one adolescent (G7) stated is central to whether domestic violence or any other form of violence is spoken about and how the society chooses to speak about it. Media outlets play a part in how violence is perceived and spoken about based on what stories make the news or newspapers. By continually reporting a majority of sensational stories many other forms of domestic violence are delegitimized and these stories can contribute to the wider community not always considering less extreme experiences as violence.

Adolescents are surrounded by violence in the communities where they live and grow. Conflicting messages of violence are pervasive in Guyanese culture, and these messages are reflected in the perspectives and opinions of adolescents.

**Dating Discourses for Adolescents**

To this point, I have presented how masculinity and femininity are understood from the perspectives of parents, teachers, school officials, and adolescents. I have also described how these roles contribute to the experiences of domestic violence in the community as well as adolescents’ perspectives and experiences of violence in their social environments. In this section, I will address the dominant discourses on dating which are shaped by dominant discourses on masculinity and femininity as well as domestic violence. For adults, the dominant discourse is centered on dating being unacceptable for adolescents. This is not surprising considering the prevailing ideas of gender roles and respectability, especially for girls. However, another perspective exists. Most teenagers and some adults believe dating is acceptable during adolescence.
No Dating Discourse

Most adults expressed in my interview and focus group conversations, expressed a strong opinion regarding adolescents not dating. Parents, teachers, and school officials provided similar arguments that opposed dating based on three main factors: first, that school should be first priority, secondly, adolescents are too naïve and immature to enter intimate relationships, and lastly, that dating is dangerous.

School should be complete priority.

It is understandable that adults encourage teenagers to focus on their education. Parents, school officials, and teachers each expressed that education should always be the first priority because it creates future security and economic independence. When speaking about the importance of education in the future, it was mostly directed at girls, as adults felt girls were more influenced to drop out of school for relationships, especially when those relationships led into motherhood. A male school official stated,

…and I tell the girls, I love independent women. Women who can stand up on their own irrespective of what. You hook up, you drop out of school and get married and so. You cannot leave the abusive relationship because if you leave you have nothing to turn to (Interview 4).

A mother in the parents’ focus group also related education with the ability to leave a relationship. Her description reflects normative beliefs of women’s roles. She told her daughter,

You know boys start to like you first, but one thing you have to understand. That at your age education is paramount, because if you don’t take your education the very boy that like you now, when he puts you in a home and you can’t cook, you
can’t wash, you can’t clean and you can’t work for your own money, he’s going to become tired of you…. (P1).

While the belief is that these types of encouragement promote independence and confidence in women, in these contexts it does neither. Promoting independence by relating it back to women escaping a relationship or the inability to perform rigid gender roles conveys to girls that women’s independence is still not their own decision, but rather comes at the price of not conforming to dominant gender roles. These explanations oversimplify the importance of intimate relationships to social position and women’s learned identity in relation to men.

However, students rejected the notion that relationships would distract them from their studies. Boys conveyed that relationships could act as support for academics if the partner is also academically inclined. Girls were not as optimistic that this would occur. I asked the girls how they would respond to adults who said it’s difficult for teenagers to balance school and relationships. Two girls (G8, G6) responded stating, “Ms. some boys does want ya skip school fuh go with them [some boys want you to skip school to go with them]. Ms. and if you say ‘me ain’t want go’ that lead you back right again to violence Ms. cause they would…” Another girl then started to speak,

It’s not always difficult cause as an adolescent if you have a right partner, like you both would encourage each other to focus on you schooling (Hear G8 saying – where you finding that person?). If we focus we could have a better life when we grow up (G6).
Participant eight’s comment of “where you finding that person?” separates the ideal and reality of dating relationships and justifies adults’ concern that students will be unnecessarily distracted by relationships.

I had my own questions about adults instilling a lone focus on education as a dating deterrent. In one sense the reality that education provides greater opportunities and builds skills that most times can support being self-sufficient is inarguable. However, I wanted to gain a better understanding about how a singular focus on education is helpful for everyone. I posed this question to a male school official,

…I hear you speaking a lot about relating to them and how this in turn impacts their education. But, in our discussions we’ve also talked about the fact that there are some kids that really aren’t or don’t seem to be that invested in school. So then how do you get through to a kid, whose focus is not education – that this relationship is going to affect your education?

The school official responded and said, “…well I tell you what, some cases you win and some you lose” (Interview 3, male). In theory, presenting education as the complete priority is ideal as it unlocks some of the answers to independence and adulthood. However, for many adolescents who are not proficient in schoolwork for various reasons, the push for school as a deterrent may have the opposite effect and encourage intimate relationships as an alternative pathway into adulthood.

**Adolescents are physically and emotionally naïve.**

A focus on school and education was at times related to the perception that teenagers were physically and emotionally naïve. Parents and teachers believed that adolescence as a life stage is tumultuous and challenging enough without including
intimate relationships to their lives. Based on my observations on school grounds and hearing the stories of the living environments many teenagers came from, I do not believe naivety is afforded in many communities. Teenagers may be personally inexperienced in some aspects of relationships, but they are knowledgeable and deeply aware of their surroundings and the relationship examples they witness on a daily basis. One female teacher stated,

… we want them to dress like a child, but they are really not a child. They are adolescents who will soon be adults going into the world of work and we still have them like children running around in this place. This is why we can’t accept when they get into relationships – because we still see them as children. We don’t see them as adolescents with hormones and decisions to make and emotions; we keep stifling them in this place. The whole Guyanese society like that (T5).

This comment is important as it explains the added difficulty teenagers face as they transition through adolescence. By this teacher stating, ‘we keep stifling them in this place’ she is explaining the lack of support for teenagers from various community members as they attempt to transition between childhood and adulthood. A constant perspective that teenagers are ill equipped with skills to be successful in relationships and a lack of guidance from the community creates a scenario that poses numerous challenges.

**Sex is dangerous.**

In my conversations with adults, dating was often spoken about as sex. Therefore, dating was considered to be dangerous by adults and should be avoided. Parents and teachers described dating through the possibilities of pregnancy, sexually
transmitted infections (STI’s), and violence. These concerns are not unfounded as
Guyana has one of the highest reported rates of teenage pregnancies, HIV, and domestic
violence for the Caribbean region. However, STI’s and domestic violence can occur at
any life stage. The focus on pregnancy and STI’s primarily for girls reflects the sexual
respectability that is expected in normative femininity. A sole concentration on the
physical outcomes of these dating dangers lessens the importance of the stigma
associated with teen pregnancies, STI’s and domestic violence. The stigma and shame
associated with these situations can result in people being excluded or shunned from their
usual social settings.

Adolescents also expressed an awareness of having sex as a dating danger. Boys
and girls verbalized the same possible outcomes as adults and point the blame at each
other (as in the opposite sex) for the cause of negative outcomes, such as STI’s. Girls
spoke with a greater distrust for boys than boys did for girls. Two adolescent girls
provide their opinions on what adolescent boys want from relationships in the following
corneration.

G8: Ms. some a them men or them young boys interested in right now is fi geh
yuh disease, geh you a belly, and sex yuh.” [Give you a disease, get you pregnant,
or have sex with you]
Moderator: O.k.
G9: Most men is want sex from you and when you ask them, like, if you get
pregnant or anything - they does tell you that is you decision, or they is tell yuh
throw it away or whatever you want to do.” [Most men want to have sex, but say
that it is the girls responsibility to decide whether to have a child or not. They want girls to have abortions.]

Throughout the discussions on dating, adolescents were able to indicate both the negative and positive aspects of relationships, however, most adults spoke from a completely negative perspective on dating. When the reports of women and girls killed in their relationships are so frequent throughout the country, it is understandable that some parents’ fears would be intensified resulting in a perspective of no dating. However, not all relationships involve violence. Therefore, I wanted to explore other reasons for this mindset. As a young male guardian will describe below, many adults enter the discussion on dating with an acknowledgement of their previous mistakes and a desire to prevent their child(ren) from going down the same path.

…We tend to go to the extreme, we go to the worst case scenario because I guess maybe it’s a scare tactic, so you go for the worst, but there is a general stigma so it’s not something that is heavily discussed and if it is discussed it’s not among the masses. One of the things the children might tell you or even the parents might say; ‘You too young for man’ or something like that - ‘What you looking for man for, now?’ It really reflects the journey of the parent, which is why in the beginning I said for me, one of the most difficult things as a parent is your personal integrity because a lot of the times, the things you are asking them to do, we may have failed at. It is…the driving force behind our parenting a lot of times is fear; fear of a recurring issue. So because fear is the motivator, we tend to go to the extreme (Interview 5, male).
This young male guardian provides insight into the complexity of parent’s decisions on how to parent. In their decisions to prevent dating, parents consider their own past experiences, how the community views sex, and how to teach and promote a relationship that they may not have experienced. His comment details that fear is not only driven by what their adolescent might experience, but more so, how that experience will be viewed in the community. Even though parents and teachers speak from a position of fear, adolescents are resisting the no dating discourse.

**Adolescents resisting the ‘No Dating’ discourse.**

Teachers are aware that adolescents find ways of resisting the no dating discourse using extra-curricular educational activities to socialize. To help improve their grades and performance on the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate, many Guyanese adolescents attend what is referred to as *lessons*. Lessons are privately owned after school programs that provide more education outside of school hours. Teachers in the teachers’ focus group believe that students use *lessons* to create opportunities to date and socialize. In the following excerpt, one female teacher was responding to another female teacher’s comment that adolescents are not focusing on academics when they attend lessons. Rather, they are concerned with the boy or girl of their interest. This female teacher stated,

Going back to the same lessons, only as recent as last week two students were suspended because they were having oral sex. They went a bit early to lessons. When we would think that they went to learn – well it depends on what they went to learn (laughter)...now this whole lessons is all about glamour and
entertainment and socializing. This has nothing to do with academics and so on… (T4).

Adolescents have used the topic that is presented as a deterrent for dating to cunningly create spaces to explore it. Therefore, not all adolescents accept the ideas presented to them about dating that are equated with negative outcomes. Rather, adolescents are dating in spaces that are hidden in plain sight.

**Dating Discourse**

Through my conversations with teenagers and observing the interactions between students on school grounds, it was clear to me that adolescents are dating and those who are not dating are exposed to relationship experiences through friends. Adolescents spoke about the emotional and physical aspects of their dating relationships which were centered around defining love, the context of presumed sexual contact, relationships not being exclusive, resolving conflict in relationships, and understanding how to support each other. They believed that the adolescent years were to practice and experience different kinds of relationships to understand what they wanted in the future and how to manage relationships as adults. There was no consensus on any topic in the adolescent boy or girl focus groups on the issues listed above. Participants challenged one another’s beliefs on each topic, which stimulated rich discussion. Some parents and teachers also provided their perspectives on dating and challenged the dominant discourse by acknowledging the reality of adolescents dating.
Defining love.

Adolescent girls and boys spoke about their uncertainty in defining love. Both stated that they did not know what love was. Adolescent girls chose to refer to a biblical definition stating,

G1: …going to church and reading the bible, they say love is patient; love is kind, love is so on and so on…

G4: Love is forgiving; love is…let’s just say that love is not anything a person can say overnight…

G3: …Many teenagers tend to don’t know what love is, that is what OUR parents should teach us…

G7: To what G1 said Ms. the way she describes it, it sounds like love is everything good, but when you marry Ms. they say through sickness and health, good and bad. So love is not just something good.

Teenage girls are aware of characteristics often associated with love, however, participant three’s comment indicates that adolescent girls are searching for more answers from parents who may not provide this information because it is not spoken about.

When girls attempted to understand what behaviours were associated with love in relationships they questioned whether love is expressed through jealousy, control, or physical violence. As some girls described what expressions of love they saw in teen relationships other girls rejected those ideas if they deviated from the attributes described initially with the bible verse. For example, one of the girls (G2) explained to the group
that if a boy loves a girl and then finds out she is cheating, he could hit her, but she has to go back because she loves him. Another girl then responded. Ms. I disagree with G2 because she said once he really loves you and hear that you’re cheating on him, Ms. he won’t just come and hit you like that, he would ask questions and get to the bottom of it to see if it’s true or not – if he really loves you (G7).

Adolescent girls’ definition of love is confused by relationships that exhibit violence, jealousy, or control. However, while some girls are inclined to accept these behaviours as love, the group dynamics provided opportunities for other perspectives to be heard that promoted healthier ideas of how to define love.

When boys spoke about love it was from the perspective of being hurt before and then rejecting any sort of strong feelings toward girls. When a younger participant who was in fourth form (equivalent of grade 11) spoke about loving one person, the rest of boys who were in fifth form (equivalent of grade 12) told him they used to feel the same way he did before they experienced heartbreak. One boy stated,

In third form, I fell in love Ms. and my heart get broken and since then that’s when I start living lawless. I am not committed to anyone because I am not ready for that. I’m not ready for a relationship Ms. I am in fifth form and I do not know what’s love (B5).

Boys did not break down what attributes and behaviours they believed showed love. However, participant five’s comment indicates that boys are not prepared to deal with the inevitable emotions that occur when ending relationships. Another adolescent boy (B2) also spoke about changing after heartbreak, but described himself as a ‘lover
boyn prior to the relationships ending. This means that adolescent boys do have ideas of love and behave in particular ways that express love, but those ideas can become misguided with past experiences of ending relationships.

Boys and girls did agree that some girls are not receiving the amount of love they need from their parents and therefore search for that love in dating relationships and sex. Both boys and girls believed that parents play an important role in the dating relationships teenagers enter into and that if they were more open to teenagers having relationships it would protect girls from being hurt. It is unclear what impact teenagers believe that a lack of love or attention from parent to boys affects their dating relationships as parents’ roles were mostly focused on the impact it had on girls financially and emotionally.

**Dating is financial support for girls.**

Adults are aware that girls can experience poverty differently than boys by being taught that their financial security is dependent on their relationships with men. This creates precarious situations requiring girls to seek financial help. These circumstances are often caused by the gendered poverty of women. A female teacher stated,

…sometimes the children would tell you plain, ‘Ms. (kiss teeth) my mother don’t even care if I got a boyfriend’, and they wouldn’t even say boyfriend, they would say ‘if I got a man’. My mother tell me I gaffa find money for my school clothes’ [my mother tells me I have to get my own money for my school clothes]. Ahhh fine, as though it just falls on the ground and whatever, you know? (Interview 1, female)
Considering these comments by a student to her teacher provides insight into dating relationships being a form of survival. It also inextricably links the education of girls to exploitative relationships with boys and/or men that are caused by poverty. Therefore, encouraging girls to pursue their education to prevent the onset of dating as presented as the main deterrent in the no dating discourse may not be a possibility. In the girls’ focus group, one teen provided her perspective on why these types of relationships occur.

Ms. I think that some men deh with girls just because of sex. They want to go between your foot and some women encourage guys to do that because some of their parents don’t look after them. And they go and date a guy just because they want the money to come to school or provide things for them – just because their parents didn’t give them what they want. So they have to go with men because they don’t have a choice. They want what they want (G9).

While there is a clear difference between wanting and needing certain things, I believe this adolescent girl using the language of want is still in the context of what some girls need. Providing the example of girls needing money to get to school in actuality represents a necessity and not a want even though that was the language used. Moreover, when I asked the girls how many of them knew someone who had been in this type situation, most of them replied yes.

Participant nine’s comment about men wanting girls for sex was also expressed by several other girls. In what seemed to be a competition between girls to see who had or knew someone that had dated an older man, girls indicated that teenage girls had dated men as old as 70 years old. When I listened to the girls explaining that girls as young as
twelve were in relationships with older men, I had to intervene. I stated that a teen girl should not be in any relationship with a grown man because they are taking advantage of them. One of the girls then responded and stated, “It doesn’t really matter about the age when you in love” (G10). I found this comment troubling because in one sense it could mean that girls are not always able to separate their understanding of love from being exploited. However, teenage girls may understand being protected as love and not exploitation by these men, in cases where they may not have any other support. While other group members challenged many other comments on several topics, this particular comment went unchallenged by everyone. This could mean a widespread acceptability and normalcy of this perspective.

The discussion of financial support in the boys’ focus group differed from the girls, as they felt pressured to support girls financially. Boys spoke about searching for girls who only wanted to date them for who they were and not what they could provide, as they did not believe they were in a position to provide financially for anyone while attending secondary school. They termed those girls who are in relationships for money as “gold diggers, sluts, and whores”. However, boys did acknowledge that girls believe they had to have sex in return for financial help, but one boy (B4) did not understand why girls felt this way. Three teen boys then interjected and provided their take on the situation.

B5: I think it’s because they feel that all boys are like that. Because they are accustomed that when a boy gives them something, they have to give back something in return.
B2: Or maybe, in the relationship before the present person that is what they used to do, so it’s like something instilled in them.

B1: But I think, in today’s society it has an impact on them that if a man or a boy does something for you…you have to do something for them.

These boys separated themselves from being the persons who demand or expect something in return for providing financial help, but believed that most boys behave in that manner.

**The context of presumed sexual contact.**

Adolescent boys and girls shared that sexual contact was presumed in relationships. Both boys and girls felt pressure to have sex with a partner of the opposite sex. Some boys stated that they have sex to be more connected with the person when they can’t communicate verbally together.

B5: Ms. it could be a long time that you and your partner have not been communicating and when you see them Ms. you make sure you do it first to get a connection and it involves that.

Moderator: Okay, so B5 if I understand you correctly, you’re saying that sometimes you are not always communicating well but physically you can communicate better than when you communicate through talking?

B5: Yes.

Moderator: B2 you agree. But then…hum…interesting. I guess what I would want to know is how do you get to the point of being physical that is so intimate—or maybe not for you guys, so how do you skip talking to go to sex?
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B2: I mean more likely it doesn’t really be the boy. But it be the girl who would be pushing it on to you. Sometimes you wouldn’t even have it in your head. You, like you know, come over to watch a movie and boom – they push it on you.

Moderator: Okay. So why do you think they do that?

B2: Because sometimes they think they are missing that part of affection in the relationship.

Participant four and five agreed with participant two’s comments that girls are often the ones who initiate sex. Participant two further explained that when he listens to girls who are his friends speak about sex they feel left out of conversations if they are not sexually active. Whereas boys believed that it is ultimately a girl’s decision to have sex, some girl’s comments reveal that they believe they have no choice when it comes to sex in relationships.

Some girls felt pressured to have sex with their boyfriends from other girls to secure their relationships. One girl stated, “…Yea many times she was like telling me…know what to do with him because yuh got to know fuh make love with him, know how to have him enjoy him in bed and so on in order to keep him” (G10). Another girl then commented.

I agree with G10 because I’ve heard it a lot of times. Girls talking (kiss teeth) ‘girl, if you in do this or you in do that you cyan keep he [If you don’t do this or you don’t do that, you can’t keep him]. If he want yuh suck, suck he…if he want get into you, you do it girl. (Hear P8 saying ‘not this mouth’) Because that the only way you keep you boyfriend nowadays, you gone allow some stupid girl fuh
come and do wah you gah do and take away you man from you girl? As fuh me? I will do that fuh keep me man. I’ve heard it (G1).

Many girls do not believe that they have a choice with regards to sex if they want to remain in a relationship. Not only are they being told that they have to have sex to keep their men, but they have to make sure he is pleased and satisfied. These comments also point out that relationships amongst many teenagers are centered on unhealthy exchanges of sex for possible social inclusion and status and are poor starting points for the understanding of healthy relationships. Furthermore, sex is not always consensual. One teen described a scenario with a boyfriend.

Ms. for instance, you in a car and you and this person talking. Take for instance the person pick you up to carry you to school or somewhere and the person say ‘hey me and you deh and me and you got to do this’ [me and you deh means you and I are dating or together], and you know, ‘No. Me in wan do it’ [I don’t want to do it], and they carry you to do it and you can’t do nothing (laughter in the group. Someone says ‘Well da is rape!) (G8).

This adolescent girl felt that she did not have a choice in the situation because he was providing for her financially and he told her she had to do it. Girls are not always confident enough to negotiate sexual relations in relationships, especially when the partner is more financially stable. Additionally, adolescent girls may feel they have to oblige sexual requests to ensure their safety with that partner.

Adolescents have created their own understandings of how sex factors into a relationship. Without guidance and further information on sex and relationships from adults to provide some balance of information girls and boys receive, teenagers continue
to perpetuate unsafe and unhealthy relationship choices and reinforce power dynamics reflective of patriarchy.

Some parents and teachers are open to discussing sex with their students and children and were reflective on the role they play in sex occurring. For example, a male teacher in the teachers’ focus group provided his perspective on the issue of sex during adolescence.

At first when I started teaching, I would say it is wrong to have sex in school. But, when I try to understand the adolescent and the adolescent period, that period…is a transition and it doesn’t matter what we say it is going to happen. Not all…but a percentage going to have sex…For me, what I get to understand is that we need to be more supportive and that is what I try to be…So in order for me to deal with it objectively, say the right thing and do the right thing, I had to start look at it for what it is and when I get to understand that it is more deeply rooted – means that, is not only the school, but the home, and the society has a lot to do with it. When you take a young person and place them in such an environment the odds is against them…(T1).

This male teacher is aware of the stigma associated with sex during adolescence and is focused on creating opportunities for students to engage in conversations without being ridiculed. Moreover his comments indicate that he sees adolescents as people who are operating within systems that are difficult. The environments in which he is referring, makes it difficult for teenagers who are growing up to make informed and good decisions.
**Relationships are not exclusive.**

It ain’t get no relationship that I know about that people don’t cheat or people don’t lie to one another… (G8)

Infidelity was a topic that revealed both boys and girls have little trust or confidence in each other to be faithful. Having more than one partner was used as a protective factor against being hurt for boys. In the boys’ focus group, one teen (B1) rejected the notion that having more than one partner is acceptable because he believed it could “destroy” another individual. However, the other boys in the focus group did not share his perspective and stated that relationships are not meant to be serious during adolescence. They felt that dating more than one person was okay using the terms “main person” and “side chick” as descriptors for women.

Girls were aware of the term “side chick” and that boys have multiple partners. One girl stated, “It has this saying, males got the side chick, the main chick, the wife, the sweet woman, the whole long list” (G4). Girls expressed their frustration with experiencing flippant behaviour from adolescent boys in regards to cheating and explained that sometimes they (boys) do not even consider it to be cheating. This is reflective of a broader societal perspective where the discourses on gender roles dictate that men innately need multiple partners.

An adolescent girl (G2) described a scenario where her friend was shown pictures by her boyfriend of another girl he had sex with. Her boyfriend did not believe it was disrespectful and did not show any regard for his girlfriend’s feelings and said, “at least I being honest, I telling she when I doing it.” Participant two’s friend believed that she
could not do anything about her boyfriend cheating on her and stated; she just smiled and said, “what else I could do?” This teen then responded,

Girl, if I was you, I would buss he head [\textit{buss he head} means hit him or hurt him in some manner]. The phone and everything di damaging up, cause if a girl di do duh and go show he a picture of she doing another boy, he would hit she [The phone would get damaged as well, because if a girl did that to him and showed him a picture of her having sex with another boy, he would hit her]. Box she. The boy come and tell me friend, if I hear you cheating on me I would kill you (G2).

The double standard is evident in the comments made by the boyfriend.

Adolescent girls are aware of the unfair and double standards set for women and men in relationships, but that doesn’t mean they accept it. Adolescent girls can at times support one another and help each other to question unhealthy relationship norms. However, at other times girls can encourage other girls to use violence against their partners with the recognition that violence would be inevitable if the situation was reversed. Furthermore, girls can also encourage victim blaming as I noted earlier.

Conversations on cheating reveal that a lot of adolescent girls start from the understanding that a dating relationship should be between two people. However, many adolescent boys start from the perspective that dating relationships can occur with multiple people at the same time. These ideas of relationships relate to dominant discourses of femininity and masculinity and reveal that long standing discourse encourages divisiveness rather than complementing one another.

However, not all girls held this perspective. One girl tried to justify cheating when we were discussing one of the case studies presented to the youth. In discussing
this story, one girl (G9) believed that Angela, the victim in the story, could go and date other men while her boyfriend was working in the interior. However, four girls (G1, G3, G4, G8) disagreed with her belief that Angela was justified to cheat. Even though some girls may reject the notion that women should only be with one person, they are in the minority and are corrected by the prevailing social script. The overall perspective by adolescent boys and girls who participated in the focus group reveal that cheating was a common practice for both.

**Resolving conflict in dating relationships.**

Adolescent boys and girls expressed non-violent ways of resolving conflict in relationships as their first approaches and rejected the notion that all relationships are violent. Not only did they speak about their own approaches, but they also were vocal on several occasions where they believed friends or loved ones were wrong in their approach to resolving arguments. For example, in my conversations with the girls’ focus group one teen spoke about a conversation she had with her cousin.

A day I was having a discussion with my cousin, right? And he pointed out a girl and said, ‘her boyfriend hits her’. And I ask if she still in school? And he said ‘yes’. So I said, ‘why does he do that?’ And he said, ‘because she don’t hear’. So I was like, ‘and you don’t talk to your friend about it?’ and he said, ‘no, because the boy is right’. And from that point, I had to stop and correct him and tell him that not because somebody is wrong means you have to hit them (G3).

Her cousin’s comments indicate that violence in teen relationships is not hidden, it is being spoken about, and it is also not viewed by many as being wrong. However, her attempt to correct her cousin demonstrates that conversations amongst teenagers do not
go without questioning the use of violence in relationships and promoting non-violent ways of problem solving.

Boys provided examples of two ways they approach conflict in relationships with their girlfriends. Some boys stated that they would walk away until their girlfriend calmed down while other boys indicated that they would talk through the argument. Similarly, girls also believed that talking through the argument was the best way to resolve conflict. Boys debated which approach was the better way to prevent an escalation of violence each disagreeing with the other person’s perspective. However, when I asked the boys if they felt most boys approached conflict with these resolution types, they indicated that their ideas of conflict resolution were not the dominant way of thinking amongst boys.

Adolescents utilize a number of techniques to address conflict in their relationships. Violence is a common way of approaching conflict even though this approach is challenged by some teenagers and not always accepted as the right way to resolve arguments or conflict.

**Summary**

The ways in which men and women have learned to interact in intimate relationships are complex, as they are informed by dominant discourses on gender, race, class, and age. Masculinity and femininity are defined by rigid ideas of sex, respectability, and control that create contentious experiences in hetero-normative relationships. These elements of intimate relationships are not new to the discussion on violence within relationships and living these realities for participants has at times been through acts of resistance. However, the ways in which societal discourses intersect in
Guyanese society provide greater understanding to the complexities that interplay to create environments, which sustain systemic acts of violence. Not only are there intersections of race, gender, class, and age but these concepts also intersect with dominant discourses on social institutions, such as education, in ways that further confuse and refute prevailing narratives of many of these ideas.

The public-private dichotomy of domestic violence is one that has been discussed at length when attempting to understand and eliminate violence within intimate relationships. The discourses by participants reveal that violence in intimate relationships is experienced privately and publicly in a Guyanese context and these two elements are not necessarily distinct. The violence in relationships that communities are aware of and that occurs in public spaces can further hide other forms of violence that are not as visible, such as sexual violence. The web of intersections presented in this chapter creates margins for adolescents to experience violence in their relationships.
Chapter Six

The Phenomenon of Dating Violence and Approaches to its Elimination

Dating Violence

This chapter will highlight the information I learned about participant perspectives on the phenomenon of dating violence, how it is currently approached, and what participants envision as necessary for future preventative initiatives.

Perceptions of Dating Violence

Parents, teachers, and adolescents are aware that dating violence occurs in teen relationships. However, adults are not always cognizant of the frequency with which adolescents experience violence in relationships. In this section, I will present participants’ perspectives on what constitutes dating violence as well as why it occurs.

Types of violence.

Parents, teachers, and adolescent boys and girls described dating violence in physical, psychological and sexual forms, using language that denotes the severe impact it can have on those involved. When asked what dating violence means, a male guardian stated that it triggered memories of a past situation. He stated, “When I think of dating violence, as of right now, it is trauma. Emotional, mental trauma” (Interview 5). All participants also referred to dating violence as abuse and at times used adjectives such as verbal and sexual to differentiate the types of abuse. However, some adolescents also used the term abuse to mean both physical and psychological violence. Therefore, when dating violence was provided as the topic of discussion, participants identified different types of violence that signify not only an awareness of instances that are considered violence, but also, a language to describe it.
In my discussions with participants, comments also revealed a hierarchy of violence that is related to the respectability of female sexuality. For example, a female teacher’s comment indicated that some forms of violence are guided by ideas of female sexual respectability on a structural level. She stated,

When it gets to sexual abuse that is more technical. The authorities have to come in. We make jottings [writing or taking notes] and so forth to make sure that we have our reports so to avoid any implications arising out of that – should any problem occur (Interview 1).

Her comments indicate that sexual violence is considered more serious than other types of violence (i.e. physical, psychological) on an institutional level. Thinking about sexual violence as this teacher has described in her comments reflects a position that does not take into account the relationship between various forms of violence and that people can experience multiple forms of violence concurrently. When physical forms of violence were discussed, participants comments reflect a normalization of hitting as a lesser form of violence. For example, a male school official stated,

…But that dating violence, I have seen lots of cases where young boys started to hit girls. Some of them do not hit them alone, but to go as far as to inflict bodily harm and, unfortunately, a few persons died from stab wounds and so on (Interview 4).

This quote reveals a classification of harm where bodily harm is only considered as such when weapons are used. However, such understanding contributes to how dating violence is defined and also how some forms of violence are either normalized or considered a lighter form of punishment.
Causes of dating violence.

I presented two case studies of young women killed in their dating relationships to facilitate discussion. With these case studies participants identified societal, community, and individual factors for why dating violence occurs. A male teacher illustrated that he believed the causes of violence resulted from different levels in society. He stated,

…If you look at it in its entirety [case studies], a number of things will come to play. One, the home; two, the society which these people were brought up in within a community; and three, some authoritative element which seems to be absent...putting myself in his position on how he got to that point, it had to be something within him that drove him to that point. That’s where we come back to knowledge and also ignorance – because if these persons were given the necessary information in order to deal and handle those situations, I don’t think it would have ended up in that particular situation. So, I feel we need to look at it in more totality than just in parts and in segments (T1).

While this male teacher was the only person to explicitly articulate the need to consider how societal, community, and individual factors intersect to cause violence, parents and adolescents also expressed an understanding of the relationship between social systems and its effect on violence.

One mother and one father shared with the group that media, specifically music and television, promote violence. Another mother provided her experiences of traveling in mini-buses while going home. Mini-buses are privately owned public transportation that shuttle people in and around Guyana. In these private modes of transportation, the bus drivers often play loud popular music (mostly dancehall, reggae, and soca) as they
drive. Participant one (a mother) and six (a father) discussed the influence on teenagers. She stated,

P1: …And you rowing to the top of your voice, they ain’t taking you on and they turn it up more loud [Arguing or yelling but the bus drivers are ignoring her and turning up the music louder]. So, this is how the children are being caught into these other things. They are hearing it in the public, not that you’re playing it home, and most of the beats and the noise and these words is just telling you how to violate other people, how to disrespect and disregard women. [The music they are listening to does not promote respectful treatment of women]

P6: How to shame yourself.

P1: Yes. How to make fast money [Doing something potentially illegal to make money]. No, not how to make fast money, how much fast money is good. But, they don’t tell you the consequences behind making the fast money.

P6: They does tell you how to make it too [The music tells you how to make fast money as well]. Cause they got songs telling you wha fuh do fuh make fast money [The songs instruct you about what you have to do to make money]. Is stupidness, real stupidity and they corrupt the same young ones head and they gone.

Parents did not provide an example of what genre of music they were referring to. However, I noticed many teenagers wearing YMCMB hats, which stands for Young Money Cash Money Billionaires, the logo for American record label Cash Money Records and Young Money Entertainment. Additionally, listening to the radio stations and hearing the music that often fills the streets in busy shopping areas, teenagers are
influenced by Caribbean and North American musical artists. This exchange between parents demonstrated to me that they are aware of media and social messages that permeate community members’ daily lives in ways that are unavoidable for many teenagers.

Infidelity was provided as a common reason for violence in relationships as well as causing violence between two teenagers over a boy or a girl. In discussions with both adolescent boys and girls they stated that they did not know how to deal with their partner dating more than one person, even though boys previously stated that it was common for them to have more than one partner. Rumours also contributed to contention in relationships and fuelled violence. Adolescent boys stated that it is common to have other people tell them their partners are cheating with the expectation that boys will handle the situation aggressively. One teen stated, “men just do things, even if it is stupid” (B5). In this sense, men and manhood are seen as an active role of doing something even if the action is wrong. However, the adolescent boys who participated in the focus groups stated that they rejected these approaches and instead chose to ask their partner about the validity of the rumour. This information reveals that some adolescents used rumours to incite violence by spreading information that may not necessarily be true, with the expectation that violence will occur against a particular girl or women.

**Reasons to stay in violent relationships.**

All participants also provided a combination of societal, community, and individual factors as to why teenagers choose to stay in relationships once they have experienced violence. Both adults and teenagers, specifically girls, related the need to stay in violent relationships to socio-economic factors, whereas adolescent boys also
considered the choice of partner, and a lack of communication and trust within relationships as contributors to why girls remain in violent relationships.

A conversation between three adolescent girls’ disclosed the relationship between parenting, finances, and violence and also how girls can challenge the notion of financial insecurity as a fixed reason to remain in violent relationships.

Moderator: O.k. so what does everybody think?

G9: Ms. (pause) Sometimes women don’t have the choice to take the abuse, because some young ladies in our age group have to take it. They don’t have a choice because some of them their parents don’t provide for them, so they have to [take the abuse] in order to get it [money, material possessions] and some of them encourage it because they stupid.

G6: Some of the young women in relationship have to take violence – cause most of us, the parents don’t know that we are in a relationship. So, you wouldn’t have any satisfaction if you go and complain to mummy or daddy, because in the first place they didn’t know about it.

Moderator: O.k. G1

G1: Well G6 said most of what I wanted to say. And you don’t really have to take the abuse. You can go and be independent and go do you hustle you self [You can work and be independent on your own]. You have to make you own hustle, you don’t really have to sit and take the abuse if you are not getting help from family or friends you should go and be self-employed.

The first two girls perspectives in this exchange explain the intersecting social and economic factors that contribute to teenagers’ exposure and subsequent acceptance of
violence. These participants provide insight into the difficult and confusing position many teenage girls face. Girls grow in a patriarchal system and are cultured to believe that men are the providers. Parents tell teenagers that they should not date, yet, due to their own (parents) precarious situations are unable to provide basic needs for their children. Teenage girls then look to men outside of their home for financial support, but are unable to gain emotional support from their families of origin when these relationships become exploitative because they have entered into an intimate relationship with a man. This is outside the confines of respectable womanhood. As adolescent girls’ perspectives reveal, larger societal perspectives (patriarchy and respectability) do not align with the realities of poverty and resource constrained communities that cannot provide supports (e.g. social services for teenagers). While participant one’s response is noble, I am unsure how realistic it would be for teenage girls to support their basic needs independently while attending high school.

When I spoke with adolescent boys, they attributed violence and the inability to leave relationships to girl’s choice of partner. One of the boys stated, “Ms., some girls would be with the gangster kind of men and when they get in relationships, they dudes would be abusing them but they can’t talk about it and they cannot leave the relationship” (B2). His comment indicated a narrowly defined idea of who an abuser could be and the assumption that only women who are in relationships with gangsters are silenced to speak out against their abuse. Furthermore, adolescent boys consider dating violence the choice of adolescent girls, which is reflective of societal discourses of victim blaming and women being responsible for causes of violence and violence prevention.
**Resisting violence.**

Participants discussed three main areas to resist violence, including training girls with information specifically for them, using religion as a form of resistance, and using violence to resist violence. Adult participants primarily focused on girls’ education and provided them with privileged information to help prevent or resist violence. One teacher explained the types of information she tries to provide to adolescent girls specific to dating. Her advice centered on girls being confident enough to negotiate what would occur on a date and having someone aware that she is dating. Her advice included girls setting boundaries at the beginning of dates, always carrying a cell phone, and providing someone with the information of whom they are with and where they are. However, I asked this teacher how feasible she believed this advice to be, when the majority of adults do not believe teenagers should be dating. She responded that she still believed teenagers should make someone aware even if it is difficult. In the current environment, I do not believe teenagers would tell an adult about a date unless that adult has expressed openness to speaking about dating. Teaching adolescents to resist violence in the ways this teacher has suggested is sensible. However, when a supportive environment does not accompany the advice, its applicability is questionable.

Parents and teachers also continued to promote religion as a form of moral boundary that would indirectly prevent violence by avoiding dating. However, adolescents were not as confident in religion resulting in moral behaviour. For example, adolescent girls believed that boys used religion and the church to meet women and not to provide them with guidance in being respectful to women. In the excerpt below, three
girls discuss that boys are more interested in attending church based on the attractiveness of the women’s bodies.

Moderator: When do you think boys are seen as respectable?

P8: Ms., when they play saint. When they go to church. But Ms., nuff church boys, Ms., I don’t know wha fuh seh [pause] they does play the most saint [a lot of boys present themselves as innocent].

P1: Most church boys does just go to church to see how they sisters looking (laughter).

P4: True. They do have churches like that – many.

P1: Yes. In my street I was going to church and a boy was like, “wuhh! Like I ga come you church [Wow! Looks like I have to come to your church], you church look like it get nice coca cola sisters in there” [your church looks like it has women with nice figures].

“Coca Cola Sisters” refers to the curves of a woman’s body that is described by the shape of a coca cola bottle. Religion is therefore understood by some adolescents to be used as opportunities for dating as opposed to preventing it.

Finally, adolescent girls discussed resisting violence with violence. In the conversation below, two teenage girls provided opposing perspectives on the use of violence to assert themselves. Some girls believed that attempting to solve violence with violence would cause more harm, whereas other girls disagreed.

G8: Ms., according to what G4 said, I disagree. Cause Ms., if you allow him to hit you first time, he is going to continue. So when he hit you, you hit him back to show he and tell he, well, you ain’t frighten, I gine [going to] nack [hit] you back.
That is how me mother stay [That is how her mother deals with situations of violence] (Laughter in the group).

G9: Ms., I agree with G1 but disagree with G8. Ms., she saying for nacking [hitting] back a male. Ms., now if the person bigger than you, and taller than you, and ignorant, and the type to have a weapon, and you raise your hand – he could shoot you or do something to you, you can’t get back up.


G8: Ms., I disagree.

There was no consensus on the use of violence to resist violence. Other girls spoke about asserting themselves with violence if they felt threatened or disrespected, especially in relationships with boys their own age. One girl told me,

Ms., for me, because they are the same age and we both have the same opinion because we are small – if I don’t want to do something and you force me to do it, I’ll cuff [punch] your teeth – I’m very ignorant (hearing group laughing). I can get really violent at times Ms. If I say ‘don’t’ and they force me, I tend to react with violence (G7).

Some girls believe that violence is necessary as self-defence. The comments by these two girls reflect a flight or fight response where girls believe violence is necessary for their survival.

A Splintered Village - Present Approaches

The school environment consists of a network of parents, teachers, school officials, and students that become a community and therefore is the epicenter for where communication and initiatives can be improved. For the most part, parents spoke
positively about the school where I completed my data collection, pointing out that this school had resources and space that other schools lacked. Additionally, parents also believed that their children would have a bright future by attending this school. However, the school community is also impacted by societal factors that influence current approaches to violence and create challenges for parents and teachers when interacting with adolescents and each other.

**Violence in Schools**

Various forms of violence occur on school grounds daily and school officials are often faced with resolving issues between students. Observing the principal’s office throughout the five weeks of data generation, it was apparent to me that many students face challenges in resolving issues between themselves and also with teachers in non-violent ways on a regular basis. Students were often sent to the office for fights and disagreements that took on a physical nature, on one occasion two younger students had stabbed each other with a sharp object, both displaying superficial, small wounds.

School officials and teachers were aware of the issues of violence they faced within the school and the unavoidable stigma that comes with the school location, as well as the school’s past reputation of violence. A male school official stated,

> We have other social issues. We have gang related issues, a lot of gangs. We have got a violence problem - it’s a big issue…kids are debarred from coming to the schools in the avenues because it’s so violent and sometimes it can be very brutal. School against school, groups against groups, that kind of thing. I think those are probably some of the main social problems we have (Interview 3).
Poverty and relationships contribute to violence in schools.

Two overarching issues fuelled the violence that occurred on school grounds: poverty and relationships. Parents, teachers, and school officials provided numerous examples of students being bullied and robbed for lunch money and/or food and watching promising students lose their motivation to excel in school because of the destitution they experience. The school is aware of the precarious situations teenagers often come from. One female school official stated,

…Many of our children, some of them…some parents are there [working and living far away from home], some children are here [living in familial home], but the parents are there and many of these children really care for themselves because the parents are in the interior [hinterland region] and leave them with some family (Interview 6).

Many Guyanese households do not reflect nuclear families and therefore it would be common for children to reside with other relatives, however, her comment reflects the realities of living in extended family households when resources are constrained. Another male school official stated,

…Probably the most frustrating, the most depressing part of my job, is to have to deal with kids who have very limited resources to get them through school. And I mean limited, I am talking like, probably a meal, a hot meal to provide for them, transportation to get to school… (Interview 3).

This was evident to me as well as a few students asked for money in amounts of $40 and $100 Guyanese dollars. The larger amount is valued at less than seventy-five cents in Canadian currency. I was unsure how to react to the request for money and chose
not to give any out. However, a teacher provided further insight into the students’
requests during a conversation. He indicated that the miniscule amounts they asked for
were to cover bus fare to get home as he too provides certain students with bus fare for
travel.

Violence in schools is an unavoidable experience for many youth. The violence
that they experience is at times related to the challenges parents and teachers face in their
roles with teenagers.

**Challenges in Parenting**

In my conversations with mothers and fathers, they identified household, and
school system challenges when parenting their children. In one interview, a male
guardian indicated that the toughest part of parenting for him was not living the example
he wanted his teenagers to follow. He stated,

For me, one of the toughest parts is your own personal integrity… basically being
the role model instead of just giving them a set of rules and regulations to work
by. It must be something that you practice and they can see in you. I think though
they may challenge your requirements and so, they cannot deviate the fact that
you have been authentic in what you’re asking them to do. So for me, one of the
toughest things would be modeling the integrity as an individual that you want
these children to follow (Interview 5).

In this regard, parents at times felt they fell short of the educational aspirations or
family dynamic examples they set for their children and worried that their example was
not in line with what they were trying to promote. Several other parents expressed this
concern in relation to conversations about dating and their ideal model of the family.
Limited home information provided on sex, dating, and relationships.

Some parents of both girls and boys I spoke with, told me that they discussed sex and dating openly with their teenagers. These conversations primarily included information that focused on the dangers of dating as spoken about in the no dating discourse section (see 5.4). However, based on the majority of responses from teenagers and teachers, adolescents received limited information from their parents on dating in most cases. In these cases, both boys and girls sought information from other family members and trusted adults such as uncles and some teachers. Girls spoke more extensively than boys about who they can speak to about sex and dating. Several girls stated they preferred to speak with their fathers over their mothers, as they found their mothers more judgmental and would use the information disclosed against them at a later time.

Teachers also found that parents were not open to discussing relationships as students often told teachers that they (the students) could not speak to their parents, specifically their mothers, to gain information on sex and dating. Two female teachers discuss why they believe parents are unable to teach teenagers about dating.

T7: I don’t think in some cases it’s that they [adolescents] have lost the whole idea, they were never even taught. The parents usually say don’t do it and the more you say don’t, they want to know, so if you don’t explain to them, they would want to know.

T5: What I have recognized in Georgetown is that they are very young parents and the majority of them are single parents as well and the teenagers are emulating what they see…they see that mommy would have a man this week and
then he would buy her things and then she would sleep with him. So, that’s what they see dating as…when it comes to registering form one [registering students in the first grade for the school]…you can see the mothers don’t have the father’s last name so you already know nothing happened there legitimate…half of them is somebody child mother and they are proud and the fathers are proud to say they got three, four child mothers…

These teachers have definite ideas about what types of relationships are respectable. Their comments suggest that couples who are unmarried are poor examples for teenagers to follow in learning about dating and relationships. Furthermore, the idea of single parenthood is considered to be a poor example without considering the type of relationship that person may have left or whether this is simply the choice of the parent. Additionally, several people in the teachers’ focus groups were single parents. However, they were judgmental towards other single parents, which reflects an idealization of a two-parent household and makes morally inferior other family make-ups that do not fit into this norm.

**Nuclear family should be the role model.**

Parents spoke quite extensively about the breakdown of the family. I asked participants in every focus group what they would do with magic powers to prevent violence. One mother responded to my question and stated she would use her magic powers to keep families together, because boys needed a father figure and third parties often breakup families. I found it interesting that the question of magic powers did not produce any answers that I thought I would receive. I expected that participants would provide answers that were almost outlandish, but instead parents spoke about keeping
families together, wanting reliable electricity, and needing a change in the past government – which occurred in May 2015. I realized that the answers I received point toward an almost loss of hope where only magic could fix some of these structural and social ills.

Parents also believed that the messages adolescents received about relationships were one-sided. A male guardian stated,

The only thing you see in the media is when there is a failing family relationship. You see when there is a divorce – you see that… they have not tried to make very good television of a husband and a wife. I was born in the eighties so I had the benefit of seeing a show like the Cosby’s [pause] well, we see what’s happening with him now in the news. So there is a whole stripping down of anything that, that show would’ve meant for anybody growing up in terms of seeing; one, a black family that held it together, that’s raised their children, that had a father in the home that had a career, a mother was in the home who had a career, but still raised their children… (Interview 5)

Additionally, a mother in the parents focus group also believed that Guyana does not do enough to keep families together, but believed that the solution could be found in keeping the pieces of family together that are left and also in targeting those persons who she believed were responsible for families breaking up through cheating. She stated,

…I think in the country we need some sort of system that tries to keep the families together. Because you find in most cases these things stem from single parent homes, whether the child feels neglected by one parent or the other, or the
child feels they are at fault for the parents separation. We don’t know what is going on in the minds of those children. Some of them are hurting deeply (P1).

This mother continued speaking to the group and focused on the impact of infidelity when children are involved. She further stated,

…You cannot feel for a woman’s children the way she feels for them, you cannot feel for another man’s children the way he feels for them, and I think we need to have some system in place…I believe it should be treated as a criminal offense…you are like a thief (P1).

This mother believes that single-family households are the cause of the violence experienced by many youth. Her perspective arises from her own situation as a single parent and other single parents in the focus group expressed similar sentiments. However, their beliefs do not explain families whose teenagers experience violence and have both parents in the home or single parent families with happy, confident teenagers. Furthermore, the assumption that homes with two parents provide ideal examples of relationships does not reflect the level of community violence participants have stated they witness in homes with couples. Nevertheless, a male guardian believed that promoting single-family homes does not benefit future generations of children. He stated,

For girls…I know there has been a drive in terms of doing that [encouraging self-esteem and self-worth], but I think it has backfired somewhat in the sense that [pause] it’s like I think there is a thing with human behaviour where we go from one extreme to the next before we get to a place where we are balanced. So, in that drive, yes girls are doing better educationally, they are going to higher levels of education, there is a greater percentage of females in higher levels of education
than men, so there has been a lot of advancement. But what I think has happened along with that is that it has come to a place where we do not think we need each other anymore. So, I’m an independent lady, I don’t need you as a man; all I need is your sperm [pause] But if that is the case then the last 25-50 years of advancement for women would have been lost because then you are reintroducing a set of young children who now will be fatherless. So, though YOU have become independent, the purpose of the structure of the family is still losing and as a result, you’ll have the same generational issues going on though YOU as an individual would have advanced educationally, professionally and what’s not (Interview 5).

Teachers also believed that the breakdown of the family was responsible for not only violence, but also the general state of difficult youths they find in schools. A female teacher stated,

Family values gone. Can’t say going, it gone. The family structure is broken. That’s the reality of it. If we want to save our children we have to start working in our schools because often times parents going to say, ‘Ms., them things you talking about – when I gon find time for that? I got to work’ – and they lay out the time that they have to work. The reality is when the children are at school they [parents] are home preparing to go to work at night, and at night when the children are at home the parents are not there, so it doesn’t really make sense (T6).
She continued on to say that she believed targeting parents would be pointless as parents would say that they do not have the time and therefore schools are the best place to target youth to help teachers.

However, another teacher disagreed somewhat with this teacher’s comments and stated that she did not believe that the problem of violence should be fixed at the school level or with a focus solely on teenagers, but rather at home. She stated,

Yes, we are getting the problem with them [teenagers] but the problems I think it came from home, from the family. Back to the question about the magic wand the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. I would wave it over the family. I mean nature, nurture. If I’m a crackhead, I can only teach crackhead mentality to my child. So when they come to you to teach, you can’t make them understand two and two is four. It is impossible. You are flogging a dead horse. The issue lies with the family (T7).

This female teacher continued on to state that some parents are not as interested in their children’s education as others and regardless of what is taught in schools, teenagers still return home to environments that do not necessarily foster healthy lifestyles which makes it more difficult for the school system.

Teachers’ comments reflect a larger issue than parents simply not being interested in their teenagers’ lives. Rather, their comments point to the realities of parenting teenagers and juggling financial obligations with the timing of job availability often overlapping these two realities. The teachers’ frustrations are in actuality for a system that does not have the necessary supports for the numerous households that are faced with
these situations. However, teachers are directing their frustrations at parents. This in turn translates to parents feeling unsupported by teachers and the school system.

**Parents not always supported by school.**

So I am saying, from nine to three the onus is on the teachers. This is my opinion – to look after the people’s children, children who are in your protection and care during that period. If they are having problems you must see signs and get help…but don’t leave it to go down and then you stereotype them and then they turn out bad, you bad talk them. You are a part of making them good or bad, whatever they turn out to be, you would have played a role in it. (P1, Mother)

Parents depend on teachers to guide their children while they are in school and believe they play a fundamental role in shaping who their children are. However, parents do not always feel confident in teachers or the school system guiding their children. While some parents named specific teachers who they believed were positive influences on their children, one mother spoke about the struggle in parenting when teachers have not completed their job. She stated,

There are days when teachers don’t teach in this school and I must be honest. There are days when they don’t teach and you ask the child, what did you do today? Let me see your book. ‘We didn’t do any subject today, the teacher didn’t come’ or ‘the teacher came and said he or she isn’t teaching the class’ (P1).

This was an observation I also made and discussed with a school official in one of my interviews. The school is aware that teachers are not always in classrooms and are working to correct this without the quota of necessary teachers for subjects within the
school. This lack of resourcing provides another layer of difficulty for parents who look to this system for help and are at times let down.

Additionally, both parents and teachers are aware that teenagers often come from complex and precarious situations as teachers have stated previously. But, one mother did not believe teachers used tailored techniques to reach teenagers. She stated,

There must be something that they are equipped with to deal with children from all types of households… I think one of the problems we have is they apply one method to everybody. We apply one teaching method and we expect every child to become a high flier using that method. But, teachers would have learned different methods when they were trained…(P1).

This mother provides an important point in her statement, but I believe her comment is limited in focusing solely on teachers. Regardless of whether teachers may or may not have been trained to use different techniques to engage students in classrooms, teachers are stressed out and tired from operating in a constrained environment with a lack of support. The mindset of teachers is palpable to parents.

Parents and students also shared in group discussions the unhealthy exchanges they have encountered personally or witnessed between teachers and students. One teenage girl detailed a verbally abusive experience with a teacher that was similar to several situations parents spoke about. This teenager was called “a slacker and a whore” for failing to bring a pen or pencil to class. Adolescent boys also had similar exchanges with teachers. A few mothers believed their sons who were labeled, as problem students were being targeted and provoked by some male teachers. Prior to one mother (P2) detailing an experience between her son and a particular male teacher, parents did not
have any complaints of teachers. However, once this mother spoke candidly about her son’s experience, two other parents stated that their sons have had similar experiences and have been physically assaulted by teachers. Other parents did not share the same experience, but had this parent not spoken honestly about her son’s experience, this form of violence would not have been discussed and I would not have learned about this important point of how parents feel unsupported by the school system. Adolescents within the school environment that are labeled as being problematic students may experience more forms of violence that often go unnoticed. Furthermore, these exchanges demonstrate that those within positions of power believe that violence is acceptable when directed at those who deserve punishment.

Parents also indicated that the present school forum for teachers and parents to communicate does not promote discussion between parents and teachers. Parents felt that the parent-teacher association (PTA) is run in a didactic manner where teachers stand and tell parents what their children are not doing right, so parents did not feel the PTA was a space that supported them or promoted discussion.

From parents’ perspectives, the relationship between parents and the school system is at times strained, even though parents believe that the school supports them in raising their children. Parents depend on teachers and schools but these structures are also working in constrained systems, which creates difficulty for parents who rely on them for help.

**Challenges in Teaching**

When speaking with teachers and school officials, they identified key areas that impacted their abilities to function in their roles as teachers. These factors influence
students learning in ways that are visible to parents. Speaking with teachers and observing their work environment, I sensed the frustration that many teachers felt. One scenario remains fixed in my memory of a teacher in the principal’s office. Nearing the end of my fieldwork, a teacher who had participated in the focus group discussions was sitting in the principal’s office with a student and parent attempting to resolve a misunderstanding in her (the teacher) trying to help the student. Her face and body language portrayed defeat and exhaustion. I knew in that moment that any care she had, had been erased by the tiredness and misunderstanding of that situation. The challenges that teachers face are a combination of feeling unsupported on many levels and then directing these emotions at students.

**Teachers do not feel supported.**

Teachers expressed dissatisfaction with several areas of the school system. Specifically, teachers spoke about a lack of opportunities to discuss issues they faced on a daily basis. A male (T1) and female (T6) teacher stated that they have never had a forum such as the focus group to discuss problems in the school, hear from one another, or support each other in their teaching. A male teacher stated,

> We not meeting, we not discussing, we not talking, we not reinforcing, we’re not doing nothing! We just show up, because whatever I teach, I know I’ve been teaching it for a number of years so I can just walk in the classroom and regurgitate it over and over (T1).

This teacher’s perspective reflects complacency in his position as a teacher, that is in response to a system that he believes has not supported teachers enough. A female teacher agreed with the above teacher’s comment regarding the lack of support they offer
to one another and believed this was the result of school officials not providing enough support. She used staff development sessions as an example to articulate her point.

We have staff development sessions, but you’re going to tell me what I need to do, what I should do, what I shouldn’t be doing. We are all individuals. We all do things differently. If you don’t ask, if you don’t find out what is going on, we will never be together, we will never understand each other… (T6).

Teachers believed that current staff development sessions lack diversity in the ways that they are encouraged and approached to better themselves as teachers. This perspective provides some insight into parents’ observations that all students are taught with a similar teaching style even though they might have different learning needs. While teachers have vocalized interest in staff development sessions that promote individuality in teaching, this teacher’s comment demonstrates that teachers face the same challenge as students, which reflects a need for change throughout the educational system and not just at the professional level.

Additionally, teachers provided examples that demonstrate they are not always safe on school grounds. Teachers feel exposed to violence and are not confident in the school leaders or the Ministry of Education to protect them from violent situations. Teachers and parents both told me that they are aware of teachers being attacked by students. One parent spoke about a teacher being attacked with a hammer by a student, while other teachers were scared to approach particular students to correct their behaviour for fear of physical retaliation by students and family members. In fact, a school official told me that the school policy stated that teenagers were to speak with teachers and the head master first before calling family members to avoid an upsurge in violence that has
happened in the past. These examples provide a glimpse into teachers working conditions and environment, which are captured in their feeling of lack of support.

**Values and attitudes towards teaching and teenagers.**

The school environment and larger school system inevitably impacts the attitudes of teachers towards students. In one sense, teachers are aware that several students lack the support systems needed to excel in schools and try to offer support adopting the role of “family members”. A young male teacher stated,

> Apart from academic knowledge that we impart to students we should try to be brothers and sisters, the second family away from home, grandmother, mother, and father depending on how old you are and everything possible that the family does to support you. If it is giving food to the hungry, providing moral support – whatever is needed (T3).

This perspective is common amongst most teachers. I witnessed teachers baking cakes for student birthdays, visiting ill students in hospital, and attending funerals of family members of students. In my conversations with teachers outside of the interview or focus group discussions, I felt a genuine sense of concern and interest in students’ lives.

It was also clear to me that parents considered teachers as family members and looked to them as parents in schools. Three mothers in the parents’ focus group stated that they viewed teachers as their teenagers’ parent while in school and expected them to show a level of love, respect, guidance, and discipline towards their teenagers. However, teachers at times believed that they were taking on the complete responsibility of
parenting and teaching teenagers, which became overwhelming because of the number of students who required help. A female teacher stated,

…we can’t do it all. We are only humans and if it was up to us to do all of that [taking on more responsibilities than just teaching for students] then when we go home to our family we would be drained emotionally and physically…(T4)

Another female teacher provided a similar perspective and stated, “Not many of us have the energy and the time to go through every child, which is most of them in the classroom got some sort of problem that you got to reach them…” (T6). Teachers were tired and could not keep up with the needs that arose from the student population. This fatigue left little room to deal appropriately with those students who pose more challenges than others.

A male school official indicated that one of his biggest challenges is to keep teachers motivated and composed when dealing with students. He stated,

I have to try to keep teachers calm and try to help them to believe a little bit more in these children and understand that if we give them a little more time they are going to come around and they are going to actually be successful. And we have seen that happen – only this last term we had the grade 11 ‘home-ec’ [home-economics is a class stream where girls learn cooking, cleaning skills] girls. They were like the worst of the worst – everybody stereotyped them. Everybody blacklisted them. But, they were the group that shocked the entire school in terms of results. We had some of the best grades from those students… (Interview 3)

The issue of stereotyping teenagers was raised several times by parents where teenagers were written off at young ages for misbehaviour. Teachers did not deny this
fact but acknowledged in the focus group discussions that they needed to do better in their interactions with some students. A young male teacher stated,

We need to be more approachable and look at our decorum, look at how we treat the students. Sometimes I can be real rude to students, the bad ones… the ones I see as bad. I got to improve on that. I haven’t really talked to many troubled students, many violent students. As soon as they start up I would normally just chase them out of classroom and punish them. This is like the norm. They would continue and I would wonder why? So I have to do some more talking (T3).

I do not believe this male teacher’s admission would have occurred had he not been reflective of his own behaviour in encounters with students. I wondered as he spoke if other teachers related to his comment and believed they also needed to change the way they approached students who they considered to be troubled. Teacher fatigue and feelings of not being valued contribute to how students are treated while at school and the dynamics that unfold there.

**School information differs on sex, relationships, and dating.**

In my conversations with teachers, parents, and adolescents, they all report that the school offered sex education. However, the information that adolescents receive is dependent on several factors. All participants referred to Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) as the most common resource for students to learn about relationships and sex in schools. This course is currently offered in forms one to three by two teachers and does not target those students in forms four and five. One teacher told me, “I know as soon as children hit Form 3, which is about 13 or 14, I know their minds are curious about relationships, dating and so on” (T1). Teachers are aware that adolescents are
craving the information about relationships and would require more opportunities to explore their thoughts after Form 3. However, since this class does not include the higher two grades, adolescents receive information on relationships when teachers choose to include it in lesson plans. A school official stated that she believes schools are a great place to learn about relationships and sex, but that this content is not structured in their curriculum.

Both boys and girls also shared in our group discussions that HFLE class was the primary place they learned about sex and relationships. But, adolescent girls believed that while the curriculum provided information on all topics, it was in a superficial manner. One girl stated, “They have the subject that is installed in schools…it teach you about everything, they just brush across a lot of stuff, social, health, relationships and things” (G4). A male guardian expressed similarly that HFLE helps however, “…I think sometimes it’s the way that the curriculum would have been structured. They’re only required to know perhaps definitions or remember definitions as opposed to going into deeper discussions about a topic” (Interview 5). HFLE is seen as a useful curriculum but is not offered to all teenagers and the number of content areas can make it difficult for students to delve more deeply into a better understanding of particular topics, especially during the ages that parents and teachers believe the content could be related to their experiences.

I realized that teacher’s perspectives on dating and current work environments also invariably impacted the information adolescents received at school and impacted the number of teachers qualified to teach courses on dating and sex. For example, a female teacher stated,
Over the years we would have had to move it [HFLE] to different levels. But because teachers are not willing, they are not even willing to go train themselves in these areas whenever we have conferences or workshops. Even when they are appointed – sometimes HM [Head Mistress] might put the science teacher, because she expects that the science teacher would have some knowledge, with the knowledge of biology and so forth. But, for some reason or the other, work is not done (Interview 1).

In my focus group discussions and interviews, several teachers and school officials expressed to me that they did not believe students should be dating during adolescence and therefore promoted no dating and the dangers of entering into a sexual relationship. Schools also receive resources in the forms of lectures and posters on sex, violence, and relationships from various organizations and concerned bodies but this often occurs in an ad hoc manner for brief time periods. Teachers and school officials also stated that they engaged in informal conversations with adolescents about relationships. For example, a male school official told me that he has conversations with many students and provides them with this information.

…You cannot want to produce a doctor when you are dating somebody who dropped out of school. I am not saying that people who dropped out of school are not intelligent, but then, you know…you have to be able to make the proper choices if you want this. As a man said ‘sheep can’t mek goat’…” (Interview 4).

Teachers attempt to speak with students and provide advice on dating as they recognize that regardless of how they feel students will date. Students however, do not always believe that teachers are the best people to confide in. In my conversations with
teenage boys they said that some teachers, specifically the HFLE teacher, was a person you could speak to about anything; however, my discussions with girls revealed a scepticism in trusting teachers. Some girls told the group that teachers were not trustworthy and gossiped among one another about students. The excerpt below is an example of what two girls told me.

G7: …Ms., I actually trusted the teacher, I sat and I spoke [pause] Ms., she [a teacher she does not like] came into the class, and I don’t like her right? So, I wouldn’t really listen, I would rebel against her. She said some things that I told that teacher and I was wondering how she knew? It was terrible.

G2: Ms., all them teacher in here does just sit down and talk the students name [teachers in the school gossip about students].

Information on dating, sex, and relationships occurs on school grounds, but how the information is relayed and whether the information is received is dependent on teacher’s motivations and student’s perceptions of teacher’s trustworthiness. Through my focus group and interview conversations it became apparent to me that current approaches to violence are impeded by challenges teachers and parents face. Each group of people recognized the importance of the other but believe the opposing group can improve in the supports they provide to teenagers. Moreover, parents and teachers were also self-critical of their respective roles and believed that other adults who were either parents or teachers could be doing a better job in educating teenagers.

**It Takes a Village – Future Approaches**

Looking forward towards strategies that can help to prevent adolescent dating violence, participants provided their ideas on how this can be achieved. Four main areas
arose from the information shared by participants. First, it became clear to me that parents, teachers, and adolescents felt there was either a lack of or limited dialogue when they interacted with one another (i.e. parent to adolescent, teacher to adolescent) and amongst each other (i.e. teacher to teacher or parent to parent) in their daily lives. Secondly, all participants stated that the interaction between adults needed to be improved. Additionally, the school environment offers a space for students to practice relationship building and conflict resolution outside of the familial home and with others within the community. The school environment is therefore considered a useful space to promote healthy relationships. Lastly, the school is located within a larger community. Surrounding communities must be included in violence prevention initiatives as nothing occurs in silos and my analysis of the data has revealed that the community provides a lot of opportunities for learning about relationships and violence. Engaging the greater community to change their perceptions on adolescents dating and community violence is necessary for the success of violence prevention.

**Ending the Silence (Strategies for Teenagers, Parents, Teachers)**

Throughout this study, it became apparent to me that participants live with a certain amount of silence when communicating with each other. Ending this silence was a common realization within all groups of participants. Participants suggested two main ways that this could be achieved. First, more opportunities need to be created for dialogue, and secondly, the interactions between adults and adolescents need to be improved.
Opportunities for dialogue.

In my conversations with adolescent boys and girls, they repeatedly shared with the group a desire to have more opportunities to engage in conversations on dating, sex, and relationships on a consistent basis. Girls indicated that teenagers always want to discuss these topics, but a lack of clubs, as they described it, is prevalent. Not only did they want to continue these conversations amongst girls, but also wanted the opportunity to have group conversations with adolescent boys to hear their perspectives. When asked what Guyanese society should do to build healthier relationships, one of the adolescent girls stated, “To like speak to both parties. Like the boys and the girls and tell them things that you shouldn’t do and what you should do” (G6). Another girl then stated, “We should have a debate with both parties” (G8). Girls believed that continuing these discussions would be beneficial, but similar to the focus group discussions, they wanted a teacher or trusted adult to guide the groups.

Likewise, adolescent boys also shared their need for their own youth group geared to boys. Below is a conversation between two boys where they discussed what they want.

B1: I think they should have a way that we can go sit down with an adult or counsellor, that you can share your problems with or share what is going on or what teenage problem is for you.

B4: Ms., I agree with B1. If they could have a youth group just like what we are having here. Ms., in every community, that would be nice.

B1: They could do it in schools too. Have a group that teenage boys can come and sit and share what they think on matters and so.
Boys also expressed similarly to girls that an adult would be helpful to guide the group and provide information. I wanted to understand how the boys felt sitting in a group moderated and observed by two women and asked them questions pertaining to what would work best for them when discussing issues such as these. Boys replied that both men and women are needed to guide teenagers, however, boys would be more comfortable speaking with men on particular topics related to women, as they were concerned that their perspectives and actions might offend some women.

An unexpected outcome that arose from the adolescent boys focus group was their initiative to provide advice to one another in the second focus group. I wished that I had initiated this same discussion in the other groups as I sensed that the parents’ focus group in particular would have benefitted from hearing each other’s words of encouragement. Each boy provided the group with strategies to improve their social relationships and to be successful in life. The advice presented is in the order that each boy shared his perspectives to the group. Participant two advised the group to be good listeners and follow their parents’ advice, even if at first they do not understand or agree. Participant one told the group to be respectful to everyone, especially their partner whom they claim to love. Participant five encouraged the rest of boys to believe in themselves and never let anyone’s negativity impact their success. Participant three advised the boys not to cheat on their partners and participant four shared with the group that nothing comes easy in life and to work hard for everything they want to achieve.

Providing teenagers with the opportunity to speak with each other in a safe environment promoted healthy exchanges amongst them and allowed them to question, challenge, and disagree with each other in respectful ways. I believe these adolescents
required a safe environment where they felt heard to express their ideas and reveal their understanding of dating and violence. Adolescents are informed about a number of topics but could benefit from guidance and clarification of unhealthy dominant discourses.

Similarly, parents also shared their interest in having more consistent opportunities for dialogue with other parents as well as with teachers. Two of the parents who co-parent their children expressed their frustrations with the parenting style of the other parent. For example, one of the mothers who participated in the focus group said her child’s father believed the focus groups were a waste of time. This experience reveals that some parents may not receive the parenting support from the other co-parent, which further isolates parents from engaging in conversation and advice with adolescents. In this regard, having a group where parents can hear the perspectives of other parents and converse in a manner that is speaking with each other as opposed to at each other promotes the sharing of ideas and inclusiveness of parents, but clearly some parents will not come.

I was also pleasantly surprised to learn that participation in the focus groups also fostered better communication between parents and teenagers. Two mothers told the group they had healthier conversations with their sons after the first group discussion and their sons responded more positively to the conversation than in the past. Other parents reported a heightened confidence in their parenting abilities after having their perspectives reinforced with the group. A mother stated,

To me, it was an opportunity for me to get some things off my chest that have been bothering me for a little while. I must say, being a part of the discussion, I
am feeling that there are people that are listening to me and understanding what I am talking about. They are probably flowing on the same wavelength (P1).

Feeling heard validated these parents’ concerns and provided them with the boost of confidence needed to continue their parenting work. For parents, having what I would describe as debriefing sessions with one another eliminates silence by providing different ways to approach their teenagers and boosting confidence to vocalize their concerns knowing that others have similar views.

Lastly, teachers used these focus group sessions to be reflective of their own lives. Like parents, teachers also used conversations from the focus group discussions to address their own private issues. An opportunity to sit and speak with one another also highlighted for some teachers the significant lack of communication that was present in their own lives on a daily basis. One male teacher stated,

Well in my home, personally, we don’t even discuss certain topics. From day to day we just cook, we bathe, do whatever, get out of the house, then you come back after work, watch some news and you go in your bed – that’s the daily routine. This focus group has taught me to re-examine myself and violence is something that I must talk about with my siblings (T3).

Another male teacher spoke about the personal growth he felt he had developed by hearing other teacher’s opinions and comparing it to his own. The opportunity for dialogue also revealed opinions that surprised some teachers and demonstrated the importance of having conversations across various groups of people to advance our understanding of violence. A female teacher stated,
I was a bit shocked at some of the comments by the opposite sex (loud laughter in the group). Because, it was totally unfair to how the female gender would behave and to know that you’re in a relationship and the other person might be thinking totally different as some of the participants here [pause] makes me not even want to try to be in a relationship anymore (loud laughter)… for example, when it was said that cheating is a man’s thing, I can’t even believe people would justify by saying something like that. It really opened my eyes to how different men and women think and I was shocked. That’s all I have to say (T5).

Creating spaces for dialogue between two groups of people who will engage in relationships, allows many perspectives to be articulated. These conversations eliminate assumptions made by all parties by hearing directly how people feel and therefore understanding the starting point for everyone on the same issue.

**Improving interactions between adults and adolescents.**

My experience collecting data emphasized an important component of creating opportunities for dialogue. Not only is it important to create the space for conversations to occur, but also to ensure that there are positive dynamics between people when engaging in conversation. Improving interactions between adults and teenagers was viewed as an area of focus for all participants. Adolescent boys and girls were vocal about specific needs they required when communicating with adults. Most boys stated that adults could do a better job of listening when teenagers spoke and provide more opportunities for them to express themselves. Boys specified that listening to teenagers needed to occur without judgement or public embarrassment for wrongdoing. An adolescent boy stated,
I think what adults can do is to just listen to us. Don’t try to bring us down. Just try to share what they went through with us so that we will understand. They have some adults that would just [pause] everything that you say it might be wrong. They just bring you down. They don’t care, yeah (B1).

Girls were similar to boys in their perspectives on the interaction between adults and teenagers and believed adults were also judgemental. An adolescent girl stated, “Stop being judgemental, whatever you do, people tend to judge you. Just like talk” (G1). Adolescents were impacted significantly by the verbal communication between adults and themselves and also revealed that non-verbal interactions were just as important to them in how they defined the quality of interaction between themselves and adults.

When I asked adolescents what would make young people change their thinking and their actions when it comes to violence, both boys and girls said, “better adult role models”. One girl shared with the group that she felt adults showed respect for teenagers by “setting examples and doing the right thing so we can follow the right pattern” (G10). Adults agreed with many of the perspectives conveyed by teenagers. Parents relayed that the ways parents approach teenagers impacts how they communicate and their approach needs to change. A male guardian stated,

I think we need a different approach in terms of the way we interact with children. Most of the times when you talk with children, it’s from an authoritarian perspective, so it’s me talking down to you. If we could be honest, which is not the most easiest thing for a parent to do with a child because the way we have embraced parenting, is that parents are right, children are wrong and they are only to hear… (Interview 5)
Another parent stated,

How to help a child have self-respect? You can’t be talking down to that child. If the parents talk down to the child, teachers talk down to the child, people in the community talk down to the child, you are actually messing up that child psychologically…so self-respect start from what we say to the children, what we tell them about themselves to build their self-confidence (P1).

A positive realization from these two groups of participants is that parents and adolescents are in agreement on where the focus needs to be directed to improve communication between each other. Teachers also articulated the need for a more meaningful interaction with students when in each other’s presence. A male teacher stated,

If I had a magic wand to change, what I would do is try and change the contact with the students and try to make the contact more purposeful [pause] I think our system itself is too scattered, not rigorous enough, not focused. My engagement would be more purposeful if I am in class here to teach, I make it more organized and make it more rigid, the entire system [pause] make it more true, I think there are too much of loop holes (T1).

In his comments, this male teacher sees the school system as impeding his ability to interact in more meaningful ways with students. Witnessing this teacher’s interaction with students showed his easygoing temperament that had helped him establish a good relationship with many students. Often times, I would see him in conversations with groups of students outside of class time providing advice. Through my observation and informal conversations with this teacher, I believe that his lack of awareness that he could
change his own practice within this flawed system is a way of protecting himself from further frustration that arises from trying to implement change in a system that is resistant to it. After working at the school for many years and experiencing heightened violence with no perceived help from the Ministry of Education, this teacher has become weary and skeptical.

Acknowledging the Reality of Adolescent Relationships (Parents, Teachers, Teenagers)

Ms., sometimes parents don’t realize that you are becoming an adult and you are trying to be independent and you’re stuck in your own – so they see it as a way of being disrespectful (G4).

Adolescent girls voiced their desire to be given a certain amount of independence during their teenage years in our conversations together. Girls wanted the opportunity to learn from their own mistakes, as they believed it would help to build their character and teach them how to overcome adversity. Parents and teachers also acknowledged that teenagers have expressed the need to branch out on their own, however, they believed that Guyana as a society was not necessarily ready to accept the period of adolescence. A female teacher stated,

I am thinking somewhere along the line much of the effort goes into trying to get these young people to stop [dating, being sexually active], which in actuality is not really going to happen. So the focus is not really on what is going on in here [points to mind and heart] with them, you just want them to stop…(T6)

Without acknowledging the life stage that adolescents are in, strategies that have been utilized to prevent dating violence have not been successful because they are not
developmentally appropriate. Another teacher responded to the teacher’s comment above and stated,

That supports what I said yesterday. That in Guyana, here, we treat adolescents like children. We don’t want them to do anything that their adolescent mind might be feeling…we try to restrict them and we want to keep them as children. Until Guyanese do not see them as children in secondary schools – we will never ever introduce anything proper to help them with the dating. Because all Guyanese see is all these big, big, almost adults running around here as children. Trying to confine them to that uniform, and that hairstyle, that ribbon, and I don’t agree with half of the rules that we have to keep them as children (T5).

This teacher’s comment demonstrates that the dominant discourse in Guyana does not recognize the period of adolescence as a transition from childhood to adulthood. Rather, considering adolescents as children explains why many adults try to prevent the experience of dating. Additionally, exploring what experiences and behaviours are typical of this life stage, other than dating, is necessary to provide adolescents with other experiences for this life stage.

**Removing the stigma, adults teaching adolescents how to date each other.**

In my conversations with participants, some parents and teachers did acknowledge that dating is part of adolescence and provided suggestions on how to improve teenagers’ dating experience. First, both teachers and parents recognized that they played a fundamental role in perpetuating the stigma associated with dating by the information they provided. A male school official stated,
It’s just how we start them. How we guide them. How we give directions to them. What we say to them, how we counsel them. You know, everything is about condoms. You think as a parent I should just tell my child, ‘oh, you need to know how to use a condom’ and that’s it, full stop. And we don’t even bother in trying to help them understand this is a normal physical change you’re going through, an emotional change you’re going through… (Interview 3).

To address these points parents and teachers provided strategies they felt would be helpful in guiding adolescence for healthy relationships. First, a female teacher suggested that adults should explain and redefine dating. She stated,

…I think we would have to reintroduce the whole concept on the stages of dating for them to have healthy normal relationships. Because, when you are dating, you are not supposed to be intimate, you’re getting to know the individual and as you get to know the individual, it’s a process, it’s a step. I just can’t see how you meet somebody today and the next hour you are intimate. How can that be? You going and you eating out and when you finished the next hour you’re intimate…you calling that dating? (T6).

Parents also agreed with this perspective and believed that teenagers need guidance and direction on how to date. One male guardian believed the way to improve this information is to provide the advantages and disadvantages of dating as opposed to only the disadvantages, which is the present approach. He described this conversation as the “full hundred talk”, meaning that adolescents received one hundred percent of the information on dating and relationships from parents or adults.
The reality is that adolescents are entering into relationships and adults are aware. However, conforming to dominant discourses on adolescence that prevent them from fully articulating what they know to be true (that adolescents are growing up and need to explore their world in ways that are age appropriate), restricted most adults. Recognizing the reality of adolescent relationships means defining adolescence as being a stage between childhood and adulthood and providing teenagers with balanced information on healthy relationships, among them dating.

**Promoting Healthy Relationships through Schools**

Schools provide an environment for teenagers to practice developing healthier relationship and social skills. Participants saw the school as an integral part of building healthier relationships. Specifically, participants focused on three main areas. First, parents and teachers believed that working together more effectively would improve the supports they provide to their students and children. Secondly, school staff had ideas they would like to implement but require human and financial resources to improve school programs. Lastly, school curriculum was seen as a key area that if improved, could help teenagers tremendously.

**Improving relationships between parents and teachers.**

Schools were considered an obvious space to promote healthier relationships between adolescents in my conversations with participants. They believed that healthy relationships were not only needed between youth but also amongst adults that are associated with the school community. Adults believed that improving partnerships between parents and teachers was necessary to improve the environment for teenagers and increase the support both teachers and parents received. One female teacher believed
that a lot of communication was necessary to support a positive relationship between parents and teachers and that this communication should not only occur when something is wrong. If teachers adopted this approach it would address concerns expressed by parents, that teachers only reach out when there is a problem with their child.

However, when I spoke with teachers, they vocalized some barriers to communicating with parents about their teenager’s behaviour. A female teacher provided an experience where she believed a parent became defensive because she did not want to believe the behaviour her child engaged with when outside the familial home. The parent’s response to this teacher’s concern resulted in her perspective that parents should experience a regular day at the school to witness how differently teenagers act on school grounds as opposed to home.

Another male teacher stated, “I am much more for the students who are at a disadvantage in society… Students experience all sorts of problems… When there is a problem there is no other source they can look at – so they bring it to the teachers to solve it. I don’t think we have the necessary resource, the training at our disposal to deal with students” (T1). This teacher believed that the problems experienced by teenagers are so complex as they incorporate a lack of access to basic needs and a low level of support from the family, that without the school system having better supports and parents taking a more vested interest, they too are letting students down.

**Human and financial resources required to improve school programs.**

Participants told me that better supports for schools meant introducing particular initiatives that teachers and school officials had experienced in their own schooling but had not been offered to current students. One program that was spoken about was named
guidance and counselling. Guidance and counselling was a program where teenagers sat and discussed social problems that bothered them in an informal setting. School officials had vocalized several other ideas aside from guidance and counselling that they wanted to create, but were limited by financial and human resources.

Teenagers were knowledgeable about programs they found beneficial and also knew what programs interested them. Teenagers wanted the health club to be re-established and for the career guidance programs to continue on weekends. However, they also expressed being limited by finances and thought that the organizers needed to show more interest in the programs so that their parents would feel more confident in the programs.

**Promoting healthier relationships through improved curriculum.**

In my conversations with participants they had specific suggestions for improving the information that boys and girls received. Some ideas reflected the perspective that colonial ideas were the gold standard for appropriate behaviour. Two younger male teachers referred to etiquette classes that their parents attended and believed skills such as learning how to waltz and using proper utensils were important in behaving properly and would result in better behaviour, which would improve relationships.

Moreover, parents and teachers also told me that boys and girls require gender-specific information as well as general information for their age group. When reviewing the gender-specific information participants provided to me, I recognized that the information girls received did not deviate far from dominant discourses encouraging the respectability of girls with regards to their bodies. A male school official stated,
Girls on the other hand got to understand they're capable of carrying a child and if they get pregnant then they're going to lose out on their secondary education, which is critical in a country like ours, which is critical in the Caribbean. Your secondary education is like what an education system is, in a high school education in Canada or America, and if you don't complete your secondary education then your life is basically, you're not going to be amounting to much after that (Interview 3).

Girls are still relegated to a less than position when information is geared towards them. It is inarguable that teenage girls will have a more difficult path caring for a child while in school, but continuing to provide the perspective that having a child is a life sentence of being unsuccessful continues to stigmatize many teenage girls.

Conversely, the information boys received encouraged them to challenge dominant discourses on masculinity and think more deeply about how they view and interact with women. For example, a young male guardian stated,

Well for boys, I think understanding that girls or the opposite sex aren’t objects just of sexual pleasure. Now this is a big thing because we live in a time that there is so much pornographic imagery that the vast majority of young men associate the opposite sex with only [pause] well today it’s twerking [pause] but the act of sex [pause] so the imagery in our minds of the opposite sex is associated with a sexual act. So, the appreciation of the opposite sex as a thinking, breathing, living individual with emotions and views and all these things [pause] that is probably like the tenth thing on the list down. Including this in future curriculum encourages boys to remove the limited ways in which they define
womanhood, which also provides them with greater opportunities to define their own manhood (Interview 5).

A male school official also had similar views as what arose from my fifth interview. He stated,

The time has come when males must not see themselves as the macho man. And macho man meaning you can beat your woman and control her. It starts with the control anyway, but you are a macho man when you can share your opinion and listen to somebody else (Interview 4).

These perspectives are helpful as they encourage boys to question how they define their masculinity. The challenge will be ensuring these perspectives are taught consistently as it does not align with the dominant discourses for men.

**Changing Perceptions and Practices Regarding Adolescents Dating and Community Violence**

Throughout this study participants spoke about adolescent dating violence and community violence in relation to larger socio-economic and systemic factors in my interviews and focus groups. Changing perceptions on adolescent dating violence is therefore inextricably linked to improving socio-economic conditions within the community. Participants focused on various levels of community resources that, if addressed together, could create the change that is necessary to begin dismantling some of the causes of violence. Included was a recognition that those in positions to help community members require more training and empathy. Participants left no profession, institution, or level of government out of their plan to advance the elimination of
violence, believing that restoring a “brother’s keeper” outlook would benefit communities by re-establishing a communal perspective.

For adolescents, this meant creating more spaces for them to occupy and interact with each other that were affordable for all communities. Adolescent boys felt that Guyanese society was pushing them into adulthood by a lack of places and activities geared to their age group. They stated that activities were either too child-like or were for adults such as clubs or lounges. An adolescent boy stated,

…they instil on us that you know – as soon as you touch 15 or 16 and now you looking big you know what – let me go to clubs because there is nothing you can do and you have to be mature to do stuff. Is like you are forced into adult stage at an early age in the society of Guyana (B2).

While some boys shared that their community received supports in the form of visits from the first lady of Guyana and free resources, such as computers and academic classes, other boys in impoverished areas had no supports. This discrepancy reveals that some communities have been targeted and approaches tailored for them, however, some communities are left with nothing. In moving forward, the test will be to find new and innovative ways of providing some resources and supports for all communities.

Parents and teachers were also in tune with the communication styles of adolescents and believed utilizing the radio, as a forum for engaging youth in discussions on violence and dating would reach youth in ways that have not been possible to date. Lastly, parents and teachers also expressed a need for progress to be evaluated. A female teacher stated,
Just as T1 said, education, empowerment, and training and I would like to also add follow up. You can’t just give me the tools and let me go. There must be some system to track or do something to see if I am still on this path (T7).

Evaluating the progress of initiatives is a key component of understanding what works and which areas require improvement, but was only mentioned by one of the teachers and did not come up in the rest of groups.

Communities face many intersecting socio-economic challenges that make it difficult to address perceptions and practices on adolescent dating violence. To change perceptions, participants focused on an improvement in social services in all sectors of the community to ensure that families are supported in interacting with each other in more healthy ways.

**Summary**

This chapter reveals that the phenomenon of dating violence and the subsequent approaches to violence is multifaceted. Participants have a language for adolescent dating violence and understand dating violence and violence in general to be connected to larger socio-economic factors. To these participants, addressing dating violence was primarily focused on acknowledging the developmental stage of adolescents and promoting better communication and interaction between age groups. Even though participants stated that tackling all social services and systems was fundamental to create a substantial effect on violence, future approaches did not include a discussion on how race and ethnicity impact people’s experiences with violence. Moreover, the first results chapter showed how perspectives on gender are inextricably linked to experiences with violence yet, the focus on gender roles as future prevention does little to dismantle the
opposing relationship of masculinity and femininity that presently overshadows hetero-
normative relationships between women and men in a Guyanese context. What
participants have proposed continues to support the same gender arrangement that
currently exists and therefore makes gender a missing element in future approaches.

Moreover, the discussion on preventing adolescent dating violence cannot be
addressed without considering that parents and many teachers are exhausted working and
living within systems of constrained resources. These conditions further contribute to
unhealthy exchanges between people.

Additionally, the current approaches to violence demonstrate that focusing on multiple
different sectors without cohesion between social sectors and groups of people does little
to prevent violence in relationships and systemic violence. Essentially, participants have
described a matrix of oppression where class and age intersect to create the phenomenon
of dating violence. However, everyone is working and operating within fixed social
constructions – not speaking across particular constructed groups, which continues to
perpetuate the phenomenon of violence.
Chapter 7
Discussion

Introduction

Throughout this thesis, I have presented the phenomenon of dating violence as a public health issue that requires a community approach to be prevented. I entered this topic from the perspective that health is a social production, and to achieve individual and group behaviour change, the community in which people grow and live has to support and encourage that change (Carroll, 2012). Therefore, in order to promote better health, social change is necessary (Carroll, 2012). In my pursuit to answer my research question, which focused on providing a better understanding of adolescent dating violence and its prevention, I have realized that dating violence is a deeply complex phenomenon produced in the interaction of structural conditions and interpersonal relationships. These relationships, based on ideas of respectability in Guyana, are largely about maintaining or improving social and economic positions in a society that is highly hierarchal and authoritarian – the aftermath of colonialism.

In this chapter, I first discuss the results from chapters five and six, which will illustrate how discourses on age, gender, sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity are used to shape the phenomenon of adolescent dating violence. I then discuss the second section of chapter six, considering how violence prevention can be addressed in the current environment. Next, I consider the theoretical contributions to the discourse of adolescent dating violence in the Guyanese context that are offered through my research on this topic. I conclude this thesis with my final remarks and offer recommendations for practice, policy, and future research.
Section 1: Discourses about Adolescent Dating and Dating Violence in the Guyanese Context

Dating in Adolescence is related to Respectability in the Community: The “Shame and Fame” of Adolescent Relationships

In this study, most adults and teenagers had a heightened awareness of their social position, trying to preserve or improve the way in which their surrounding community viewed them. In other words, respectability as a form of social status was central to the discussion on dating violence, as it was a key factor that determined how people viewed each other and what they thought of those who chose to date. Respectability and shame are central to any discussion on relationships between men and women in the Caribbean region. As stated in chapter three, Wilson’s (1973) theory on respectability as a colonial value system and reputation as the real value system of the Caribbean has been used to examine gender roles of men and women in the region (Wilson, 1973). More so, there have been several critiques of Wilson’s theory by Caribbean scholars who have pointed out the limitations of his work and these I will address throughout my discussion on respectability and adolescent dating violence in this section.

Dating during adolescence threatens the notion of respectability as defined in Guyanese society because it is understood as the possibility of girls having sexual contact with men or boys. As one school official stated in chapter five, girls’ bodies are seen as most valuable when they are virgins, therefore the preservation of virginity is tantamount to maintaining the respectability of both her and her family. Teenagers have also grasped the notion that respectability is defined by modesty and their discussion on clothing in chapter five illustrates how the understanding of respectability is being utilized as a form of social control to organize themselves into social hierarchies that exclude those who do
not conform to hetero-normative gender roles. As G4 stated in chapter five, “what is exposed is expired”. This comment expresses the community perspective that alludes to the exposure of women’s bodies through clothing as a marker of their sexual experience and social class. This reveals that women who have engaged in particular behaviours (i.e. sex and/or exposing their bodies), or are perceived to have done so, are no longer accepted as having the same value as women who have not engaged in these behaviours in the community.

Some adults’ actions show the extreme measures parents will take to ensure the respectability of their teenagers (primarily their daughters) are maintained within the community and reveal the seriousness in which respectability is considered. Mere accusations of inappropriate behaviour sent one mother to a gynaecologist for proof that her daughter had not been sexually active (chapter five). Chapter five also discusses a story of an adolescent girl who was killed in the community by an adolescent boy, revealing the preservation of the public perception of the slain teen as a "good Muslim girl" was of the utmost importance to her family. These examples support previous work completed in Guyana by Peake and Trotz (1999) and illustrate how the respectability of teenagers is directly linked to that of their parents (specifically mothers) within the surrounding community. Peake and Trotz (1999) indicated that the stigma associated with having children outside of marriage could be mitigated if mothers raised their children correctly, resulting in the over surveillance of girls relative to boys.

Furthermore, the idea of the “good Muslim girl” also illustrates how religion was primarily seen by parents and teachers in this study to provide a moral compass that related to respectability. In contrast, adolescents’ perspectives revealed that they did not
consider religion to provide the same moral compass as their parents as they also spoke extensively about the hypocrisy they saw in the church.

Despite the dominance of discourses on respectability, three of the ten girls who participated in the focus groups revealed forms of resistance. These girls spoke vehemently about rejecting the idea that clothing determines a teen girl’s worth and/or that befriending boys automatically assumes a girl has had sexual contact. These girls represent an alternative perspective in Guyana that rejects the dominant discourses on respectability because their lives disprove this narrative. For example, these girls spoke about wanting to wear what was in style and having a lot of male friends because it gave them a different perspective and provided them with information from the opposite sex even though they were criticized by “certain people” (chapter 5, p.131). This, in part, reveals a critique of dominant discourses because their style was dictated by using a capitalist value system where brands and fashion indicated importance. Furthermore, these girls questioned discourses that are prevalent within Guyanese society that they perceived as barriers for living their lives and some experienced discrimination as a result.

The dominant perspective on respectability also shaped conceptions on the dating experiences of adolescent boys. Boys reproduced the same notions of respectability for girls when they indicated that girls are called “dangles” or “whores” in focus group discussions (chapter 5, p.131). This name-calling illustrated a participation in behaviours that shamed girls if they did not conform to the dominant discourse of no sexual activity for girls. However, boys failed to realize that their perspective of “one wood can’t light a fire” – which was important for their “fame”, directly contradicted their perspectives that girls are “dangles” or “whores” for being with more than one boy (chapter 5, p. 131).
Adolescent boys and girls statement that, “once a boy get more than one girl, its fame. But, once a girl gets a lot of guys, it’s shame” (chapter 5, p.126) revealed that their understanding of relationships is based on stereotypical hetero-normative gender roles.

These examples illustrate that Wilson’s (1973) value system of respectability and reputation are not mutually exclusive but in fact are dependent and important to one another for adolescent girls and boys. When girls attempted to resist the colonial value system of respectability, their reputation within mainstream society was threatened. For some girls, losing respectability meant gaining knowledge, “…I learn more from the boys than the girls” (chapter 5, p.131) and therefore was worth the potential loss of respectability. Boys understanding of “fame” contradicts Wilson’s claims that reputation represents equality and personal worth, as the achievement of “fame” is linked to the defamation of girls’ reputations by attacking their respectability in the community. Moreover, in listening to the boys’ comments, their “fame” is their definition of reputation as men within their communities, because lacking numerous relationships with women and sexual prowess represented lower social status.

Previous work with adult Caribbean populations support findings that respectability and reputation are not fixed value systems based on gender. For example, as stated in chapter three, Besson (1993) provided several examples of women competing for reputation within their communities through land ownership or businesses in Jamaica and Marshall (1959) attested that Barbadian men conformed to ideas of respectability through their encouragement of education and hard work as a means of survival after migrating to the United States. My results contribute to these findings by illustrating how respectability is experienced in adolescent populations and that reputation is a fundamental component of defining respectability.
Additionally, teenagers are taught that if they do not conform to narrow definitions of respectability, which are based on normative heterosexual gender roles, then as adolescent girls indicated they are welcoming “bad attraction”. Secondly, as participant experiences and perspectives indicate, not conforming to ideas of respectability results in being stigmatized, and in some cases physically abused by those teenagers who feel entitled to enforce those notions of respectability as girls also revealed (chapter five). In this sense, because the understanding of respectability is associated with not dating, teenagers are further marginalized if these dating experiences result in violence. Furthermore, adolescents attempted to use their perceptions of respectability as a way to categorize themselves within their adolescent groups, which reveal rigid and stereotypical ideas of class and gender in society and continue to perpetuate hierarchal social interactions.

As teachers and teenagers spoke about dating relationships among adolescents, it was clear that lower socio-economic conditions posed challenges for parents and teenagers to conform to the notion of respectability. When teenagers required money for uniforms or the relationship proved to help the familial home, teachers stated that the dating relationship might be overlooked. This reveals that low socio-economic conditions impact the acceptance of respectability in dating during adolescence.

The current ideas of respectability, femininity, and class in Guyana dictate who experiences violence and more importantly if the violence could be “justified” because of the actions of victims. These perspectives contribute to sustaining systems rooted in discrimination that support the idea of adolescents not dating. For example, teachers and parents both were focused on preventing adolescent girls from having sex and getting
pregnant. These perspectives resulted in judgement of those teenagers that engaged in
dating activities.

In this sense, there is a relation in this scenario to those studies presented in chapter
two where some groups of racialized women felt they had to prove their abuse more than
other women, as their socio-economic conditions were viewed by social services to be the
cause of the abuse they experienced (Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004; Gillum, 2008;
Gill & Rehman, 2004). For example, these studies show how contending with violence
in a system rooted in multiple discriminations has negatively impacted those women, by
the lack of access to necessary resources and a dismissal of their complaints based on
dominant social discourses of womanhood, race, class, and who experiences violence.

My study is distinguishable from the international studies on dating violence
reviewed in chapter two because those studies began from the perspective that
adolescents are in fact dating and some of their dating experiences are unhealthy.
However, my study explores dating violence in a community where most think
adolescents should not date because it threatens family respectability, which is an
important measure of social status in the community.

Moreover, my study also differs from previous studies that engaged youth in
conversations on domestic violence within the country because I began the study from
the perspective that adolescents are currently having these experiences, while other
studies focused more broadly on domestic violence as a situation that might be
experienced in the future by teenagers (chapter 2). This shaped the way in which I
engaged adolescents in discussions and the questions I chose to ask which revealed the
discourse of respectability.
The discourse on dating in adolescence and its relation to respectability is largely articulated through control over girls and their bodies. The pressures to conform to respectable ideas of femininity place women and girls in positions where they may go to extreme measures to prove their respectability. Even though there are some adolescent girls who question these ideas, dominant discourses are teaching adolescent girls and boys that, if girls are not virgins or engage in dating, they are less valuable or respectable within the community. This creates a dangerous cultural context for those teenagers who may experience dating violence.

The Partial Acceptance of Domestic Violence Undermines the Legitimacy of Adolescent Dating Violence

In chapter two, I pointed out that even though studies like Malik et al. (1997) made a connection between the exposure to community violence and the experience of dating violence, we could not assume that the community condoned dating violence because it was exposed to a high level of violence. However, in this study, I have identified several connections between the perspectives on domestic violence and adolescent dating violence.

First, some participants spoke about domestic violence being more accepted in some ethnicities and communities than others. Specifically, most participants in interviews and focus groups believed that Indo-Guyanese families and rural communities had a higher tolerance for domestic violence between men and women. One example of this was discussed in chapter five between two teachers who focused on ethnicity and community as determining factors in the acceptability of domestic violence. One teacher believed that Indo-Guyanese women in lower socio-economic communities (which happen to be predominantly Afro-Guyanese neighbourhoods) did not accept violence as easily as Indo-
Guyanese women living in other areas. I had indicated in chapter five that because the
perception of where violence occurs is limited (i.e. Indo-Guyanese families, rural areas)
women in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods could face additional challenges when
seeking help because they may not necessarily fit into the stereotype of who experiences
violence more.

The perspective of particular women being treated differently based on ideas of class
and race creates a starting point for the understanding of violence that marginalizes some
women. A discussion with adolescent girls on women who “act ghetto”, revealed that
some adolescents have already categorized women into classes based on their socio-
economic status and blamed these women for the “bad attraction” they receive because
they have not conformed to dominant ideas of respectability (chapter 5, p.134).

Secondly, there is still no consensus on whether violence is “good” or “bad”
which corroborates McCarry’s (2009) study where adolescent boys and girls stated that
violence was acceptable if a girlfriend provoked her boyfriend (chapter two).
Participants’ views of violence were complex, sometimes contradictory, and heavily
context-dependent. In this study, adolescent boys and girls and male teachers spoke
extensively about witnessing domestic violence in their communities. As one teacher
stated, he did not consider beating a woman to be domestic violence, because she had not
completed her tasks of cleaning and taking care of the children (chapter 5). In this case,
violence was considered “a corrective tool” to remedy wrong behaviour (chapter 5, p.18).

As I discussed in chapter three, the two largest marginalized communities in Guyana
(Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese) were pitted against each other through deliberate
narratives that encouraged racialized stereotypes. Therefore, in other instances teachers
and parents spoke about ethnicity determining the acceptability of violence in
relationships based on an understanding of gender roles that were not met. However, what I found is that this violence has been pervasive across African and Indian Guyanese communities, and in actuality it has been accepted in more areas. This perspective has been common in previous Caribbean studies and supports a discourse that husbands have the right to “discipline” their wives and families (Barrow, 1996; Chevannes, 2001; Lazarus-Black 1995). Lazarus-Black (2008) has considered spaces such as these (i.e. family) where violence is acceptable in local Caribbean communities as cultures of reconciliation. Reconciliation, in this sense, means that there are certain social institutions (i.e. family) where violence has been considered acceptable. She indicated that cultures of reconciliation have larger implications and contribute to women not following through with domestic violence cases in the justice system, which exposes them to greater danger (Lazarus-Black, 2008).

Considering Lazarus-Black’s (2008) perspective, domestic violence contributes to the acceptability of violence in adolescent relationships because it relates violence to discipline, which is based on non-compliance to hetero-normative gender roles. This can contribute to silencing girls and boys from speaking about the violence they are experiencing because they are unsure whether they deserved it. However, in other instances, male school officials stated they often rejected any sort of violence in relationships, advising male friends and students not to be abusive to their wives or girlfriends.

Teenage girls also spoke about overhearing women justify violence in relationships by indicating that their men do not love them if they do not beat them (chapter 5). However, not all girls felt this way. Some girls vocalized a rejection of any sort of violence as a symbol of love or affection in a healthy relationship, which supports
findings from Reeves & Orpinas (2012) study where at no time was violence acceptable in relationships when boys were the perpetrator. These conflicting messages on domestic violence continue to foster ideas that violence in relationships is acceptable in some situations. It also reveals that the understanding of violence in relationships continues to be grounded in normative gender roles and patriarchy even though discourses are emerging that reject all forms of violence.

Thirdly, during my data collection time in Guyana and through reading online newspapers, I realized that the intensity and frequency of domestic violence stories far outweighed the messaging on domestic violence prevention. I thought about what implications this might have for how adolescents understand Guyanese society’s response to this issue and whether they see preventing violence to be as important as the violence itself since it is not reported in that manner. Previous research on domestic violence prevention in the Caribbean supports this thinking. It has illustrated that financial and human resource constraints posed challenges to creating consistent messaging and initiatives to combat the issue of domestic violence (DeShong & Haynes, 2014; Mancey, 2008) and continues to be a challenge for countries within the Caribbean region (Drayton, Benfield, Bourne & Roach, 2016).

Fourthly, adult and adolescent participants faced similar challenges in this study to Guyanese and international studies reviewed in chapter two, where domestic violence victims had to contend with accessing social services (i.e. police, counsellors) that were either discriminatory and/or limited. For example, one mother was told by a counsellor to tell her abuser to attend the counselling services, whereas a teacher recounted that a police officer would laugh and encourage women to go home to their husbands and “make-up”, while adolescent boys also pointed out that men receive no help if they report
an assault from a woman. Additionally, even though parents and teachers often looked to their faith for guidance and encouraged their teenagers to follow the teachings of their respective religion, adults admitted that at times those in leadership positions in their religious institutions also engaged in domestic violence acts and therefore contradicted the example parents and teachers expected of them (chapter 5).

Therefore, this study reveals that domestic violence continues to be treated as a private issue, not as a community or social occurrence. Even though Guyana has made several efforts to address domestic violence through a multi-sector and multi-level approach as described in chapter two, participants’ perspectives in this study overwhelmingly show that many of these efforts have not translated to victims obtaining help when they need it. More explicitly, the results indicate that those in most positions to help teenagers either judge them for being in dating relationships (e.g. teachers and teenagers spoke about girls being sent away to distant families if pregnant) or at times exploit them (a mother spoke about her daughter being pursued by a police officer). There remains a discrepancy between people’s everyday experiences when facing domestic violence and the perception that domestic violence is considered unacceptable throughout society.

In summary, the pervasive nature of domestic violence (Mitchell, Parekh, Russ, Forget & Wright, 2013; Parekh, Russ, Amsalam, Rambaran, Langston & Wright, 2012; Peake, 2002) sets the stage for inadequate responses to domestic violence, as violence is at times justified when grounded in stereotypical gender roles. The experiences of domestic violence also highlight the continued inadequacies of structural systems – that if unable to properly provide support for adults, they will definitely pose significant challenges in assisting teenagers. These challenges are primarily grounded in adolescents
learning that asking for help is futile in most cases, which can result in silencing the issue of dating violence and contribute to the persistence of this issue in adolescent groups.

**Adults Limited Understanding of Adolescence Contributes to Adolescent Dating Violence**

The results from this study reveal that adults approach adolescent dating violence from a deficit perspective; they start from what they believe teenagers are incapable of handling (chapter 5). To most parents and teachers, adolescence represented a time when teenagers lacked the necessary emotional and physical maturity to balance school and relationships, thus requiring the concerted protection of parents. In this regard, adults believed that teaching teenagers to live their lives sequentially during their adolescent years would be beneficial.

For example, teenagers were told to focus on school first, once secondary school was completed then dating could potentially take place, and most importantly sex was to be avoided at all costs (chapter 5). Most times this was the only option presented to adolescents (chapter 5). This perception was shaped by the high teen pregnancy rate that was a common occurrence in Guyanese society. Teenage pregnancy often resulted in teenage girls dropping out of school and teenagers being injured fatally in adolescent relationships. As one parent indicated, fear was the primary motivator for the parenting that occurred in Guyana, especially in lower socio-economic families where there were more stressors related to maintaining the basic necessities of life (chapter 5). Moreover, there are minimal structural supports and little options during pregnancy for teenagers. For example, the observer and Guyanese board member of this study who runs a program for pregnant teenagers has told me on numerous occasions that she lacks the necessary
supports to help the number of referrals she receives from Georgetown hospital, and therefore, has to turn some girls away.

However, these concerns are not specific to Guyana, as previous research regionally has focused primarily on risk factors for teenagers – specifically regarding unhealthy behaviours such as risky sexual practices, substance abuse, and various forms of violence (i.e. gangs, sexual violence) (Bailey & Charles, 2008; Maharaj, Nunes, & Renwick 2009). In this regard, Caribbean adolescents have been narrowly defined and described primarily by their challenges and how these challenges can be averted. Nonetheless, some studies have acknowledged that Caribbean adolescents are not a homogenous group and require differing and tailored needs based on their different circumstances (Bailey & Charles, 2008).

In this study, adolescence was spoken about as a time when hormones began to rage and teenagers started having physical attractions. However, the understanding of adolescence ended at that point and was only to be defined and not acted upon. Therefore, adults defined adolescence biologically without accepting the fact that the period of adolescence also included different activities and actions from that of a child. Thus, the limited perspective of adolescence normalized a narrow scope of experiences that teenagers might encounter, which became a marker of difference and therefore a less-than status for those teenagers who could not conform to this idea based on how their socio-economic status contributed to the ways in which they lived out the expectations of adolescence. Only one teacher explicitly stated that the current definition of adolescence in Guyanese society stifles the healthy development of teenagers, but this same teacher still agreed that teenagers should not be dating (chapter 5).
William (2004) has indicated that the concept of adolescence is relatively new for the Caribbean, because historically childhood and adolescence were almost indistinguishable from the responsibilities of adulthood during slavery. Adults, teenagers, and children were powerless and were required to do tough work and accept violent abuse, and cruel discipline (Williams, 2004). Adolescents (along with children) continued to be conceptualized in economic terms because they were important to the labour force well into the 1940s (Bailey & Charles, 2008). It was not until after this time period that child labour was outlawed because it undermined adult labour (Bailey & Charles, 2008). After this point, the introduction of mass education in post-emancipation years steered the understanding of adolescents into broader social terms as the current focus is on health, education, and financial security (Bailey & Charles, 2008).

Conversations with adolescents further emphasized how limiting the view of adolescents is and debunked some of the claims by adults. For example, when speaking with teenagers on school grounds in informal discussions, I learned that several teenagers were responsible for the care of younger siblings. When I inquired about why a teen was constantly late to school, she told me that she had to take her sibling to school in a different part of the city. When teenagers spoke about intimate relationships in the focus group discussions, they revealed a more nuanced understanding of the emotional and physical aspects of their relationships that are often linked to social factors. For example, in chapter five boys recognized that some girls want love and affection that they have not received at home and questioned the sincerity of girls when adolescent girls requested money in their relationships. Boys also recognized that girls felt they had to initiate sex after they were given some gift or item and believed this was the dominant perspective,
but also indicated they used sex as a way to feel closer to their partner if they had not seen them in a while.

Conversely, girls spoke quite cautiously about intimacy with boys, sceptical of their intentions and believing that most adolescent boys only wanted the physical nature of a relationship. However, in their conversations with other girlfriends, they were pressured to engage in sexual acts and also ensure that the boy was pleasured in order to keep him. The discussions on sex reveal that some adolescents are engaging in transactional sex with other teenagers in their age groups. This contributes to the body of research on this topic in the Caribbean and expands the relationships where transactional sex can occur as previous research has primarily focused on intergenerational sex (Drakes et al., 2013; Kempadoo, 2009). Moreover, all teenagers wanted more information on love, dealing with infidelity, and mending a broken heart.

These discussions inevitably lead to dating violence because some girls described abuse as a factor in unhealthy relationships during the icebreaker exercises and also debated whether hitting was an expression of love when one girl brought up a situation her friend experienced. For these adolescents, defining this life stage was reflective of the environments in which they live, which supports Bailey & Charles’ (2008) research on Caribbean youth requiring different needs based on their environment. As a school official and teacher stated, many of the teenagers in the school live in destitute situations, which inevitably shaped their motivations for wanting dating relationships (i.e. support, love, money) along with the physical and emotional changes they were going through. Therefore, the way in which adults chose to define the adolescent years does not take into account the socio-economic conditions in which teenagers live and grow that often do not allow for naivety.
Furthermore, my study also highlights the importance of how respectability factors into the understanding of the adolescent life stage and shapes how the community defines and responds to issues affecting adolescents as I illustrated in the first section. This is one factor that has been omitted in past health research reports but is central to any discussion on adolescents and how they are defined within Guyana and the broader Caribbean region (Bailey & Charles, 2008; Edberg, 2008; Edberg, 2009; Maharaj et al., 2009).

Therefore, the current definition of adolescence by adults contributes to silencing teenagers from discussing with most adults the various elements of dating relationships that can lead to dating violence. Adults are speaking about adolescent dating violence, but in a manner that further stigmatizes youth and families who have gone through it, because they start from the assumption that teenagers should not be engaging in dating relationships. Without adults providing information that helps clarify some of the ideas of relationships that teenagers have, teenagers continued to operate in a state of limbo, speaking without guidance about healthy relationships.

**Dating Violence Is Unavoidable and Inescapable For Some Teenagers**

Similar to other studies on adolescent dating violence discussed in chapter two, when given the opportunity to discuss dating violence in their own words, adolescents articulated that dating violence happens in physical, sexual, economic, and emotional forms. Additionally, adolescents’ perspectives of why they experience dating violence reflect an understanding of the connection between larger societal issues and their personal experiences.

In this study, adolescent girls and boys spoke extensively about how gendered poverty in familial homes often fuelled adolescent girls’ actions to remain in
relationships, even if they were abusive. Adolescent girls described their choice to stay in violent relationships with phrases like “don’t have a choice” and note they “have to take it” because they needed basic necessities that often times could not be met by their families due to the precarity of their daily lives (chapter 6, p.183). One girl explained that if her boyfriend normally took her to school and requested sex, she felt she had no other recourse but to comply to ensure that she secured her transportation and returned home safely (chapter 6). Even though it is well documented in the literature that dating violence occurs in all segments of society (Cutter-Wilson & Richmond, 2011), for these adolescents, poverty contributed to the feeling that girls were left without a choice of escaping abusive relationships, which illustrates the dire situations some teenagers come from.

In the boys’ focus group, their comments revealed that they did not fully grasp the complexity of socio-economic factors that contribute to girls staying in abusive relationships, because this was not their reality growing up as men in Guyana. This was revealed in adolescent boys comments on why girls stay in abusive relationships – which was more focused on the perceived choices girls made in partners, even though they acknowledged that at times, girls could enter into relationships to fulfill needs unmet by their families.

Furthermore, while it was not a popular perspective, our discussions on gendered poverty and adolescent dating violence led one girl to question why exactly girls have to depend on boys or men to provide for them, telling the group that they were capable of caring for themselves. However, the most recent human development report for the Caribbean shows that even if girls wanted to enter the workforce to take care of themselves, there is still a significant gender gap in available jobs and more importantly,
women continue to receive lower paying jobs at 23-28% throughout the Caribbean even when they enter the workforce (Drayton et al., 2016). This supports previous research in Guyana where even if women expressed a desire to enter into the workforce, they were challenged by the unequal employment conditions (Peake and Trotz, 2000). As Bailey and Charles (2008) have indicated, poverty reduction is measured from household poverty which teenagers are often considered a part of. Therefore, even though Caribbean reports cite a high level of adolescent unemployment, poverty reduction strategies are not tailored to their needs due to a paucity of research on how teenagers experience poverty (Bailey and Charles, 2008). Teenagers and adults in this study have highlighted some of the main ways teenagers experience poverty — and I alluded to this when I spoke about violence in schools often being fuelled by stealing money, food and/or other personal items (chapter 6). In these instances, dating violence can be unavoidable because poverty is inescapable.

Additionally, some girls also stated that they used violence as a useful and common response when experiencing violence, which corroborates previous research that adolescent girls use retaliatory violence in relationships that may contribute to statistics showing dating violence in adolescence as being reciprocal from girls to boys (Simon, Miller, Gorman-Smith, Orpinas & Sullivan, 2010). However, there were other girls who felt violence was an unwise choice, as they believed it would result in further violence that could cause greater harm to them. What became apparent to me as I continued to analyze the results of this study was that adolescent boys’ and girls’ focus groups did not come to a consensus that violence in relationships was inherently wrong.Teenagers were unsure whether violence was “good or bad” because they have heard and witnessed
conflicting messages in the communities where they lived, traveling in and around the city, and when they attended church (chapter 5).

From parents’ perspectives, they recognized the inevitability of adolescents’ exposure to messages that promote violence or behaviours that lead to gender violence for teenagers while taking public transportation (chapter 6). I also observed the influence of North American hip hop culture through the branding of North American record labels on clothing. The mainstream hip-hop culture that teenagers in Guyana choose to follow, promotes a consumerism that is difficult to attain for most living in a lower-middle income country. Trying to conform to these images can also contribute to teenagers staying in abusive relationships to maintain a certain social position through consumption, which is acknowledged by branded clothing (i.e. YMCMB).

Violence in many ways is a form of survival for teenagers because it is inextricably linked to maintaining social relationships while obtaining basic needs. Accepting dating violence as a survival strategy has been well documented in literature, and these results are comparable to previous studies that show marginalized women remaining silent in abusive relationships to avoid negative stereotyping of their communities (Sokoloff, 2008). My study contributes to enhancing our understanding of how this manifests itself among adolescents who contend with another layer of marginalization due to their age.

Adolescent girls spoke about the outcomes of adult perspectives on age when they stated that seeking help from parents was not a realistic possibility because teenagers dated in secrecy knowing parents’ will disapprove. In these comments we learn two important points. First, teenagers do not believe that their parents concern for their wellbeing would supersede the disappointment and/or anger for being in a dating relationship. Secondly, they do not believe their parents would help them if they knew
they were in an abusive relationship. These perspectives provide further insight into why teenagers might be hesitant to speak with adults, which results in some adults believing that dating violence is not a serious issue within the adolescent community as some school officials told me.

These findings support previous research that showed different awareness levels of the seriousness of adolescent dating violence by adults who interact with teenagers (Khubchandani et al., 2012; Khubchandani et al., 2013; Martolf et al., 2012), but also differs from previous research I reviewed where girls felt embarrassed to tell someone they were in an abusive relationship due to the amount of women’s rights campaigns that encouraged women to reject domestic violence (Gallopin et al., 2009; Martin et al., 2012; Redhawk Love & Richards, 2013; Sears et al., 2006). For the girls in this study, the dating relationship itself was stigmatizing, which prevented them from exposing the violence they endured. Girls spoke about the domestic violence campaigns as a subject to be studied, providing the correct answers to questions asked, but did not consider these initiatives to have a great impact on their lives.

**Family Composition is Perceived to Impact Adolescent Dating Violence.**

Trying to account for adolescent dating violence, parents, teachers, and adolescents created an oversimplified explanation of the phenomenon based on the discourse of family composition. When participants spoke about different types of families (specifically single parent homes) it was considered to be the most responsible in contributing to adolescent dating violence. Parents speculated that teenagers might have felt neglected or blamed themselves for their parents’ separation in single parent households (chapter 6).
However, when teenagers talked about relationships with their parents, they never indicated having one parent as a problem or concern. Rather, teenagers wanted the interaction between themselves and their parents to improve and this was irrespective of family make-up (chapter 6). Furthermore, some teenagers that came from single-parent households expressed to others in the focus groups the strong bonds they felt with their parents and were often times aware of the life circumstances that led to their parents being alone. Previous studies support these results and have found that the quality of interaction between Caribbean parents and teenagers is protective against involvement in violence (i.e. gangs), substance abuse, and unhealthy sexual practices (Blum et al., 2003; Maguire & Fishbein, 2016; Pilgrim & Blum, 2011).

Paradoxically, teachers differentiated incoming students through their mothers’ last names as an indication that the families were illegitimate and assumed these situations to be unstable because parents were not married (chapter 6). However, this assumption is limiting. As stated in chapter 3, Caribbean households reflect a multitude of relationship types, and there is a strong history of having extended family members who often aid in child rearing in the Caribbean (Barrow, 1996). This was also revealed to me when I spoke to teenagers who wanted to participate in this study and they described their living situation to be with aunts or uncles and grandparents. Nevertheless, as we see through these results, colonial ideas of the nuclear, two-parent, heterosexual family continue to influence people’s understanding of families, which at times can be inaccurately judgmental.

With this perspective, teachers also believed that the familial home would hamper or eliminate all of the work that they achieved in school with improving the behaviour of teenagers (chapter 6). In this regard, the school was described as a system where
teenagers were only taught and exposed to positive images and examples of relationships between people. However, this perspective is misguided and I will address it in the following section. When teachers further explained their comments about why families would hinder their efforts, they indicated that parents would tell teachers they had no time to implement what teachers would suggest, as their financial responsibilities meant work often superseded family time (chapter 6). In many of the students’ households, time was considered a luxury that did not reflect the reality of their current situation.

The socio-economic conditions of parents in this study support the results found in Gonzalez-Guarda et al. (2013) study, where the need to access employment opportunities often meant separating parents and teenagers in ways that left teenagers vulnerable to seek social and financial supports in other ways. School officials indicated that a large portion of the student community has parents who work in the interior – a very far travel from the capital city where this study took place. However, numerous participants who were teachers (and also parents) spoke about moving to the capital from other regions of Guyana to find more employment opportunities for teaching. The difference in these cases is that the teachers often had the financial means to relocate to the capital city with their families.

There remains a significant gap between unskilled work and access to employment opportunities within Guyana that impact relationships between parents and teenagers in lower social classes. In this sense, low socio-economic status was a challenge for single parent and two-parent homes, as parents and teachers only made the differentiation of family composition when speaking directly about violence. Moreover, adolescents’ attendance at school was also impacted by these working and living conditions, as I observed some teenagers skipping school so that they could spend time
with parents who spent long periods away from the family home and at other times were unable to attend school if parents did not return in time from the interior with money for the family. In the situations that participants described, there are stronger possibilities for dating violence to occur in the intersections of parent’s interactions (that are in lower socio-economic status) with larger structural systems. Marmot (2015) has stated poverty is not destiny for people within communities. However, social systems have to support those who are socio-economically disadvantaged and there are no easy answers to this issue in a lower middle-income country, such as Guyana.

One male guardian considered North American television’s impact on families and believed Guyana has been inundated with images of families that are divorced or experiencing upheaval without balanced images of successful families. He referred to the Cosby’s television show and how this example has been tainted by the allegations surrounding Bill Cosby, but sees a difference in the programming teenagers are exposed to in today’s society (chapter 6). While he was the only person to consider the impact of media in the discussion on the family’s responsibility in dating violence situations, previous literature supports that adolescents obtain knowledge on the acceptability of violence and dating behaviour from various media portrayals (Bowen et al., 2013; Chung, 2007; Herrman 2013; McCarry 2009; Ulloa et al., 2008). Moreover, teenagers in this study repeatedly requested more positive role models in our group discussions to learn better ways of interacting with each other (chapter 6). This indicates that adolescents are also aware of the lack of positive examples in their communities and are yearning for this to be improved.

Additionally, an interesting point arose on the perception of how the gender equity campaign has impacted relationships and illustrates an area to be further explored
to ensure that campaign efforts are having the desired effect. A male guardian stated that he saw the current promotion of one gender (women) more than the other (men) as promoting an individualistic focus with regards to relationships that is not healthy for building intimate relationships, and threatens the idea of togetherness that adults feel is lacking in Guyanese society (chapter 6). There is a history in the Caribbean of a backlash to the women’s movement by men who felt threatened with the increased focus on gender equality (Reddock, 2007). I do not believe these comments were from this perspective, but rather to question how we continue to promote gender equity through a lens that focuses on bringing people together, rather than continuing the current dialogue, which continues to create adversarial relationships.

The definition of a two-parent household has resulted in many families who do not fit this definition speaking from the margins of society attempting to fit an ideal which we know historically was imposed on Caribbean communities (Beckles, 2003; Kempadoo, 2003; Peake and Trotz, 1999). Furthermore, the Caribbean human development report has also indicated that there are significant material differences for two-parent households as opposed to single-parent households within the region, which may also play into the perspective that single parent households are not the ideal (Drayton et al., 2016). As I mentioned previously, due to the difference in wages and employment opportunities, women-led Caribbean households struggle far more, which contributes to their economic marginality. Therefore, the focus on the family composition as opposed to family interaction and its impact on dating violence are limiting, as parents may not be in a position to immediately change the composition of their families or their socio-economic status.
Furthermore, Barrow (2001) has questioned the family breakdown discourse that has been disseminated in Barbados and throughout the Caribbean. She asserts that this discourse has informed public policy and shaped public perception and opinion into a dual image where “family is blamed for the failure to deal with escalating social problems [and at the same time] it is revered as the primary agent for the resolution of these problems and for maintaining social continuity and cohesion” (Barrow, 2001, p. 424). However, in the case of Barbados she illustrated that the indicators used to signify the effects of family breakdown specifically in Afro-Caribbean families (i.e. teen pregnancy, divorce, elder abuse) were considered in an oversimplified manner that did not take into account other social policies that would impact the fluctuating statistics (Barrow, 2001). She used these examples to highlight that the focus on family composition is not inherently useful to explain some of the social issues that challenge Caribbean society. Considering the results of this study, I agree with Barrow (2001) that the breakdown of families is a limiting focus when attempting to address social phenomenon such as adolescent dating violence in the Caribbean.

Moreover, parents, aware of their perceived inadequate family make-up utilized what resources were available to assist them with their parenting. The most practical and consistent resource for single parents to access (as well as two-parent households) was teachers, even though these relationships were tense on occasions. However, single parents spoke about seeing teachers also as having parenting roles while in school and placed some onus on teachers for how their teenagers fared (chapter 6). This perspective was also accepted by teachers, who saw the need to reach out to students in a familial manner, and also in their professional role (chapter 6) and support adults reminiscing
about a period in Guyana where the entire community played a role in raising adolescents.

To assume that the familial home is the main cause of dating violence as teachers and parents perspectives suggest, would mean that all other societal factors surrounding the family have no bearing on what occurs inside of the home. As Barrow (2001) has suggested, the idea of the two-parent, nuclear, heterosexual household was a narrative taught to Caribbean communities and has shaped how social issues are thought about and approached when family inevitably plays a role. Teenagers have stated that the interaction with their parents is most important to them. With this in mind it would be beneficial to question how policies that impact socio-economic factors and the definition of families impede the ability of family members to interact in ways that are more meaningful as teenagers have requested. If family and adolescent dating violence is considered through this lens then the narrative that family composition is more important than family interaction can be continuously challenged.

**The Connection between the Educational System and Adolescent Dating Violence**

The school system did not have solely a positive impact on addressing adolescent dating violence, even though many violence prevention initiatives globally look to schools as a place to promote healthier interpersonal interactions with teenagers (Alexander et al., 2014; Wolfe et al., 2003).

First, this school was challenged by limited financial and human resources, which at times left students under-supervised in classrooms when there was no available teacher to cover classes. Teachers also felt stifled in the current system as they described staff development sessions as enforcing behaviours instead of promoting individual development that would be beneficial to their specific needs. Additionally, some teachers
showed signs of being burned out, aware that they had nothing left to give to their own families if they tried to help all of the teenagers at the school who required help (chapter 6). The reality of teachers working in this system, especially in schools that are ranked medium to low, means working with fewer resources for larger number of students who have more problems often caused by their low socio-economic status. In this school, the environment in which relationships are formed is depleted.

When I consider the history of education within the region, I see this school environment as a consequence of colonial practices. As Bailey and Charles (2008) indicated, “Caribbean education systems remain marked by race, class and gender organizing hierarchies which regulate the distribution of knowledge and ultimately differential access to material resources and symbolic power” (p.68). Historically, those in lower classes of society (ex-slaves, labourers) were provided with primary education, while those deemed to be in higher classes (colonizers) were given access to secondary and tertiary education (Bailey, 2009). The overall intention of the post-independence period was to democratize education by providing access to secondary education for everyone (Bailey, 2009). However, as the experiences of teachers and teenagers illustrate in my study, access to secondary education without an understanding of the socio-economic conditions of the school and the school population can perpetuate inequitable conditions that contradict the intended goals of the system (Bailey, 2009).

Participants have shown that the school community encompasses multiple forms of violence and also potential support networks between parents, teachers, and adolescents, creating a matrix of factors that prevent but also contribute to adolescent dating violence. As described in chapter six, teachers and school officials spoke quite candidly about experiencing physical violence in schools from parents and students, some parents spoke
about their teenage boys being targeted with aggressive behaviour by teachers, adolescents (specifically girls) revealed interactions with teachers that were verbally abusive, and teenagers visited the head mistresses office on a daily basis for fighting or being physically and verbally aggressive with other students. These results support past research completed in the Caribbean that has identified corporal punishment and violence among adolescents as quite common in Caribbean secondary schools (Bailey and Charles, 2008).

Yet I also observed a strong sense of family-like relations and community on school grounds (chapter 6). Teachers gave students money for bus fares or would be seen taking extra time speaking with some students who were sent to the principal’s office at recess or after school. Adolescent boys and girls also spoke about their relationships with teachers, whom they spoke to as confidants. However, these relationships were damaged when teachers did not respect the privacy of teenagers and therefore broke an established trust. Teachers in some regards may not have realized the importance that teenagers placed in these informal relationships, as it may have been one of few opportunities to speak with an adult and feel heard.

School is often times the only resource for information on dating, however, this information is taught primarily through the dominant lens of respectability. For example, there is only one course currently offered in schools that covers dating titled Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) and teachers, parents, and teenagers feel that it is taught in a limited manner where the two most important forms (4&5) do not receive the information from this course (Chapter 6). Most of the participants believed that the content in the curriculum was superficial and more information was needed in this course. This supports previous evaluative reports on the HFLE curriculum that indicated
teachers were not always teaching the full content because of their personal beliefs on sex education (Evaluating report piloting, 2013). However, speaking with students during two focus group sessions (2 hours/session) in this study demonstrated that adolescent boys and girls have a tremendous wealth of knowledge and opinions on dating and dating violence, but require more opportunities to critically engage with dominant perspectives.

One recurrent point in conversations with adolescents, parents, and teachers was the importance of education in teen’s lives and even more importantly to parents and teachers, using education as the main deterrent for entering into dating relationships. However, participants’ perspectives made me realize that the education system had a far more profound effect on the experiences of dating violence in adolescence then simply being used as a preventative measure for dating. While parents spoke positively about their teenagers attending this school, several school officials and teachers stated that this particular school did not receive what they would call, “high-flyers” compared to other higher ranked public schools, meaning that students who attended this school were not considered to have a high educational aptitude (chapter 6).

This perspective lowered the expectations of teachers and school officials, essentially stigmatizing the entire student population, with particular groups of students being further stigmatized as “problem children” or the “worst of the worst” if they were poorly behaved (chapter 6). However, one of the school officials told me during this study that an all girls’ class recently debunked this belief by achieving good academic scores during internal school examinations, even though they were “blacklisted”.

Additionally, a school official who had worked at several different schools in his/her career – many he/she described as being far worse than the school my study took place in (i.e. higher levels of violence and poverty), believed that parents whose teenagers
attended higher ranked schools were more co-operative and interested in their teen’s education than those schools that were ranked lower in the city. Moreover, I have witnessed the competition and judgement that happens in neighbourhoods between families when comparing which secondary schools teenagers will attend and the ensuing embarrassment or disappointment towards teenagers who do not obtain high scores.

In both of these instances and in further conversations with teachers and parents, it became apparent that the ranking of public secondary schools based on academic performance has fostered unhelpful comparisons that shape parents, teachers, adolescents, and the community’s perceptions of teenagers and their academic ability. As Jules (2015) has stated, “the unfortunate reality is that the post-colonial project in education has never fundamentally questioned the colonial inheritance. We have accepted and expanded education systems whose organizing principles and structural frameworks have assumed that a principal function of education is to sort and classify people” (para. 7). Even though there may be some instances as we saw with the class above where teenagers performed well academically in spite of the stigma of their school of origin, there is also the potential impact that this type of stigma can have on teenagers and their decision-making and illustrates the systemic vestiges that colonialism maintains in structural institutions. If adults promote education as the most important preventative tool for dating violence, and then stigmatize students who also internalize the view that they are not academically inclined, dating relationships may replace the importance for social inclusion they might have felt with education.

This is a key defining point that distinguishes this study from other previous work on violence, schools, and adolescents within the Caribbean. Previous research has focused on gender distributions of access to secondary and tertiary education, the amount
of violence that occurs within schools, teen pregnancies and its association to drop-out rates, and literacy rates for the Caribbean, but these reports have not considered how the ranking of schools contributes to the experiences of dating violence and shuns teenagers from receiving help from their communities (Drayton et al., 2016; UNDP, 2012). The only reference about the ranking of schools for a dating violence program in St. Lucia was done simply to provide context to the study (Alexander et al., 2014).

The educational system cannot be forgotten when attempting to understand adolescent’s experiences of dating violence and also how adults respond to teenagers that are in dating relationships. While schools might provide ideal spaces for violence prevention, my study reveals that without accounting for how the educational system has been organized and understood in a local context, the role of education can be oversimplified and therefore not address systemic forms of violence (i.e. access to poor education based on socio-economic status) that adolescents and adults might experience.

Section 2: Advancing Health Promotion and Healthier Relationship Practices

*If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But, if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.*

*(Aboriginal activists group as cited in Marmot, 2015)*

I chose to begin with this quote because it succinctly captures the greater possibilities that arise from working equitably. In this section, I will present key strategies that can be considered to build healthier relationships. I have realized through this research process that interventions or initiatives have to happen at two levels. The structural has to create spaces for healthy interpersonal relationships to occur and relationships have to build possibilities for structural change.
Re-defining Adolescence for Guyana

In the first section of this discussion chapter, I described that current perspectives on adolescents were limiting and prevented teenagers from seeking guidance and/or help. Adolescents were defined by their developmental stage rather considering them as people who will inevitably encounter different experiences as they grow. Adults’ perspectives inaccurately captured the lives of teenagers, which resulted in adults and teenagers speaking past one another at the detriment of their relationships. Teachers were able to acknowledge that adults may not know how to approach teenagers and therefore simply tell them to stop certain behaviours instead of trying to understand their emotions and decisions during these years (chapter 6). If teenagers continue to be viewed as children and not as adolescents transitioning into adulthood, it will remain a difficult feat to remove the stigma associated with dating and therefore promote healthier relationships that can eliminate dating violence.

However, I must note, it is not my intention to single out Guyana as the only country challenged with attempting to understand and define the period between childhood and adulthood. Defining adolescence has been a global effort and the multiplicity of age ranges used in previous research highlights that a single definition of adolescence might not be possible with the different contexts of people's lives (see Table 1). Rather, I believe it is important for Guyana to create its own definition of adolescence that can work towards supporting teenagers more effectively with the realities of their lives. By this I mean to focus on the potential experiences adolescents might encounter and not base the definition solely on a developmental stage. Moreover, researchers such as Bent-Goodley & Williams (2004) propose that it is important for marginalized
communities to create and live by their own definitions. With this in mind, re-defining adolescence would be a useful and pragmatic step in promoting healthier relationships.

This study reveals that contrary to larger dominant discourses, Guyanese teenagers are knowledgeable of their surroundings and capable of managing multiple life events or experiences simultaneously, requiring support occasionally when managing complex issues. Teenagers require encouragement to gain independence but adolescents are also inextricably linked to the communities in which they live as their lives represent not only themselves, but also the legacies of their parents and extended family.

Creating or re-thinking how Guyana views adolescents does not mean that it will eliminate violence on its own. Rather, it enables the community to better address the concerns of the adolescent community by recognizing their (adolescent) capabilities and acknowledge that adults can contribute to adolescent dating violence by silencing teenagers. There are multiple examples globally of the numerous possibilities that exist to address adolescent dating violence if the community begins from the perspective that teenagers are dating.

One notable Canadian program, The Fourth R has engaged adolescents, parents, and teachers with positive results of decreasing dating violence among teenagers and improved parent and teacher interactions with teenagers (Crooks et al., 2008; Crooks et al., 2011). The Fourth R initiative was piloted in 2001, developed from the Youth Relationships Project that sought to reduce violence in relationships (Crooks et al., 2008). The Fourth R program approaches relationships (the fourth R), as one of the four core courses (i.e. reading, writing, arithmetic) that are fundamental in developing the whole individual by also teaching relationship knowledge and skills (Wolfe, Jaffe, & Crooks, 2006). This program includes a 21-lesson plan with role-play exercises that emphasizes
knowledge, awareness, and skills development that address safety in relationships, sexual health, and substance use (Crooks et al., 2011). Moreover, the creators of this program acknowledged that one approach to healthy relationships did not meet the specific needs of various communities. Therefore, *the Fourth R* program has been adapted to better address the needs of marginalized communities nationally (Crooks, Snowshoe, Chiodo & Brunette-Debassige, 2013).

Notably, this program has been adapted for First Nations, Metis and Inuit (FNMI) communities (Crooks et al., 2013). *Uniting Our Nations* is another program grounded in a strength-based approach recognizing that the history of colonization had a significant impact on FNMI communities, essentially stripping them of their culture for assimilation into Western society (Crooks et al., 2013). Developing *Uniting Our Nations* from this perspective meant that the process of engaging multidisciplinary stakeholders (including youth) was central to creating programs that would be used in FNMI communities. All programs are grounded in youth perspectives and the community (Crooks et al., 2013). *Uniting Our Nations* offers FNMI communities seven different programs that range in length, focus, and implementation style (i.e. peer mentorship program/aboriginal perspectives program/cultural leadership camp) but have a core connection of promoting healthier relationships (Crooks et al., 2013). The success of these programs is evidenced by its uptake in a number of communities nationally because it enables communities to choose which combination of the seven programs is suitable for their situation (Crooks et al., 2013).

Such a program is only possible because these communities acknowledged that adolescents were dating and focused on eliminating unhealthy relationships, with recognition that cultural context is crucial to ensure initiatives meet the needs of the
community. However, for a program such as this to occur in Guyana, adolescence would first have to be understood as a time when dating occurs, which is difficult in the current climate where dating is mainly related to ideas of respectability and gender stereotypes. Moreover, as seen with *Uniting Our Nations*, Guyanese communities would also have to acknowledge that the historical effects of colonization continue to shape dominant discourses that impact perspectives on adolescent dating violence.

**Moving Away From Adversarial Gender Roles**

The results reveal that the current understanding of normative masculinity and femininity created misconceptions and adversarial relationships between adolescent boys and girls where girls most often experienced an oppressed position in heterosexual relationships. The discussion on relationships with teenagers revealed that teenagers were taught to define gender roles based on the actions of the opposite sex. Nonetheless, in all focus group discussions with parents, teachers, and adolescents, I found opportunities that could be considered to move polarized discourses on gender norms and relationships to a common ground.

Specifically, the second ice-breaker I used to begin the second round of focus groups was helpful in illustrating that participants saw several aspects of relationships that they believed should be shared between both parties. These words and phrases reflected a healthier emotional connection and also gave tangible suggestions of how these emotions could be displayed in relationships. For example, there were particular words that described attributes participants believed that men and women, boys and girls should embody within relationships, including “trust, love, supportive and faithful”. As previously mentioned, adolescents had discussed that they were not always certain what love was or what actions denoted love. When I analyzed the phrases that were also
suggested by participants, it became clearer to me that these phrases would be helpful in understanding what trust, love, support and faithful would look like and feel like in a relationship. Phrases such as “love you for who you are”, “complement each other’s strengths and weaknesses”, and “decision-making shared”, provide positive attitudes to create or mend a relationship to make it healthier.

Additionally, participants also spoke about changing the way men and women are initially taught about each other, as it provides an unhealthy starting point for interactions between teenagers. One participant spoke about his first experience with women being through pornography, which heavily influenced what he thought about women at an impressionable age (chapter 6). Girls also discussed overhearing women speak about men hitting them as a form of affection and boys spoke about witnessing parents calling their daughters “whores” in their communities (chapter 5). Combating experiences, which I believe occur quite commonly for adolescents based on their comments, can be countered by also considering how structural spaces such as the school system perpetuate adversarial gender roles – this I will address in a latter section focusing on schools’ role in violence prevention.

In essence, these results reveal a sharing of vulnerabilities that men and women experience in relationships. In this study, I understood shared vulnerabilities to mean that because adolescents and adults experienced multiple oppressions, there were opportunities to begin dating relationships from the position that adolescent boys and girls are both vulnerable in different ways. As Ojara (2006) stated, “Shared vulnerability is always disclosed or expressed in a context of higher purpose. People participate in the experience of shared vulnerability for the sake of communion of love, which engenders and establishes love, kindness and joy. In this sense, participation in shared vulnerability
stands on the opposite plane of debasement or dehumanization” (p.285-286). Therefore, considering establishing or building healthier relationships as a higher purpose as Ojara (2006) has indicated, sharing vulnerabilities changes the adversarial starting point that participants have expressed in this study by focusing on relationship characteristics that both groups of people want.

Furthermore, gender roles were not void of racial stereotypes and this was evident when boys discussed violence related to masculinity. For example, in chapter five B1 stated, “…I think scientists say that East Indians are more likely to kill themselves, but the Africans would kill their partners or whatever…” and B2 responded, “from a mixed perspective, they would talk around the problem” (p.13). B2 was mixed with Portuguese and was lighter than the other boys in the focus groups. In these comments it is clear that adolescents understand the use of violence to be different based on race and or ethnicity, and these are adversarial. For B2 to believe that being “mixed race” means being less prone to use violence illustrates that he considers mixed-race people superior to Indian or African Guyanese because lighter skin equates to greater civility. Therefore, the understanding of race remains a steadfast undercurrent in defining adversarial gender roles because it is indivisible from ideas of gender – even if it is not recognized as such. Moreover, the link between race and adversarial gender roles is important as it continues to reveal the normalization of violence in relationships based on inaccurate understandings of the innate nature of violence in relation to race. These perspectives also highlight that more effort is required to engage students in discussions on race that can address and correct inaccurate information as a form of decolonization.

In keeping with a higher purpose of healthier relationships and the inseparable link between adolescents and their families, the results also reveal that the idea of shared
vulnerabilities might be useful to consider in the familial home to support better relationships between parents and teenagers. Teen girls told the group that they often preferred speaking with their fathers instead of their mothers as they found their mothers more judgemental and would often use the information against them a later time (chapter 6). Since the ideas of respectability are so intertwined with femininity which uses motherhood as a central characteristic to define womanhood in Guyana, mothers can be harder on teenagers recognizing that the actions of teenagers influence how the community views their success in their roles as mothers (Peake & Trotz, 1999). As a teacher stated in chapter 6, “a crack head can only teach crack head mentality” (p.61). Therefore, a respectable mother raises a respectable child, and this thinking can contribute to adversarial relationships between parents and teenagers when girls engage in dating relationships that are often complicated by the family social and economic factors. Given that the entire family shares the same challenges living out their daily lives and teenagers have added pressures due to community expectations for their age group, changing the dynamics within families and the basis from which families choose to communicate and interact with teenagers could promote healthier relationships.

**Moving From Hierarchal to Dialogical Approaches**

Marmot (2015) has indicated that to build socially sustainable and resilient communities two main issues have to be addressed. First, you have to prevent bad things from happening, and secondly, you have to build the capacity for the community to bounce back from adversity. I believe both of these factors can be achieved through changing hierarchal modes of communication to dialogical approaches in families, schools, and among teenagers. However, what I am suggesting here would not occur without significant challenges, as it is incredibly different than the current environment,
which is highly hierarchal. In this sense, moving from hierarchal to dialogical approaches would be revolutionary.

The most unexpected finding of this study for me was the impact that participating in focus group discussions had on parents, teachers, and adolescents. Simply being exposed to a different way of communicating (i.e. respectful, with time for all to talk, with active listening) enabled participants, specifically adults, to acknowledge the gaps in their current communication approaches. Participants realized that the authoritarian mode of communication had done little to support healthy relationships between adults and teenagers and participants discussed quite extensively feeling silenced in interactions with each other (chapter 6).

For example, teenagers expressed that they needed adults to listen to them and show them respect (chapter 6). Parents and teachers also recognized that the current ways in which adults interact with teenagers does not promote self-respect or self-worth amongst teenagers (chapter 6). More importantly, both parents and teachers who attended the second round of focus groups stated that they used approaches practiced in the first set of focus groups in their personal lives and received better responses from their family members (chapter 6). Some teachers also indicated that they would incorporate these approaches in their classrooms. As Freire (2000) stated, “Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p.51). In this scenario, experiential learning removed a hierarchal relationship between myself and the participants and empowered them to critically think about their experience and in turn practice what they had experienced in their own lives (Kolb, 1984).
Additionally, the literature supports dialogical conversations as being central for improved community social cohesion (Tsivacou, 2005). Freire (2000) also attests that dialogue to be the correct method to move towards greater humanity for those who are oppressed as a form of liberation. He indicates that the oppressed cannot be liberated through the same methods that have contributed to their dehumanization (Freire, 2000). By changing the way people communicated within the focus groups, I changed the expectations of what the conversations could achieve which made people more open and willing to engage in conversation (Laszlo & Laszlo, 2005). This openness was necessary to understand the various perspectives on dating violence and also enable people to present differing views.

Furthermore, dialogical approaches can also help to prevent bad things from happening as Marmot (2015) has indicated, because it provided people with practice to continue conversations even in the midst of disagreement and across conflicting perspectives. For example, women and men in the teachers groups were surprised to hear the polarizing perspectives of the opposite sex. This made me realize how little conversations on gender roles, masculinity and femininity, relationships, and violence occur in a dialogical manner among men and women and also that it is possible to engage in these conversations within safe and supportive spaces.

Thus, the dialogical approach was integral in encouraging group members to actively hear other group members and also question their own thoughts in relation to the conversation. Laszlo and Laszlo (2005) would consider these exchanges within focus groups to be thriving conversations, which are “co-creative processes that involve competence, mutual support, and enrichment” (p.358). Thriving conversations were therefore an alternative to the current mode of hierarchal approaches and showed the
potential possibilities of building community capacity by promoting healthier ways of conversing that would be integral to dealing with any social issue.

**Creating Safe Spaces for Dialogical Conversations**

Participants’ comments reveal that their current life activities and tasks are not focused on having conversations with each other. Additionally, they also believed that there were minimal spaces to engage in these conversations as teachers indicated that they do not fully support each other or meet to speak about issues pertaining to the school in a meaningful way (chapter 6). Teenagers also revealed that the heavy focus on fulfilling core academic requirements (i.e. math, English, science) left little space to engage with each other in spaces similar to the focus group discussions (chapter 6). Additionally, participants indicated they wanted opportunities to speak across groups. For example, girls suggested future conversations could occur with boys and girls and parents wanted their children to be included in the study, revealing that safe spaces are desired to speak within groups and also across groups.

However, the literature on building stronger communities has indicated that location and space are important factors in supporting and maintaining dialogue (Laszlo & Laszlo, 2005; O’Hara & Wood, 2005). The location can provide important information on what would need to be created to facilitate more discussions similar to what was experienced in this study. As O’Hara and Wood (2005) have indicated, the space where dialogues occur can give participants a sense of location that, if relaxing and enjoyable, will influence the quality of the conversation. This study revealed the ease with which this can be achieved in environments that do not have an abundance of resources. Our discussions took place in the library of the school and we borrowed needed materials (i.e. chairs) from other classrooms to ensure we had enough seating for
everyone. The school was accessible and familiar for all participants and also was a meeting place for interviews.

Moreover, the focus groups provided a safe space for parents, teachers, and adolescents to express their opinions, frustrations, questions, and concerns on relevant topics such as gender, dating, and sex in a manner that they were not used to. More importantly, the focus groups represented a safe space to have verbal disagreements in respectful and healthy ways. None of the focus groups had complete consensus on any topic and there were periods in all group discussions where tensions rose as we discussed certain issues. Throughout all of the focus groups participants discussed very heavy topics in a light-hearted manner and laughter was the most common body language used. I believe these expressions of emotions relayed embarrassment and uneasiness in discussing the study topics for all participants. For adolescents specifically, I believe laughter occurred in our conversations as a defence mechanism because they were unsure whether speaking genuinely crossed boundaries that normally would not be approached with adults in such a relaxed and dialogical forum.

However, I believe these expressions of body language are key markers of a safe and supportive environment that engaged participants in a timely and rare conversation. As Laszlo and Laszlo (2005) have indicated, successful conversations or dialogical approaches have agreement, dispute, and chaos that eventually transcend into a deeper understanding that “make waves into the future” (p.360). Freire (2000) also states that, “knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p.72). Had participants not continued to engage in the focus group discussions, than I would have surmised that the environment did not feel safe enough to
engage in my research topic. However, because participants remained engaged in the focus groups, I believe these emotions reflect a deeper engagement and connection to the content that touched on perspectives and experiences normally not discussed. As I mentioned previously, “the waves” were already evident in the ongoing discussions that followed the focus group discussions and I believe if spaces were more readily available to access consistently the impact could be helpful in creating sustainable communities.

Moreover, critically examining dominant discourses cannot occur if the questions are not asked and people are not given the opportunity to think through them in a safe space without ridicule. Freire (2000) stated, “…it is necessary to trust in the oppressed and in their ability to reason. Whoever lacks this trust will fail to initiate (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection, and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiqués, monologues, and instructions” (p.66). As I stated before, there was little consensus on most topics within all focus group discussions, which demonstrates the heterogeneity of perspectives and why approaches have to be tailored in a manner that allows for different viewpoints to be discussed and questioned within safe spaces. Furthermore, when an alternative space was created and people were given the opportunity to express themselves, Guyanese participants revealed a deep level of awareness for the causes of causes behind adolescent dating violence and a sophisticated level of critique that is stifled in the current manner people communicate. The alternative space also revealed stereotypical accounts of the causes of causes and these were portrayed in the discussions on gender roles and race.

The methods people have used to communicate (i.e. hierarchal approaches) and understand adolescent dating violence cannot be the same methods used to advance our understanding on this phenomenon, because people have been othered in that process
(Freire, 2000). Dialogical conversations have to be encouraged in safe spaces where people feel free to express their perspectives, question theirs and others perspectives, and disagree in respectful ways that allow critical engagement with dominant discourses. These spaces provide opportunities for communities to become more resilient by greater engagement with complex and taboo topics. For this study, the school environment can provide safe spaces and also opportunities for dialogical approaches that are learned from this study.

**Making Schools Part of Violence Prevention: Positive Role Models and Consistent Messaging**

Sidorkin (2005) has indicated that the difference between good schools and bad schools is the space for public conversation where every person listens and is heard. While I do not agree with labelling or dichotomizing schools as good and bad (we see in my study how the stigmatization of schools impacts perceptions of those who attend certain schools), I do agree that promoting more opportunities for open discussions can facilitate healthier school environments. As Sidorkin (2005) further stated, schools that do not promote these types of public conversations limit the possibility that what someone believes can be known to everyone, especially those in a higher social position. “In such schools, authorities are not interested, nor have they established any effective ways to find out, who thinks what and why” (Sidorkin, 2005, p.250).

In this study, I do not believe it is a case of being uninterested, but rather, established and accepted hierarchal relations allow for information to flow mainly in one direction, which often means teen’s perspectives are not always considered. This can be compared to Freire’s (2000) concept of the banking system of education where teenagers are viewed solely as receivers of deposits of information. In this system there is little
communication that fosters original thinking because education is used as a dominating force that further indoctrinates teenagers to adapt to a world of oppression (Freire, 2000). This can be done knowingly or unknowingly (Freire, 2000).

In our discussions, teenagers were very explicit and specific about what they felt would change their thinking about violence and adults were in agreement with most suggestions (chapter 6). First, teenagers and adults wanted better curriculum and information on relationships, dating, and communication. Specifically, teenagers and adults requested more information on the opposite sex and how to know themselves and each other on deeper levels. In their discussion on Caribbean education, Bailey and Charles (2008) suggested that schools in the Caribbean should take a closer look at how schools and school populations are organized into subjects and if these arrangements continue to perpetuate conditions that contributes to gender inequity.

Earlier in this thesis, I considered how the current education system stigmatizes particular teenagers based on the ranking of public schools within the country. However, considering Bailey and Charles (2008) work, my study results go one step further in revealing that adolescent girls and boys are positioned within the school to conform to normative societal gender roles, which essentially is a question of heteronormativity. For example, the home economics class was an all-female class and the technology class was predominantly boys – only one girl attended that class. If teenagers continue to be encouraged to attend classes that perpetuate the gendered divisions of labour, it undermines our efforts to advance how we think about men and women’s roles. In this sense, schools have an opportunity to review their curriculum more broadly and question whether the current curriculum within schools promotes narratives that would support more equitable relationship practices. Additionally, this example also illustrates that it is
important to challenge gender roles and heteronormativity through all kinds of frames to continuously recognize the subtle and overt ways communities conform to them.

Secondly, it was clear that teenagers and adults appreciated the time and opportunity to express themselves and their views in the focus groups. However, it was also apparent in the results that the current school environment is already operating at maximum capacity with teachers overworked and feeling under-valued. Furthermore, there is a perspective within the Caribbean that education and the school system has become the solution for all social problems (Jules, 2015). Jules (2015) indicates that the formula for public policy is to integrate health and social topics with a simplistic formula that makes it difficult for teachers to focus on their teaching responsibilities. Therefore, suggesting any major changes that would increase teachers’ workload would not be received well and would probably be poorly initiated.

In one sense Jules (2015) is correct that focusing on education without addressing other social systems would overwhelm the school system, which we have seen in this study through teacher burn out. However, his perspective also demonstrates that the understanding of health issues (he used HIV as an example) is not considered in relation to the *causes of causes*, which is inextricably linked to students’ education and the ways in which people communicate in the education system. Therefore, it is more pragmatic at this juncture to consider spaces already available that could be re-worked to promote dialogical approaches that focus on the social and emotional needs of parents, teachers, and adolescents that would address teacher burn out by improving interactions between these groups of people.

One proven framework that can be implemented incrementally with consideration for the current setting is social emotional learning. Social emotional learning (SEL)
addresses the concerns and exhaustion adults face, while also teaching adolescents healthier ways of interacting with parents, teachers, and other adolescents (Brackett & Rivers, 2013). SEL focuses on expressing emotions as a way of enhancing thinking and being aware of the emotions and reactions of others (Brackett & Rivers, 2013). Most importantly, it addresses the multiple discriminations parents, teachers, and adolescents face by promoting environments that create feelings of belonging, safety, and a sense of community (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczek, & Hawkins, 2004). This aligns well with Marmot’s (2015) idea of socially sustainable communities, as SEL is grounded in the field of positive youth development where the focus is on building personal assets by enhancing skills and achieving positive goals rather than preventing problems (Catalano, Hawkins, Berglund, Pollard, & Arthur, 2002).

SEL has been acknowledged in the Caribbean as being fundamental to student learning and had positive effects on improving adolescents’ academic performances, bettering the quality of relationships between teachers and students, and also in decreasing problem behaviour in North American schools (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2012; Brown, Jones, LaRusso, & Aber, 2010; Durlak et al., 2011; Elias, 2003; Hutton, 2013; Raver et al., 2011). In this sense, SEL can offer immediate benefits to teachers, parents, and adolescents by helping to address all of their different needs in spaces that are already carved out presently in the school system. Parents and teachers spoke extensively about the parent-teacher meetings not meeting the needs of both parties and parents, teachers, and adolescents also revealed a desire to have counselling sessions for adolescents. If these two spaces are structured like the focus groups fused with social emotional learning, it could prove to be beneficial for parents, teachers, and adolescents in the present setting.
The school community provides ideal opportunities to build healthier relationships among parents, teachers, and adolescents using spaces that are already present for interpersonal interactions that remove the authoritarian relationship and promotes social emotional learning strategies. However, to implement SEL, broader questions need to be considered such as what resources and characteristics are required from teachers to be able to use this framework. Additionally, any suggested initiative for secondary schools in Guyana must remember that the educational system represents remnants of colonial systems that other groups of people and there are lessons that can be learned from programs such as Uniting Our Nation that addressed similar issues.

Addressing adolescent dating violence prevention using secondary schools has to take into account the current system that is overworked and focus on changing the relations of people within the school system before implementing larger programs or initiatives (Prochaska, 2000).

Final Remarks

This dissertation illustrates the complexity of adolescent dating violence and how community perspectives are shaped on this phenomenon. Adolescent dating violence reflects the inextricable links between individual circumstances and socioeconomic factors within a context of heteronormativity and colonial legacy. My research reveals that current approaches to adolescent dating violence, which is primarily focused on promoting adolescents not to date, is an oversimplified understanding of a complex experience that does not provide realistic options for teenagers. Rather, violence is about regulation and in this thesis I have challenged societal norms and considered the various ways violence regulates gender.
First, promoting no dating in adolescence is representative of a larger and more important issue that is pertinent to all health research in the Caribbean, not just Guyana. Participants demonstrated that no dating is reflective of conforming to a societal discourse of respectability that narrowly dictates gender norms in the Caribbean region. Respectability is central to addressing public health issues because it exposes the subtle continuing of colonial ideas of womanhood that have contributed to sustaining markers of difference, marginalizing and stigmatizing adolescent girls and their families. Respectability is also foundational in contributing to the limited ways in which adolescent boys are taught how to define their masculinity and role in relationships that perpetuate adversarial gender roles and inequitable relationships. In this sense, no dating intersects normative gender roles, coloniality, and difference, and attempts to individualize the responsibility of experiences that occur outside of the respectability discourse. Therefore, this study shows that accounting for respectability is fundamental in critically examining how Caribbean people develop perspectives on the acceptability and use of violence in relation to gender, race, and class.

This study also provided a more nuanced understanding of parent and teacher perspectives on dating violence. It illustrates that dating violence in adolescence is also a discussion about social positioning and class, along with respectability, that is grounded in colonial ideas of family and education. Parents and teachers made it clear that decisions regarding their teenagers often took into account the potential social inclusion or exclusion that could occur depending on the family make-up, and what is deemed acceptable behaviour in the rest of the community. However, participants’ perspectives also highlight that the colonial ideal of family are not the reality for many families, essentially placing them in an othered position when their social and economic conditions
did not meet this standard. While participants clearly articulated the challenges many families faced, pointing out other influences of violence throughout the community and addressing the limited work options for parents with informal skill sets or lower educational attainment, there was a persistent discourse that family make-up was the main cause of dating violence in adolescence. Thus, the current dominant discourse on family must be more critically examined in future studies.

Additionally, social responses to domestic violence continue to reveal inadequacies in structural systems such as police and social services – indicating that violence remains a private issue on many fronts. For adolescents, another layer of structural inadequacies were experienced in the educational system through stigma and systemic violence. When education is deemed the answer to prevent adolescent dating violence, it must be questioned for which teenagers? The educational system is being utilized in a colonial sense to categorize and organize people sustaining a class structure where those considered to have lower educational aptitude are provided lower standards of education. Therefore, students that attend schools with a lower ranking, may have a different understanding of the uses for education in relation to dating violence in adolescence and its prevention.

Intersecting all of these key ideas were issues of race. This study brought to the forefront how stereotypical perspectives on race remain steadfast, but race is often unspoken publicly across racial divides in ways that reject stereotypes. Having ongoing discussions on race in relation to gender roles, class, and violence is necessary to challenge and discredit internalized colonial beliefs of biological determination.

Additionally, my research also shows that adolescent dating violence is not only about dominant discourses, but also about how those discourses are communicated.
Hierarchal modes of communication silenced adolescents and also some adults when interacting with those who are in a higher social position. It highlights the internalization of otherness, which directs the focus towards the individual, who chooses to remain silent, instead of considering the systems that create hierarchal modes of communication. Dialogical communication in this study was a decolonizing exercise that provided participants with the opportunity to question the current system by utilizing an alternative approach.

In essence, adolescent dating violence is produced collectively within a Guyanese context because it is a community and societal issue. Intersectionality enabled me to see and understand social categories such as gender, age, race, and class as social processes and structural categories rather than as individual characteristics. This was important to articulate how entangled discourses and systems are, which provide greater credence to approaching dating violence as a community issue. Furthermore, intersectionality was also useful in illustrating difference between adolescents, parents, and teacher perspectives’ as there was little consensus on most topics. Within these discussions, it was clear that some adolescents, parents, and teachers opposed dominant discourses, questioning and outright rejecting narratives that did not suit their lives, while others reproduced the status quo.

Perhaps the greatest challenge I encountered in this study was to understand a phenomenon such as adolescent dating violence, recognizing the multiple experiences and discourses that shape it, but still search for ways to think and live outside the limits imposed by such understanding (Geerts and van der Tuin, 2013). By broadening my perspective on adolescent dating violence through a community approach and a decolonization lens, I was able to create safe spaces to question and debate dominant
discourses in a dialogical manner, identify the need to rethink the educational system and promote role models of healthy relationships, and expand the notions of adolescence and family.

**Recommendations for Practice, Policy, and Research**

The purpose of this research was to create a more comprehensive understanding of adolescent dating violence and also guide future initiatives on creating or improving healthier relationships. Below I propose recommendations for practice, policy, and research based on the study results.

**Educational Practice**

My study highlights that in the school system all community members manifest the need for healthier relationships and that the style for the delivery of information is just as important as the message. Adolescents repeatedly requested better examples and role models to understand how to interact more positively with each other. With this in mind, I have five recommendations for the educational system aiming at improving the relationships between parents, teachers, and adolescents within the school environment.

*Recommendation 1:* Create dialogical spaces on school grounds for the school community.

- To debrief and brainstorm solutions to difficult situations with teenagers and their families.
- Re-configure current staff meetings between teachers and management to reflect a conversational approach where teachers are encouraged to voice their concerns, frustrations, and motivations about their work environment.
- Create a teachers’ group to facilitate a support system for each other.
CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

- Develop male and female teacher/school official panel discussions on relevant topics with students as audience.
  - Provide examples of positive interactions between men and women communicating.
  - Demonstrate how to disagree on topics in respectful manners.
  - Format should include an interactive component where students are able to participate and ask questions.

**Recommendation 2:** Improve communication and relationships between parents and teachers

- Encourage teachers to balance information about students to parents, providing positive feedback as well as areas for improvement.
- Re-configure the parent-teacher meetings (PTA) to reflect a conversational approach between parents and teachers, providing opportunities for both parties to ask questions and have opinions heard.

**Recommendation 3:** Create spaces and activities for adolescents to discuss relevant topics selected by them guided by a moderator/facilitator.

- The moderator/facilitator must be comfortable conversing with teenagers and having open dialogue on topics such as sex, dating, violence, etc.
- Information on dating relationships should include the five areas teenagers indicated are important in their dating relationships
  - Defining love
  - Dating and the role of money in relationships
  - Sex and dating relationships
  - Infidelity
o How to resolve conflict in dating relationships
  ▪ Incorporate discussions in classrooms that engage students to critically question race, gender, and class assumptions more frequently in relation to classroom subjects.

_Recommendation 4:_ Incorporate social-emotional learning techniques in teachers’ college education
  ▪ Social-emotional learning techniques should be incorporated into the curriculum taught in teachers’ college, so all teachers that graduate will have knowledge of its uses and be able to incorporate it in classrooms.

_Recommendation 5:_ Increase support staff for lower ranking schools.
  ▪ Schools are important social institutions. They are in most cases the most consistent resource in communities with regards to adolescents. Schools and school staff need to have support to adequately teach and support students, but the current system does not promote equity and further stigmatizes some populations of students and their families.
  ▪ Improve support systems to lower ranking schools by addressing the inequity of resource distribution. Schools servicing lower income communities have greater need and therefore should receive increased resources (i.e. school counsellors).
  ▪ Include breakfast feeding programs in schools that service low-income families.

These recommendations are focused on improving the social interactions between people within the school community presently with recognition that long-term approaches are also required. I believe that changing the way in which people interact will create a better foundation to have conversations on more contentious topics.
However, the school community in its present state is depleted and there are other factors that go beyond the scope of the school in creating and promoting healthier socially sustainable communities. As teachers have indicated, regardless of the progress they might make in schools, students and their families still return to destitute situations. Therefore, I will address the surrounding community and public policy approaches that might be helpful promoting healthier relationships.

**Public Policy**

This study has illustrated how challenging it is for some participants to avoid dating violence or to leave once violence has occurred. Participants’ perspectives also indicate the difficulties that are presented when attempting to access help. The recommendations that follow address structural inequities that have contributed to the marginalization of adolescents and their families. Additionally, public policy does little if it is not understood and taken up in the community. Therefore, for all recommendations provided below, I also propose a community outreach component to ensure policy is adopted in the community.

**Recommendation 1:** Create a more inclusive definition of families in Guyana.

- Review policies and social programs to ensure there is no discrimination of single parent families.
- To focus on family interaction to prevent adolescent dating violence and promote discussions on dating between adults and teenagers.

**Recommendation 2:** Broaden the view on adolescence

- Current understanding of adolescence is limiting in acknowledging the resilience and strength in youth. Working towards an expanded definition of adolescence
would be timely to better reflect the realities of adolescent lives, acknowledge and understand the capacity of adolescents and enhance their skills.

- Review initiatives for adolescents to ensure health promotion plans and projects are reflective of adolescents’ concerns and consider the challenges they face in their current surroundings.

**Recommendation 3:** Promote a national strategy for acknowledging shared vulnerabilities for men and women

- Focus on shifting the narrative of adversarial gender roles in programs, which creates an unhealthy starting point for entering into dating relationships with the opposite sex.

- Review national public health campaigns to promote a language that includes shared vulnerabilities between men and women making it accessible to all residents.

- Review school curriculum to ensure adversarial gender roles are not being promoted.

- Review gender distribution of class subjects to ensure both adolescent girls and boys are not being placed into subjects based on gender (i.e. home economics classes only for girls).

**Research**

My doctoral work contributes to the limited amount of research on adolescent dating violence in the Caribbean region. To my knowledge, my research is the only of its kind completed in Guyana. Advancing efforts to build healthier relationships will require further research in a number of areas to ensure initiatives produced address the
complexity of social issues that have created health inequities. Therefore, the following is recommended.

*Recommendation 1:* Research on other adolescent groups

- Future research needs to ensure that we understand the various experiences with adolescent dating violence from other adolescent groups in Guyana. For example, there is no information on the experiences of dating violence among LGBTQ adolescents.

*Recommendation 2:* Intersectional analysis should be incorporated into health research

- Incorporate the historical context of the Caribbean region, which impacts health inequities.
- Ensure experiences of research participants are presented in manner that reflects their living circumstances.

*Recommendation 3:* Favour dialogical and participatory research methodologies

- Dialogical or participatory methods should be used when working with communities to optimize their participation in the research process and values their perspectives.

*Recommendation 4:* Focus on feasibility and evaluative research on violence prevention strategies

- Evaluate programs implementing safe spaces in schools to scale up best practices applied in a Guyanese context.

*Recommendation 5:* Research on incorporating social-emotional learning for teachers

- Future research is needed to understand how teachers are trained.
- Needs assessment on what resources are required for teachers to implement SEL.
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Table 1: Characteristics of Studies for Adolescent Perspectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>References</th>
<th>Definition provided a prior Y/N</th>
<th>Dating Violence Definition</th>
<th>Methodology/Methods</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Study Population</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Key Objectives</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bowen et al., 2013</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Physical, Sexual, Psychological</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus Groups</td>
<td>Swedish, German, English, Belgian</td>
<td>50 Females 36 Males 12-17 years</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>To contribute Northern European adolescents attitudes toward dating violence to see whether primary interventions should have same focus as seen in North America.</td>
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<td>Hilton, et al., 2003</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Physical, Sexual</td>
<td>Quantitative Audiotaped Scenarios and questionnaires</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>118 Female 94 Male 15-20 years</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>To determine how adolescents perceive physical and sexual aggression by gender and by comparing types of aggression to see which is believed to be worse than another.</td>
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Table 1: Continued

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<tr>
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<td>Mueller et al., 2013</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical, Sexual</td>
<td>Mixed Methods Questionnaire/Interviews</td>
<td>African American/Caucasian/Hispanic Asian American Indian/Mixed Race</td>
<td>44 Female</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Examine the interplay between beliefs and perpetration of dating violence amongst youth.</td>
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<td>Murphy &amp; Smith, 2010</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Quantitative Questionnaire</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>146 Females</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>Focused on answering the question of how psycho-educational interventions can assist adolescent girls in recognizing warning signs of abuse.</td>
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<td>Pradubmook-Sherer &amp; Sherer, 2011</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td>Psychological, Physical, Sexual</td>
<td>Quantitative Questionnaires</td>
<td>Jewish and Arab – Israeli and Thai</td>
<td>683 Female</td>
<td>1357</td>
<td>To assess the understanding and severity of attitudes toward dating violence among Jewish, Arabs, and Thai male and female adolescents.</td>
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<td>Reeves &amp; Orpinas, 2012</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td>Survey - Physical Focus Groups - Physical, Verbal</td>
<td>Mixed Methods Survey/Focus Groups</td>
<td>Caucasian American, African American, Latin American, ‘other’</td>
<td>294 Female</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>To understand the role of social norms and their link to dating violence in heterosexual relationships</td>
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<td>References</td>
<td>Definition provided a prior</td>
<td>Dating Violence Definition</td>
<td>Methodology/Methods</td>
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<td>Key Objectives</td>
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<td>Sears et al., 2006</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Physical and Psychological</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus Groups</td>
<td>Caucasian Canadians</td>
<td>No breakdown for sex</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>To understand how adolescents see gender affecting the causes and consequences of dating violence.</td>
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<td>Sherer, 2010</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Psychological, Physical, Sexual</td>
<td>Quantitative Questionnaires</td>
<td>Jewish/Arab</td>
<td>332 Female 308 Male Grades 9-12</td>
<td>1357</td>
<td>To prove that gender and ethnicity impact acceptability of dating violence in adolescents.</td>
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<td>Stueve &amp; O’Donnell, 2008</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Quantitative Survey Longitudinal Study</td>
<td>African American, Hispanic, Black and Hispanic</td>
<td>550 Female 19-20 years</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>Understanding the relationships between community violence, discrimination and dating violence.</td>
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<td>Ulloa et al., 2004</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Physical, Psychological, Sexual</td>
<td>Qualitative Survey</td>
<td>Mexican, Mexican American</td>
<td>372 Female 306 Male Average age 14</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>To study the relationship between personal characteristics, belief in gender stereotypes, recent fearful dating experiences, and attitudes and knowledge about violence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>Definition provided a prior Y/N</td>
<td>Dating Violence Definition</td>
<td>Methodology/ Methods</td>
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<td>Study Population</td>
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<td>Ulloa et al., 2008</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Qualitative Survey</td>
<td>Mexican, Mexican American, Central American, South American, Puerto Rican/Cuban, Mixed heritage</td>
<td>215 Female</td>
<td>221 Male</td>
<td>Average age 14.5 years This study examined the perception of what constitutes socially unacceptable aversive behaviour and the perception of the actual prevalence of aversive incidents</td>
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<td>Ascencio, 1999</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Verbal, Sexual, Physical</td>
<td>Qualitative Ethnographic</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Female/ Male (no total number)</td>
<td>14-21 years</td>
<td>150 To understand how ideas of masculinity such as machismo impact dating violence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baker &amp; Helm, 2010</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus Groups Participatory Research</td>
<td>Native Hawaiian/ Filipino/ Samoan</td>
<td>26 Female</td>
<td>25 Male</td>
<td>13-19 years To include the voices of Pacific youth by exploring their views on dating violence in current literature.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black &amp; Weisz, 2004</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Physical, Verbal</td>
<td>Qualitative Grounded Theory/Focus Groups</td>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>15 Female</td>
<td>15 Male</td>
<td>11-16 years Gain understanding of views and experiences with dating violence, as well as suggestions on prevention and interventions that would be unique to their needs</td>
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<td>References</td>
<td>Definition provided a priori</td>
<td>Dating Violence Definition</td>
<td>Methodology/Methods</td>
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<td>Chung, 2007</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Physical, Verbal, Sexual</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus Groups</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>25 Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>To examine young women’s understanding and experiences of dating violence and to compare this to what is known about adult relationship violence.</td>
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<td>Gallopin &amp; Leigh, 2009</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Physical, Sexual, Emotional, Verbal</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus Groups</td>
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<td>15 Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>To demonstrate teenagers perceptions of dating violence and their interactions with schools and adult providers.</td>
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<td>Gillium &amp; DiFulvio, 2012</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Physical, Sexual, Psychological</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus Groups</td>
<td>Caucasian, African American</td>
<td>63 Females</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>To understand the perceptions and reasons of dating violence from sexual minority youth.</td>
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<td>Grover &amp; Nangle, 2003</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Emotional, Verbal</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus Groups</td>
<td>Caucasian, American</td>
<td>37 Female</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>To elicit adolescent perceptions of problematic hetero-social situations.</td>
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<td>Haglund et al., 2012</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Sexual, Physical, Verbal</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus Groups</td>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>20 Females</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>To explore the perspectives of Mexican American adolescent girls on dating relationships and dating violence.</td>
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<td>References</td>
<td>Definition provided a prior</td>
<td>Dating Violence Definition</td>
<td>Methodology /Methods</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herrman, 2013</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Qualitative Focus Groups</td>
<td>Hispanic, African American, Caucasian, Mixed origins</td>
<td>26 Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>To provide a voice for young mothers to provide their perceptions on dating violence in their relationships and its impact on pregnancy and parenting.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Johnson et al., 2005</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus Groups</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>68 Female 52 Male</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Explore the experiences of violence and fighting by urban youths.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin et al., 2011</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Verbal, Emotional Physical, Sexual, Financial</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus groups</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>No breakdown for gender</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>To present adolescents’ description of teen dating violence, who they would approach for help, and desired elements of a dating violence resource center.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCarry, 2009</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Physical, Mental, Sexual, Verbal</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus groups</td>
<td>Caucasian and South Asian Scottish</td>
<td>No breakdown for gender</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>To understand how young people view domestic violence and the causes of it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redhawk Love &amp; Richards, 2013</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Physical, Sexual, Psychological</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus Groups</td>
<td>African American and ‘Other’</td>
<td>13 Females 12 Males</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>To present African American teenagers perceptions of IPV, gender violence, help-seeking behaviour, types of services most helpful in preventing and intervening of dating violence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>Definition provided a prior Y/N</td>
<td>Dating Violence Definition</td>
<td>Methodology /Methods</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Study Population</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Key Objectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gevers et al., 2012</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Not specifically defined</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus Groups/Interviews</td>
<td>Black South African/People of Colour</td>
<td>53 Female 44 Male 14-20 years</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>To understand the context of youth relationships in which violence or sex occur as well as implications for program development.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kubeka, 2008</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Not specifically defined</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus Groups</td>
<td>14-20 years</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td>To explore how adolescents negotiate and apply what they are taught to interpersonal aggression, power, and control within relationships.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guzman et al., 2009</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Verbal, Physical</td>
<td>Qualitative Focus Groups</td>
<td>African American, Latino</td>
<td>36 Females 16 Males 15-17 years</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>To provide information on the range on dating relationships and behaviour in adolescents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson et al., 2011</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Sexual, Financial, Physical, Psychological</td>
<td>Qualitative Interviews</td>
<td>15-19 years</td>
<td>23 Females 23 Males 15-17 years</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>To provide information on the full experience of adolescent mothers in Guyana.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2: Social, Economic, and Regional conditions of Domestic Violence in Guyana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>References</th>
<th>Location of Study</th>
<th>Collaborating Partners</th>
<th>Length of Study</th>
<th>Funding Provided By:</th>
<th>Targeted Study Participants/Professions</th>
<th>Key Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clark &amp; Kertzious, 2007</td>
<td>Georgetown</td>
<td>UNIFEM/Help and Shelter</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>UNIFEM</td>
<td>Police, Faith Based Organizations, Children and Youth, Community Based Organizations</td>
<td>To contribute to the reduction of gender-based violence through public awareness campaigns, training of police officers, and to advocate for the passing of the sexual offences bill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Counseling, counseling training”, 2010</td>
<td>New Amsterdam/ Moruca/ Georgetown</td>
<td>Canada-Caribbean Gender Equality Program/ Help and Shelter</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>CGEP</td>
<td>Teachers/Students from one rural high school, Women, Men, youth, and children from the community</td>
<td>To provide counseling services more efficiently to rural communities in regards to domestic violence and to continue counseling at the crisis center in Georgetown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Final report to”, 2008</td>
<td>Linden/ Sand Reef/ Annandale/Buxton/ Haslington/Enmore/ Better Hope/ Plaisance/Georgetown/ Den Amstel</td>
<td>Red Thread/ Help and Shelter</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>UN VAW Trust Fund</td>
<td>Women and Men from these communities</td>
<td>To present experiences of a period in Guyanese history that was wrought with race violence and how sexual abuse and violence against women was manifested and understood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>Location of Study</td>
<td>Collaborating Partners</td>
<td>Length of Study</td>
<td>Funding Provided By:</td>
<td>Targeted Study Participants/Professions</td>
<td>Key Objectives</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Reducing gender-based”, 2011</td>
<td>Den Amstel, Kaneville, Covent Garden, Good Hope</td>
<td>Help &amp; Shelter/ Women’s World Day of Prayer/ German Committee</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Women’s World Day of Prayer/ German Committee</td>
<td>Religious Leaders/ Peer Educators/ Local Government Officials/ Police Committee/ Health Centre staff/ Principals</td>
<td>Increase the level of awareness of gender-based violence through public education and advocacy initiatives. Train social sector workers to better address and handle needs of victims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“UNFPA Project”, 2011</td>
<td>Hague/ Zeelugt</td>
<td>Help &amp; Shelter/ UNFPA</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>Men, women, and children in these communities/ Health care workers/ Police/ Community Leaders (not specified)</td>
<td>Increase the level of awareness of gender-based violence through public education and advocacy initiatives. Train social sector workers to better address and handle needs of victims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson &amp; Kissoon, 2010</td>
<td>Ministry of Labour, Human Services, and Social Security (MoHSSS) USAID/ UNFPA/ GGEP</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2 day workshop</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Magistrates court staff/ Social Workers/ Counsellors/ Police/ Help &amp; Shelter Staff/ Every Child/Child Link Staff/ Women Across Differences Staff/ Faith Based Organizations</td>
<td>To improve the response to domestic violence reports through the introduction of the Sexual and Domestic Violence Protocols.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>Location of Study</td>
<td>Collaborating Partners</td>
<td>Length of Study</td>
<td>Funding Provided By:</td>
<td>Targeted Study Participants/Professions</td>
<td>Key Objectives</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Help and Shelter integrated”, 2007</td>
<td>All 10 Regions</td>
<td>Help &amp; Shelter USAID GHARP</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>USAID GHARP</td>
<td>Teachers/Police Officers/ Regional Administrative Staff/ School Children/General Public Religious Organizations</td>
<td>To strengthen the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act through numerous activities including increased training and counseling, court support, and public education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mancey, 2008</td>
<td>Regions 1,2,3,4, 5,6,7,9, &amp;10</td>
<td>Help &amp; Shelter Ministry of Education/ British High Commission</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>British High Commission</td>
<td>Fourth Form Students (Boys and Girls)</td>
<td>To target schools that had been left out of other initiatives on building awareness for domestic violence. To provide students with more information on domestic violence, teen pregnancy, Drug Abuse, Suicide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mancey &amp; Kissoon, 2010</td>
<td>Linden and surrounding communitites (not specified)</td>
<td>Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security/ UNFPA/ USAID/ GGEP</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>UNIFEM</td>
<td>Social workers/ Counsellors/ Community Activists</td>
<td>To improve the response to domestic violence reports by informing participants about the sexual and domestic violence protocols. To increase knowledge and clarify attitudes to sexual and domestic violence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A
Principal Interview Guide

Pre-amble
Good Evening. Thanks for taking the time to speak with me today. We are going to talk about dating, violence, and teenagers. I want to tap into your expertise working with adolescents here. There are no right or wrong answers. If you are not comfortable answering a question, you do not have to. I am tape recording this session because I don’t want to miss any of your comments. Your name will not be included in any reports. Your comments are confidential. Keep in mind that if you disclose any information that indicates harm to yourself or anyone else I will have to notify the appropriate authorities. If at anytime during this interview you would like to discontinue your participation there is no penalty. You can withdraw from this study at any time.

Contextual Information
1) Can you tell me about a typical day as the principal of XXX high school?
2) Can you tell me about the history of XXX high school and its infrastructure?
3) What are your objectives or goals as principal of this high school?
4) What have been some of your main accomplishments?
5) What are some of the challenges of being the principal at this school?
6) Can you tell me who the students, parents, and teachers of this school are?

Adolescent dating relationships
7) What are your thoughts on adolescents dating?
8) Is this view shared by many in Guyana? In your opinion, what is the dominant view in the country?
9) What kind of skills and information do teenagers need to make healthy dating choices?
   9.1) If she says they shouldn’t be dating- What are strategies for avoiding pressure to date?
10) Should the information be different for boys and girls? Why?
11) What parts of relationships and sex should be learned at home and school?
12) Do you feel schools are a good place to learn about relationships and sex?
13) Do you feel comfortable speaking to the kids in your school about dating issues?
14) Can you give me examples of activities or conversations about dating that occur in this school?

Dating violence
15) When you hear dating violence, what comes to mind?
16) Why do you think dating violence occurs in Guyana?
17) What do you think teenagers should know about dating violence at the age of 14 to 16?
Ethnicity & Class
18) Would you say experiencing violence in Guyana is the same or different if you are Afro-Guyanese or Indo-Guyanese?
19) What should you take into account when working with Indo/Afro Guyanese communities?
20) Does living in one part of Guyana as opposed to another effect being in situations that are violent?

Contextual information about violence and dating violence in this high school
21) What kinds of violence happen on school grounds?
22) What are the typical causes for such behaviour?
23) Does dating violence occur among students?
24) Can you give me an example of a situation?
25) How do you deal with issues of violence here? Is there a formal system in place to support teachers and the principal?

How to address dating violence
26) What factors do you feel would need to be addressed to improve this issue? Why?
27) Do you feel Guyanese society is addressing dating violence? If so, how?

How to prevent dating violence
28) Are there initiatives in Guyana that you find particularly good or successful in dating violence prevention?
29) In your position, what structures and resources do you feel would have to be in place to discuss issues such as dating violence consistently in a meaningful way in schools?
30) What would you like to learn from the focus group discussions with parents, teachers, and adolescents?

Closing
31) Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to tell me about?
Appendix B
Teacher Interview Guide

Pre-amble
Good Evening. Thanks for taking the time to speak with me today. We are going to talk about dating, violence, and teenagers. I want to tap into your expertise working with adolescents here. There are no right or wrong answers. If you are not comfortable answering a question, you do not have to. I am tape recording this session because I don’t want to miss any of your comments. Your name will not be included in any reports. Your comments are confidential. Keep in mind that if you disclose any information that indicates harm to yourself or anyone else I will have to notify the appropriate authorities. If at anytime during this interview you would like to discontinue your participation there is no penalty. You can withdraw from this study at any time.

Contextual information
1) Please tell me what a typical day is like for you as a teacher?
2) How would you describe your relationship with the students age 14-16 in Forms 4 to 6?
   2.1) Do they discuss personal issues with you?
   2.2) How would you typically intervene if there is a problem? Can you give me an example?
   2.3) What is the toughest part about teaching these students?
   2.4) What are the major rewards?
   2.5) What are some of the major social issues your students face?
3) Can you describe the relationship you have with the parents of the students you teach?

Adolescent dating relationships
4) What are your thoughts on adolescents dating?
5) Is this view shared by many in Guyana? In your opinion, what is the dominant view in the country?
6) What kinds of skills and information do teenagers need to make healthy dating choices?
   6.1) If they say kids shouldn’t be dating, what are strategies for avoiding pressure to date?
7) Should the information be different for boys and girls? Why?
8) What parts of relationships and sex should be learned at home and school?
9) Do you feel schools are a good place to learn about relationships and sex?
10) Would you feel comfortable teaching a class on these topics?
    9.1. If not, who should teach it?
11) Are there differences between your ideas and other teachers’ views on teaching these topics?
12) Can you give me examples of activities or conversations about dating that occur in this school?

Dating violence
13) When you hear dating violence, what comes to mind?
14) Why do you think dating violence occurs in Guyana?
15) What do you think teenagers should know about dating violence at the age of 14 to 16?

Ethnicity & Class
16) Would you say experiencing violence in Guyana is the same or different if you are Afro-Guyanese or Indo-Guyanese?

17) What should you take into account when working with Indo/Afro Guyanese communities?

18) Does living in one part of Guyana as opposed to another affect being in situations that are violent?

Contextual information about violence and dating violence in this high school

19) What kinds of violence happen on school grounds?

20) What are the typical causes?

21) Does dating violence occur?

22) Can you give me an example of a situation and how you knew?

23) How do you deal with issues of violence here? Is there a formal system in place to support you?

How to address dating violence

24) What factors do you feel would need to be addressed to improve this issue? Why?

25) Do you feel Guyanese society is addressing dating violence? If so, how?

How to prevent dating violence

26) Are there initiatives in Guyana that you find particularly good or successful in dating violence prevention?

27) In your position, what structures and resources do you feel would have to be in place to discuss issues such as dating violence consistently in a meaningful way in schools?

28) What would you like to learn from the focus group discussions with parents, teachers, and adolescents?

Closing

29) Is there anything I have not asked you that you would like to tell me about?
Appendix C
Parent Interview Guide

Pre-amble
Good Evening. Thanks for taking the time to speak with me today. We are going to talk about dating, violence, and teenagers. I want to tap into your expertise as a parent of an adolescent(s) here. There are no right or wrong answers. If you are not comfortable answering a question, you do not have to. I am tape recording this session because I don’t want to miss any of your comments. Your name will not be included in any reports. Your comments are confidential. Keep in mind that if you disclose any information that indicates harm to yourself or anyone else I will have to notify the appropriate authorities. If at anytime during this interview you would like to discontinue your participation there is no penalty. You can withdraw from this study at any time.

Contextual information
1) If you had to use one word to describe being a parent of a teenager in Guyana, what word would you choose?
2) What are the toughest parts about being a parent of a teenager in Guyana?
3) What are the structures and supports that help you to do your parenting work?
4) How do you feel about your child(ren) attending this high school?

Adolescent dating relationships
5) How do you feel about teenagers dating?
6) Is this view shared by many in Guyana? In your opinion, what is the dominant view in the country?
7) Do you feel comfortable speaking to your kids about dating?
8) What kinds of skills and information do kids need to make healthy dating choices?
   8.1) If they say kids shouldn’t be dating, what are strategies for avoiding pressure to date?
9) Should the information be different for a girl or boy? Why?
10) Do you feel comfortable speaking to your kid(s) about dating issues?
11) Can you give me examples of the things you have spoken to them about in regards to dating?
12) Beyond learning about relationships and sex at home, what do you think schools should teach?

Dating violence
13) When you hear dating violence, what comes to mind?
14) Why do you think dating violence occurs in Guyana?
15) What do you think teenagers should know about dating violence at the age of 14 to 16?

Ethnicity & Class
16) Would you say experiencing violence in Guyana is the same or different if you are Afro-Guyanese or Indo-Guyanese?
17) Does living in one part of Guyana as opposed to another effect being in situations that are violent?

Contextual information about violence and dating violence in this high school
18) Do you know if any kind of violence occurs on school grounds?
19) How do you find out? 
    Probe: Do your kid(s) tell you? Or does the school notify you?
20) Does dating violence occur?
21) Are you aware of how these situations are dealt with? Can you explain it to me?

How to address dating violence
22) What factors do you feel would need to be addressed to improve this issue? Why?
23) Do you feel Guyanese society is addressing dating violence? If so, how?

How to prevent dating violence
24) Are there initiatives in Guyana that you find particularly good or successful in dating violence prevention?
25) As a parent, what structures and resources do you feel would have to be in place to discuss issues such as dating violence consistently in a meaningful way in schools?
   25.1) (If they say they don’t want schools involved) Where do you think would be the ideal place then?
26) What would you like to learn from the focus group discussions with parents, teachers, and adolescents?

Closing
27) Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to tell me about?
Appendix D
School Counsellor Interview Guide

Pre-amble
Good Evening. Thanks for taking the time to speak with me today. We are going to talk about dating, violence, and teenagers. I want to tap into your expertise working with adolescents here. There are no right or wrong answers. If you are not comfortable answering a question, you do not have to. I am tape recording this session because I don’t want to miss any of your comments. Your name will not be included in any reports. Your comments are confidential. Keep in mind that if you disclose any information that indicates harm to yourself or anyone else I will have to notify the appropriate authorities. If at anytime during this interview you would like to discontinue your participation there is no penalty. You can withdraw from this study at any time.

Contextual information
1) Can you tell me about a typical day of work for you at this school?
2) What are your objectives or goals as counsellor?
3) How would you describe your relationship with the students age 14-16 in Forms 4 to 6?
   3.1) Do they discuss personal issues with you?
   3.2) How would you typically intervene if there is a problem? Can you give me an example?
   3.3) What is the toughest part about teaching these students?
   3.4) What are the major rewards?
   3.5) What are some of the major social issues that you feel your students face?
4) What kinds of advice do you normally give for the issues you mentioned?
5) Can you describe the relationship you have with the parents of the students you teach?

Adolescent dating relationships
6) How do you feel about teenagers dating?
7) Is this view shared by many in Guyana? In your opinion, what is the dominant view in the country?
8) Do you feel comfortable speaking to the kids about dating?
9) What kinds of skills and information do teenagers need to make healthy dating choices?
   9.1) If teenagers shouldn’t be dating, what strategies do they need to avoid pressure to date?
10) Should the information be different for a girl or boy? Why?
11) Do you feel comfortable speaking to the kid(s) about dating issues?
12) Can you give me examples of the things you have spoken to them about in regards to dating?
13) What parts of relationships and sex should be learned at home and school?

Dating violence
14) When you hear dating violence, what comes to mind?
15) Why do you think dating violence occurs in Guyana?
16) What do you think teenagers should know about dating violence at the age of 14 to 16?

Ethnicity & Class
17) Would you say experiencing violence in Guyana is the same or different if you are Afro-Guyanese or Indo-Guyanese?
18) Does the information you tell a student of Indo-Guyanese descent differ from that of an Afro-Guyanese student when thinking about violence?
19) Does living in one part of Guyana as opposed to another affect being in situations that are violent?

**Contextual information about violence and dating violence in this high school**

20) What kinds of violence happen on school grounds?
21) What are the typical causes that you are told?
22) Does dating violence occur?
23) Can you give me an example of a situation and how you knew?
24) How do you deal with issues of violence here?

**How to address dating violence**

25) What factors do you feel would need to be addressed to improve this issue? Why?
26) Do you feel Guyanese society is addressing dating violence? If so, how?

**How to prevent dating violence**

27) Are there initiatives in Guyana that you find particularly good or successful in dating violence prevention?
28) As a parent, what structures and resources do you feel would have to be in place to discuss issues such as dating violence consistently in a meaningful way in schools?
29) What would you like to learn from the focus group discussions with parents, teachers, and adolescents?

**Closing**

30) Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to tell me about?
LET’S TALK!

Join Ruth Rodney, a nurse and PhD Student from the University of Toronto and a group of your colleagues at XXX high school to talk about teenagers, dating relationships, and violence.

If you’re interested in joining the conversation, or have any questions contact Ruth Rodney at
Cell: xxx-xxxx

* AFTER OCTOBER 1ST 2015 *
Appendix F
Invitation Letter/Email for Teachers

Good Day,

My name is Ruth Rodney, I am a registered nurse and a doctoral student at the University of Toronto’s Faculty of Nursing. I have chosen to complete my doctoral research in Guyana, as it is the land of my heritage.

As you may have read, there have been several stories in the newspapers about violence in adolescents’ relationships. I would like to see this violence end, and I believe the way to begin this process is to first understand what teachers, parents, and adolescents think about this issue. My research is focused on understanding Guyanese perspectives on adolescent dating violence. This information will be developed to build knowledge, which hopefully will be used to better initiatives and programs in prevention of dating violence.

I believe teachers are integral to a prosperous society because you play a significant role in shaping the minds of our future leaders. I am quite interested in understanding your views on this topic and how you believe we can move forward as a community in addressing this issue. I will provide information sessions to your school (in person) where we can discuss further details about this study. If you are interested in speaking with a group of your peers in focus groups between October to November 2015, please do not hesitate to contact me with the number provided below. Additionally, you can email me at the address provided below with your contact information. Please note, to participate in this study, you must be available to meet on two different days for approximately two hours. Refreshments and a small stipend will be provided as a token of appreciation for your time. Additionally, if you have further questions about this study, I have also included my supervisor’s contact information.

These topics are sensitive issues and answering questions about your community, violence, and dating violence may cause feelings of discomfort, anger, or sadness. For this reason, a list of free resources will be provided to all participants after the focus group discussions. There is no tangible benefit for participating in this study, however, I am hopeful that your participation in discussing this issue will shed some light on understand dating violence for your students. Please note there is no obligation to participate in this study and you can withdraw at any time from this study without penalty.

Thank-you for considering this invitation.
Please Read Carefully:

1) By signing below you are agreeing to meet for approximately 2 hours on 2 separate days if selected.
2) Signing below does not guarantee participation in this study.
3) If you are selected, you will be contacted by the information you provide below.

Yes, I would like to participate in this study if I am selected.

Teacher Name (Printed) __________________________
Teacher Phone number __________________________

No, I do not wish to participate in this study.
Appendix G
Information Letter for Parents

Good Day,

My name is Ruth Rodney. I am a registered nurse and doctoral student at the University of Toronto’s Faculty of Nursing. I have chosen to complete my doctoral work in Guyana, as it is the land of my heritage. I am writing this letter to tell you about my intentions. I would like to have the opportunity to hear from you or your child, but only with your blessing.

As you may have read, there have been several stories printed in the newspapers about violence in adolescents’ relationships. I would like to see this violence end, and I believe the way to begin this process is to first understand what parents, adolescents, and teachers think. My research is focused on understanding Guyanese perspectives on adolescent dating violence. This information will be developed to build knowledge, which hopefully will be used to better initiatives and programs in prevention of dating violence.

My study will include group discussions about dating and dating violence with students of their own age group and gender. Boys will be grouped with boys, and girls will be grouped with girls.

I think that parents or caretakers are also very important in this issue, and I want to understand what your views are on adolescent dating violence. If you would be willing to sit down with a group of other parents on two separate occasions to discuss this issue, you can contact me with the information provided below and can return this form with a contact number for yourself. You or your child will receive light refreshments for participating in this study as well as a small amount of money for your participation or theirs.

These topics are sensitive issues and answering questions about your community, violence, and dating violence may cause feelings of discomfort, anger, or sadness. For this reason, a list of free resources will be provided to all participants after the focus group discussions. Furthermore, the school counsellor will be available for your child to contact if they would like to have further support. There is no tangible benefit for participating in this study, however, I am hopeful that your participation in discussing this issue will shed some light on understand dating violence for your students. Please note there is no obligation to participate in this study and you can withdraw at any time from this study without penalty.
Please note there is no obligation to participate in this study. You can withdraw from this study at any time and there is no penalty. Enclosed is a permission slip to be returned next week if you or your child would like to participate. I will collect this permission slip back from your child.

Thank-you for considering this invitation.

Respectfully,
Ruth Rodney, RN, PhD Candidate Denise Gastaldo, PhD
Ruth.rodney@mail.utoronto.ca PhD Supervisor
Cell: xxx-xxxx
denise.gastaldo@utoronto.ca

**Please Read Carefully:**

4) By signing below you are agreeing to meet for approximately 2 hours on 2 separate days if selected.

5) Only one person from each household can participate in this study.

6) **Signing below does not guarantee participation in this study.**

7) If you are selected, you will be contacted by the information you provide below.

8) **Both mothers and fathers (male and female guardians) are encouraged to participate in this study.**

**Option 1**

☐ Yes, I would like to participate in this study if I am selected.

| Parent/Guardian Name (Printed) | ________________________________ |
| Parent/Guardian Phone number | ________________________________ |
| Please circle one: | |
| I am my child(ren)’s: | Mother   Father  Male Guardian Female Guardian |

☐ Yes, I am giving permission for my child to participate in this study if selected.

| Student Name (Printed) | ________________________________ |
| Parent/Guardian Name (Printed) | ________________________________ |
| Parent/Guardian Signature | ________________________________ |

**Option 2**

☐ No, I do not wish to participate in this study.

☐ Yes, I am giving permission for my child to participate in this study if selected.

| Student Name (Printed) | ________________________________ |
| Parent/Guardian Name (Printed) | ________________________________ |
| Parent/Guardian Signature | ________________________________ |
Option 3

☐ Yes, I would like to participate in this study.
    Please circle one:
    I am my child(ren)'s:  Mother   Father   Male Guardian   Female Guardian

    Parent/Guardian Name (Printed) ________________________________
    Parent/Guardian Phone number ________________________________

☐ No, I do not wish for my child to participate in this study.
Appendix H
1st Focus Group Guide
Parents/Teachers Focus Group Guide

Preamble
Good Evening and Welcome. Thanks for taking the time to join our discussion on teenagers, dating, and violence. My name is Ruth Rodney, I am a nurse and PhD student at University of Toronto. Assisting me is Ms. Clonel Boston, who is the co-ordinator at Women Across Differences here in Georgetown. She will be taking notes about our discussion today so don’t be concerned if you see her writing.

You were invited because you all have important information that can help me to answer some of my research questions. There are no right or wrong answers. I expect that you will have differing points of views. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said.

We’re tape-recording the session because we don’t want to miss any of your comments. No names will be included in any reports. I have chosen to give you each a nametag with an alias. “P” stands for participant and each of you get a number based on the order you showed up today. These aliases will help me later to know who is speaking when listening to the tape recordings. If you want to follow up on something that someone has said, you want to disagree, agree, or give an example, feel free to do that but try to use the alias listed on the nametag when you go to respond. I would also ask that only one person speak at a time, as it will be difficult to hear multiple voices clearly later on the tape recording.

Feel free to have a conversation with one another about these questions. I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share. We’re interested in hearing from each of you. So if you’re talking a lot, I may ask you to give others a chance. And if you aren’t saying much, I may call on you. I just want to make sure I hear from all of you. I am assuming that when we learn about one another’s views, they remain confidential. In a small group like this, people are identifiable to some degree by their views and opinions. Having said this, and having made these requests, you know that I cannot guarantee that the request to remain confidential will be honoured by everyone in the room. So I am asking you to make only those comments that you would be comfortable making in a public setting; and to hold back making comments that you would not say publicly. However, if you disclose any information that puts yourself or someone else at risk I will have to report it.

Lastly, if you change your mind and no longer care to participate you can excuse yourself from the focus group at anytime. There is no penalty from withdrawing from this study. If you would not like your information included, you have one week to

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6 This focus group guide was used to guide the discussion on answering how discourses on age, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity were used to explain dating violence. Through discussing these two dating violence stories, the perspectives of Guyanese adolescents, teachers, and parents’ were compared for similarities and differences.
contact me. If I do not hear from you in this time then your information will not be destroyed.

**Ice Breaker**

**Instructions:** I would like everyone to finish these questions for me and I will record them on this flip chart. There are no right or wrong answers and this is informal. You can shout out what you would like me to write down.

1) Please finish this sentence for me: A healthy relationship looks like…

2) Now, this one: An unhealthy relationship looks like…

**Dating in adolescence**

1) How do you know adolescents are dating?
2) Do they have a name for it?
3) Would they tell you if they were dating?
4) What would you say or how would you feel if I told you some adolescents are having sex in their relationships?

**Dating Violence**

**Instructions:** We are going to talk about two stories that were in the news. You may remember these stories once I tell you about them. I am going to pose a series of questions to the group, and I would like for us to consider and speak about both stories in answering these questions.

**Story # 1**

Does the name Angela McAllister ring a bell? (Allow for some response). She was the 17-year old girl beaten and stabbed to death by her boyfriend in the East Bank at her boyfriend’s home. The boy’s mother called her to come over after her son told her rumours were flying that she cheated. When the boy started beating her with a spade and cutting her with the cutlass, the mother and sister ran for safety in a neighbours’ yard and then asked for someone to intervene. No one did because the boy was armed.


**Story # 2**

I also wanted us to look at another story that occurred earlier this year in Berbice. Do you remember a teenager by the name of Sheniza Mohamed? Sheniza was killed in January by her (alleged) boyfriend after she chose to end the relationship. I use the term “alleged” because her family firmly states she was not in a relationship with this young man.


5) Did you know about either of these stories?
6) Did you talk about it?
   6.1 Can you tell me a bit about what you talked about and with whom?
7) How would you describe the relationships here?
8) What are some of the things that stand out to you in these stories?
   8.1 Why did these things you described stand out?
   8.2 Do you see an element of shaming?
9) It seems like the only dating stories that make the news are those when someone is killed. Do you hear or know about any other sorts of violence in relationships?

**Community awareness of dating violence**

9) How is violence viewed in the community?
10) Is violence something that is talked about?
11) If violence is talked about, where and when is it mostly discussed?
12) If you attend church, is violence in relationships ever discussed? If so, how do you think these stories we are discussing today would be talked about in church?
13) Does Guyana have laws against violence? Can you tell me a little bit about them and how it works?
14) Why do you think there is violence in teen relationships?
15) What causes violence in teen relationships?

**Gender**

17) If this story was the other way around and Angela or Sheniza were the attacker, would the stories be any different? How so?
18) Are there different expectations of boys/girls in relationships in Guyana? What are they?
   18.1 When is a Guyanese girl/boy seen as respectable?
19) Why as a man does he feel so disrespected by Angela cheating on him?
   19.1 Does this somehow relate to his manhood/being a woman?
20) Why is Sheniza’s family saying she was not in a relationship with this boy?
21) One saying I’ve heard is “Tie the heffer, let the bull run free”. What does this mean? What sorts of sayings do you hear?

**Ethnicity & Class**

18) Sheniza and Angela come from different ethnic backgrounds, does this impact how you see their stories?
19) Are there differences between your ideas and what others might think regarding their ethnicity?
20) Would you say experiencing violence in Guyana is the same or different if you are Afro-Guyanese or Indo-Guyanese?
21) Each story happens in a different part of Guyana. Does living in one part of Guyana as opposed to another effect being in these types of situations?

**Closing**

26) Is there anything else we have not touched upon you would like to address?
27) Why did you decide to participate in this focus group?
Appendix I
1st Focus Group Guide
Adolescent Focus Group Guide

Preamble

Good Afternoon and Welcome. Thanks for taking the time to join our discussion on dating and violence. My name is Ruth Rodney, I am a nurse and PhD student at University of Toronto. Assisting me is Ms. Clonel Boston, who is the co-ordinator at Women Across Differences here in Georgetown. She will be taking notes about our discussion today so don’t be concerned if you see her writing.

You were invited because you all have important information that can help me to answer some of my research questions. There are no right or wrong answers. I expect that you will have differing points of views. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said.

We’re tape-recording the session because we don’t want to miss any of your comments. No names will be included in any reports. I have chosen to give you each a nametag with an alias. “P” stands for participant and each of you get a number based on the order you showed up today. These aliases will help me later to know who is speaking when listening to the tape recordings. If you want to follow up on something that someone has said, you want to disagree, agree, or give an example, feel free to do that but try to use the alias listed on the nametag when you go to respond. I would also ask that only one person speak at a time, as it will be difficult to hear multiple voices clearly later on the tape recording.

Feel free to have a conversation with one another about these questions. I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share. We’re interested in hearing from each of you. So if you’re talking a lot, I may ask you to give others a chance. And if you aren’t saying much, I may call on you. I just want to make sure I hear from all of you. I am assuming that when we learn about one another's views, they remain confidential. In a small group like this, people are identifiable to some degree by their views and opinions. Having said this, and having made these requests, you know that I cannot guarantee that the request to remain confidential will be honoured by everyone in the room. So I am asking you to make only those comments that you would be comfortable making in a public setting; and to hold back making comments that you would not say publicly. However, if you disclose any information that puts yourself or someone else at risk I will have to report it.

Lastly, if you change your mind and no longer care to participate you can excuse yourself from the focus group at anytime. There is no penalty from withdrawing from this study. If you would not like your information included, you have one week to contact me. If I do not hear from you in this time then your information will not be destroyed.

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7 This focus group guide was used to guide the discussion on answering how discourses on age, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity were used to explain dating violence. Through discussing these two dating violence stories, the perspectives of Guyanese adolescents, teachers, and parents' were compared for similarities and differences.
Ice Breaker

Instructions: I would like everyone to finish these questions for me and I will record them on this flip chart. There are no right or wrong answers and this is informal. You can shout out what you would like me to write down.

1) Please finish these sentences for me.
   A healthy relationship;
   - Looks like…
   - Sounds like…
   - Feels like…

2) Now, these ones.
   An unhealthy relationship;
   - Looks like…
   - Sounds like…
   - Feels like…

Dating in adolescence

1) What’s the difference between being a friend and dating someone?
2) What do you call it when someone is more than a friend?
   Probe: For example, I would say I’m talking to someone – what do you guys say?
3) Does dating involve having sex or not?
4) Sex means different things to different people, when your friends talk about sex, what do they mean?

Dating Violence

Instructions: We are going to talk about two stories that were in the news. You may remember these stories once I tell you about them. I am going to pose a series of questions to the group, and I would like for us to consider and speak about both stories in answering these questions.

Story # 1
Does the name Angela McAllister ring a bell? (Allow for some response). She was the 17-year old girl beaten and stabbed to death by her boyfriend in the East Bank at her boyfriend’s home. The boy’s mother called her to come over after her son told her rumours were flying that she cheated. When the boy started beating her with a spade and cutting her with the cutlass, the mother and sister ran for safety in a neighbours’ yard and then asked for someone to intervene. No one did because the boy was armed. 

Story # 2
I also wanted us to look at another story that occurred earlier this year in Berbice. Do you remember a teenager by the name of Sheniza Mohamed? Sheniza was killed in January by her (alleged) boyfriend after she chose to end the relationship. I use the term “alleged” because her family firmly states she was not in a relationship with this young man.


5) Did you know about either of these stories?
6) Did you talk about it?
   6.1 Can you tell me a bit about what you talked about and with whom?
7) How would you describe the relationships here?
8) What are some of the things that stand out to you in these stories?
   8.1 Why did these things you described standout?
   8.2 Do you see an element of shaming?
9) It seems like the only dating stories that make the news are those when someone is killed. Do you hear or know about any other sorts of violence in relationships?

Community awareness of dating violence
10) How is violence viewed in the community?
11) Is violence something that is talked about?
12) If violence is talked about, where and when is it mostly discussed?
13) If you attend church, is violence in relationships ever discussed? If so, how do you think these stories we are discussing today would be talked about in church?
14) Does Guyana have laws against violence? Can you tell me a little bit about them and how it works?
15) Why do you think there is violence in teen relationships?
16) What causes violence in teen relationships?

Gender
17) If this story was the other way around and Angela or Sheniza was the attacker, would the story be any different? How so?
18) Are there different expectations of boys/girls in a relationship? What are they?
   18.1 When is a Guyanese girl/boy seen as respectable?
19) Why as a man does he feel so disrespected by Angela cheating on him?
20) Why is Sheniza’s family saying she was not in a relationship with that boy?
21) One saying I’ve heard is “Tie the heffer, let the bull run free”. What does this mean? What sorts of sayings do you hear?

Ethnicity & Class
22) Sheniza and Angela come from different ethnic backgrounds, does this impact how you see their stories?
23) Are there differences between your ideas and what others might think regarding their ethnicity?
24) Is it different or the same if you go through something like this and you’re Afro-Guyanese or Indo-Guyanese?
25) Each story happens in a different part of Guyana. Does living in different parts of Guyana affect being in these types of situations?

Closing
26) Is there anything else we have not touched upon you would like to address?
27) Why did you decide to participate in this focus group?
Appendix J
2nd Focus Group
Parents/Teachers Focus Group

Preamble
Good Evening and Welcome. I just wanted to remind you about a few things before we start the second focus group. Once again, thanks for taking the time to join our discussion on teenagers, dating, and violence. Assisting me again today is Ms. Boston. She will be taking notes about our discussion again today.

You were invited back so that we can continue our discussion but address some other questions. There are no right or wrong answers. I expect that you will have differing points of views. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said.

We’re tape-recording the session because we don’t want to miss any of your comments. No names will be included in any reports. I have chosen to give you each a nametag with an alias. “P” stands for participant and each of you get a number based on the order you showed up today. These aliases will help me later to know who is speaking when listening to the tape recordings. If you want to follow up on something that someone has said, you want to disagree, agree, or give an example, feel free to do that but try to use the alias listed on the nametag when you go to respond. I would also ask that only one person speak at a time, as it will be difficult to hear multiple voices clearly later on the tape recording.

Feel free to have a conversation with one another about these questions. I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share. We’re interested in hearing from each of you. So if you’re talking a lot, I may ask you to give others a chance. And if you aren’t saying much, I may call on you. I just want to make sure I hear from all of you. I am assuming that when we learn about one another's views, they remain confidential. In a small group like this, people are identifiable to some degree by their views and opinions. Having said this, and having made these requests, you know that I cannot guarantee that the request to remain confidential will be honoured by everyone in the room. So I am asking you to make only those comments that you would be comfortable making in a public setting; and to hold back making comments that you would not say publicly. However, if you disclose any information that puts yourself or someone else at risk I will have to report it.

Lastly, if you change your mind and no longer want to participate you can excuse yourself from the focus group at anytime. There is no penalty from withdrawing from this study. If you would not like your information included, you have one week to contact me. If I do not hear from you in this time then your information will not be destroyed.

Knowledge of initiatives on dating violence

8 The second focus group discussions concentrated on answering what Guyanese adolescents, teachers, and parents thought would improve relationships between adults and teenagers and between teenagers.
1) Can you identify any activities, programs, or resources that address dating violence for youth in Guyana?
2) What do you think currently works/doesn’t work in these programs?

**Prevention of dating violence in adolescent community**
3) How can we change the current situation with violence in youth?
4) If you had magic powers, what would you change in Guyana to make adolescents’ relationships healthy and happy?
5) How can we build respect within this age group?
6) How do you think it is best to engage youth?

**Community prevention of dating violence**
7) How do you feel your community is currently doing in preventing dating violence?
8) If you could do something for your community to prevent the violence occurring in adolescent relationships, what would it be?
   Probe: How would you do it?
   Probe: Which resources would need to be involved?
9) How can we as a community prevent violence?
   Probe: Who is included in this community?

**Societal prevention of dating violence**
10) If we want to move away from dating violence, what should we do as a society to build healthy relationships?
11) I have asked you some questions regarding prevention initiatives, but what do you feel should be done? Is there anything we have missed?

**Closing**
12) Is there anything else we have not touched upon you would like to address?
Appendix K
2nd Focus Group
Adolescent Focus Group Guide

Preamble

Good Evening and Welcome. I just wanted to remind you about a few things before we start the second focus group. Once again, thanks for taking the time to join our discussion on dating and violence. Assisting me again today is Ms. Boston. She will be taking notes about our discussion again today.

You were invited back so that we can continue our discussion but address some other questions. There are no right or wrong answers. I expect that you will have differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what other have said.

We’re tape-recording the session because we don’t want to miss any of your comments. No names will be included in any reports. I have chosen to give you each a nametag with an alias. “P” stands for participant and each of you get a number based on the order you showed up today. These aliases will help me later to know who is speaking when listening to the tape recordings. If you want to follow up on something that someone has said, you want to disagree, agree, or give an example, feel free to do that but try to use the alias listed on the nametag when you go to respond. I would also ask that only one person speak at a time, as it will be difficult to hear multiple voices clearly later on the tape recording.

Feel free to have a conversation with one another about these questions. I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share. We’re interested in hearing from each of you. So if you’re talking a lot, I may ask you to give others a chance. And if you aren’t saying much, I may call on you. I just want to make sure I hear from all of you. I am assuming that when we learn about one another's views, they remain confidential. In a small group like this, people are identifiable to some degree by their views and opinions. Having said this, and having made these requests, you know that I cannot guarantee that the request to remain confidential will be honoured by everyone in the room. So I am asking you to make only those comments that you would be comfortable making in a public setting; and to hold back making comments that you would not say publicly. However, if you disclose any information that puts yourself or someone else at risk I will have to report it.

Lastly, if you change your mind and no longer want to participate you can excuse yourself from the focus group at anytime. There is no penalty from withdrawing from this study. If you would not like your information included, you have one week to contact me. If I do not hear from you in this time then your information will not be destroyed.

Learning About Dating Violence

1) Where do you think the best place for you guys to learn about relationships, sex, and violence is?

What is Available for Dating Violence?
2) What sorts of activities, programs, or resources address dating violence that you know of?
3) What do you think currently works/doesn’t work in these programs?
4) What are some key ideas for stopping dating violence?

**Prevention of dating violence in adolescent community and community prevention**

5) If you could do something for your community to prevent the violence occurring in relationships, what would it be?
   Probe: How would you do it?
   Probe: What would need to be involved?
6) How do you think we as a community can support you better?
7) How do you feel your community is currently doing in preventing dating violence?
8) What do you guys think would really make young people change their thinking and actions when it comes to violence?

**Societal prevention of dating violence**

9) If we want to move away from dating violence, what should we do as a society to build healthy relationships?
10) I have asked you some questions regarding prevention initiatives and different ways to prevent violence in your relationships, but what do you feel should be done? Have we missed anything?

**Closing**

11) Is there anything else we have not touched upon you would like to address?
This is an anonymous survey. Please answer the questions below. You do not have to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable with.

1) Age: ___________

2) Gender: Male or Female (Please circle)

3) Ethnicity: __________________________

4) What is the name of the neighbourhood you live in?: ______________________

5) Do you think of yourself as a religious or spiritual person?
   Yes  No   (Please circle)
   If you answered yes, what religion do you practice?: ______________________
Appendix M
Focus Group Demographic Questionnaire for Parents/Teachers

Building Healthier Relationships Demographic Questionnaire for Adults

This is an anonymous survey. Please answer the questions below. You do not have to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable with.

1) Age: __________

2) Gender: Male or Female (Please circle)

3) Ethnicity: ________________________________________

4) Do you think of yourself as a religious or spiritual person? (Please circle)
   - Yes
   - No
   If you answered yes, what religion do you practice? __________________________

5) What is your highest level of education? (Please circle)
   - No schooling completed
   - Elementary school
   - Some high school, no diploma
   - High school graduate
   - Some college credit, no degree
   - Trade/technical/vocational training
   - University Degree

6) What is the name of the neighbourhood you live in? ______________________

7) Are you currently employed? (Please circle)  Yes  No

8) What is your marital status? (Please circle)
   - Single, never married
   - Married or domestic partnership
   - Visiting partnership
   - Widowed
   - Divorced
9) How many children do you have and what are their ages? _________________
Appendix N

Letter of Consent for Principal/Teacher/Parent/School Counsellor Interview

Participant Information and Consent Form

**Title of Study:** Building Healthier Relationships: Guyanese Perspectives on Adolescent Dating Violence

**Principal Investigator:** Ruth Rodney, RN, MSc, PhD Candidate, Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent, it is important that you read this form carefully so you understand what is being asked of you. Please let me know if there is anything on this form that you do not understand or anything that needs further explanation.

**Why is this study being done?**
The purpose of this study is to speak with adolescents between the ages of 14-16 years, teachers, parents, the school counsellor, and the principal to understand their views on adolescent dating violence. This study will create information to support the development of prevention initiatives on adolescent dating violence. Completion of this study will also fulfill requirements for my doctoral degree.

**What is required of you?**
The principal investigator will interview you about your views on Guyanese society, violence, and dating violence in adolescence. You will be asked a series of general questions about these topics. The interview should not exceed 2 hours and will be completed on school grounds. The interview will be audio recorded, with a transcript made of the discussion. By signing this permission form, you are agreeing to be interviewed. If at any time you want me to stop recording, the recording will be stopped and you will not be penalized.

**What if I change my mind?**
You can change your mind about being in the study at anytime. Even after the study is over you can contact me if you change your mind about sharing some of the things we talked about. However, it is important to keep in mind that, at a certain point, it may be too late to retract some of the information provided (e.g. materials already published or presented at conferences)

**Will I get paid?**
Thirty-one hundred GYD ($20 CAD) will be provided as a token of appreciation for your time and to assist with transportation. The GYD amount is subject to change based on exchange rates.
Potential Harms:
This is a sensitive issue and answering questions about your community, violence, and dating violence in adolescence may elicit feelings of discomfort, anger, or sadness. If at anytime a question may make you feel uncomfortable, you are not obligated to answer it. All focus group members will receive a list of free available resources at the end of each focus group should there be need for further emotional or psychological support. You will have a week after the interview is completed to withdraw from the study, after this timeframe it will not be possible to destroy your information without effecting the integrity of the study.

Limit to Confidentiality: If you report in the group discussion that there is a threat to your life, would like to harm yourself, or someone else, I am required by law to report this to the appropriate authorities.

Potential Benefits:
There is no tangible benefit for participating in this study, however, I am hopeful that your participation in discussing this issue will shed some further light on understanding dating violence for your children/students.

Privacy and Confidentiality:
I will not use your name or any information identifying you. No one but the PhD committee, my advisory board, and myself can read the transcripts from the interview, unless you yourself share it. The information you provide will be kept on my computer, which will be protected by my password.

Who will you share this information with?
Study results will be provided in the form of written reports, which will be available to all participants by September 2016.

Questions?
If you have any further questions or concerns regarding this study please contact my supervisor or myself by the information provided below.

Ruth Rodney, RN, PhD Candidate
Ruth.rodney@mail.utoronto.ca
Guyanese Number: xxx-xxxx

Denise Gastaldo, PhD
PhD Supervisor
denise.gastaldo@utoronto.ca

This study has been reviewed by the Research and Ethics Board at the University of Toronto If you have any questions related to your rights as a study participant or about ethical issues related to this study, you can contact the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics at: ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 001-416-946-3273.

Participant
By signing this form I confirm that:

- The study has been explained
- All of my questions have been answered
- I understand what is required of me
- I understand the potential harms and benefits of participating in this study
I understand that I can withdraw at anytime if I change my mind
I don’t have to answer any questions that I am not comfortable with
I have carefully read each page of this consent form
I have been given a copy of the consent form

Print Name of Principal/Teacher/Parent: ______________________

Signature of Principal/Teacher/Parent: ______________________

Date: ________________

**Principal Investigator**

By signing this form I confirm that:
- I have fully explained this study to the participant
- I have answered all questions asked by the participant
- I have given the participant a copy of the consent form

(Print)______________________________

(Signature)______________________________

Date: ________________
Appendix O
Letter of Consent for Teacher Focus Group

Participant Information and Consent Form

Title of Study: Building Healthier Relationships: Guyanese Perspectives on Adolescent Dating Violence
Principal Investigator: Ruth Rodney, RN, MSc, PhD Candidate, Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent, it is important that you read this form carefully so you understand what is being asked of you. Please let me know if there is anything on this form that you do not understand or anything that needs further explanation.

Why is this study being done?
The purpose of this study is to speak with adolescents between the ages of 14-16 years, teachers, parents, the school counsellor, and the principal to understand their views on adolescent dating violence. This study will create information to support the development of prevention initiatives on adolescent dating violence. Completion of this study will also fulfill requirements for my doctoral degree.

What is required of you?
With your permission, you will participate in two focus group discussions about dating violence in adolescent relationships with other teachers at XXX high school. You will be asked a series of general questions about this issue. The focus group should not exceed 2 hours and will be completed after school hours. The focus groups will be audio recorded, with a transcript made of the discussion. By signing this permission form, you are agreeing to be interviewed.

What if I change my mind?
If you change your mind, you can withdraw at any time from the focus group. However, please note that you will have one week after the focus group is completed to withdraw your information from the study, after this timeframe it will not be possible to destroy your information without effecting the integrity of the study. There is no penalty for not answering questions. I describe below the steps I am taking to ensure your privacy.

Will I get paid?
Thirty-one hundred GYD ($20 CAD) will be provided as a token of appreciation for your time and to assist with transportation. The GYD amount is subject to change based on exchange rates.
Potential Harms:
This is a sensitive issue and answering questions about dating violence in adolescence may elicit feelings of discomfort, anger, or sadness if there is disagreement within the group on personal views. No names will be recorded in the focus group, however the information discussed in a focus group setting has potential to go beyond that discussion. All focus group participants will be advised to respect each other’s privacy and not discuss someone else’s responses outside of the group. However, I cannot control what people discuss once they leave, and therefore this is a potential risk. For this reason, all focus group members will receive a list of free available resources at the end of each focus group should there be need for further emotional or psychological support.

Limit to Confidentiality: If you report in the group discussion that there is a threat to your life, would like to harm yourself, or someone else, I am required by law to report this to the appropriate authorities.

Potential Benefits:
There is no tangible benefit for participating in this study, however, I am hopeful that your participation in discussing this issue will shed some further light on understanding dating violence for your students.

Privacy and Confidentiality:
I will not use your name or any information identifying you. No one but the PhD committee, my advisory board, and myself can read the transcripts from the focus groups. The information you provide will be kept on my computer, which will be protected by my password.

Who will you share this information with?
The analysis of this study will be completed by September 2016 at which time I will provide a 3 to 5 page written report for you to read. I will also provide another shorter report for parents and adolescents of this school.

Questions?
If you have any further questions or concerns regarding this study please contact my supervisor or myself by the information provided below.

Ruth Rodney, RN, PhD Candidate
Ruth.rodney@mail.utoronto.ca
Guyanese Number: xxx-xxxx

Denise Gastaldo, PhD
PhD Supervisor
denise.gastaldo@utoronto.ca

This study has been reviewed by the Research and Ethics Board at the University of Toronto If you have any questions related to your rights as a study participant or about ethical issues related to this study, you can contact the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics at: ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 001-416-946-3273.

Participant
By signing this form I confirm that:

- The study has been explained
- All of my questions have been answered
- I understand what is required of me
I understand the potential harms and benefits of participating in this study.
I understand that I have a one week time period after the focus group is completed to withdraw my information. If I choose to withdraw after this time my information will remain in the study.
I don’t have to answer any questions that I am not comfortable with.
I have carefully read each page of this consent form.
I have been given a copy of the consent form.

Print Name of Principal/Teacher/Parent: ______________________________

Signature of Principal/Teacher/Parent: ______________________________

Date: ________________

**Principal Investigator**

By signing this form I confirm that:
- I have fully explained this study to the participant.
- I have answered all questions asked by the participant.
- I have given the participant a copy of the consent form.

(Print)______________________________

(Signature)______________________________

Date: ________________
Appendix P
Letter of Consent for adolescent focus group

Participant Information and Consent Form

**Title of Study:** Building Healthier Relationships: Guyanese Perspectives on Adolescent Dating Violence

**Principal Investigator:** Ruth Rodney, RN, MSc, PhD Candidate, Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing

You are being asked to participate in a research study. **Before you give your consent, it is important that you read this form carefully so you understand what is being asked of you.** Please let me know if there is anything on this form that you do not understand or anything that needs further explanation.

**Why is this study being done?**
We know that some Guyanese adolescents are experiencing violence in their relationships, but we need more information on how to prevent this from happening. Sometimes talking about dating is hard, so this study gives you a chance to speak with kids your own age in a group. Hearing what you think will help us to understand how best to create or improve initiatives that prevent violence.

**Study Design:**
You will participate in two focus group discussions with about 8 to 10 kids who are between the ages of 14 to 16 years. The focus groups will occur on school grounds right after school is finished for the day. You should be prepared to stay 2 hours after school. Refreshments will be provided and you will receive $1700 dollars for your time and to help get you home.

**What's a focus group?**
A focus group is a group of people who will sit in a circle together and talk about topics. One person guides the discussion by asking questions and a second person takes some notes while we talk. This focus group will be audio recorded, so you will see two recorders in the room.

**Can other kids talk about what I said in the group?**
By signing this form, you are agreeing to respect the privacy of everyone in the group the same way you would want. However, there is still a possibility that someone in the group may discuss with others what was said.

**Limit to Confidentiality:** If you report in the group discussion that there is a threat to your life, would like to harm yourself, or someone else, I am required by law to report this to the appropriate authorities.

**What happens if the questions make me feel uncomfortable?**
You do not have to answer any question that you are not comfortable with. There is no penalty for not answering questions. If you feel uncomfortable or upset after the
group discussion, your school counsellor, will be available to talk to you during his regular days at school. I will also give you a list of free resources you can contact if you need further help.

**Will I get paid?**
Yes. One thousand fifteen hundred GYD ($10 CAD) will be provided as a token of appreciation for your time and to assist with transportation. The GYD amount is subject to change based on exchange rates.

**Will my name be used at all?**
No. Your name or any other information that may identify you will not be used in the reports from this research.

**What if I change my mind about participating?**
You will have a one-week period after the focus group is completed to withdraw from the study. If you choose to withdraw after this period, your information will not be destroyed.

**What happens to the information I give you?**
The information you provide will be kept on my computer, which will be protected by my password. No one but the PhD committee, my advisory board, and myself can read the transcripts from the focus groups.

**When will I know what you found?**
I am planning to have a 2 to 3-page report made for you by September 2016. This will give you a summary about what this study taught us.

**Who else will know about this information?**
I am also creating a report for the Ministry of Education, parents, and teachers. The information we learn from this study can be very helpful for people within the community and other adolescents in Guyana, The Caribbean, and other parts of the world. So I also hope to present these findings at conferences where people are focused on improving adolescent health and publish some of the findings.

**How do I benefit from this study?**
There is no direct benefit to you participating in this study.

**I think I may have more questions...**
If you have any other questions you can contact my supervisor Dr. Denise Gastaldo or myself with the information provided below.

Ruth Rodney, RN, PhD Candidate
Ruth.rodney@mail.utoronto.ca
Guyanese Number: xxx-xxxx

Denise Gastaldo, PhD
PhD Supervisor
denise.gastaldo@utoronto.ca

This study has been reviewed by the Research and Ethics Board at the University of Toronto. If you have any questions related to your rights as a study participant or about ethical issues related to this study, you can contact the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics at: ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 001-416-946-3273.
**Participant**
By signing this form I confirm that:

- The study has been explained
- All of my questions have been answered
- I understand what is required of me
- I understand the potential harms and benefits of participating in this study
- I understand that I have a one week time period after the focus group is completed to withdraw my information. If I choose to withdraw after this time my information will remain in the study.
- I don’t have to answer any questions that I am not comfortable with
- I have carefully read each page of this consent form
- I have been given a copy of the consent form

Print Name of Principal/Teacher/Parent: ____________________________

Signature of Principal/Teacher/Parent: ____________________________

Date: _________________

**Principal Investigator**

By signing this form I confirm that:

- I have fully explained this study to the participant
- I have answered all questions asked by the participant
- I have given the participant a copy of the consent form

(Print) ____________________________

(Signature) ____________________________

Date: _________________
Appendix Q
Letter of Consent for Parents

Participant Information and Consent Form

Title of Study: Building Healthier Relationships: Guyanese Perspectives on Adolescent Dating Violence
Principal Investigator: Ruth Rodney, RN, MSc, PhD Candidate, Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing

You are being asked to participate in a research study. **Before you give your consent, it is important that you read this form carefully so you understand what is being asked of you.** Please let me know if there is anything on this form that you do not understand or anything that needs further explanation.

Why is this study being done?
The purpose of this study is to speak with adolescents between the ages of 14-16 years, teachers, parents, the school counsellor, and the principal to understand their views on adolescent dating violence. This study will create information to support the development of prevention initiatives on adolescent dating violence. Completion of this study will also fulfill requirements for my doctoral degree.

What is required of you?
With your permission, you will participate in two focus group discussions about dating violence in adolescent relationships with other parents from XXX High School. You will be asked a series of general questions about this issue. The focus groups should not exceed 2 hours and will be completed in the day or evening on a weekend, depending on the best time for the group.

Will I get paid?
Yes. Thirty-one hundred GYD ($20 CAD) will be provided as a token of appreciation for your time and to assist with transportation. The GYD amount is subject to change based on exchange rates.

Is there any harm or risk to me?
This is a sensitive issue and answering questions about dating violence in adolescence may make you feel uncomfortable if there is disagreement within the group on personal views. No names will be recorded in the focus group, however the information discussed in a focus group setting has potential to go beyond that discussion. All focus group participants will be advised to respect each other’s privacy and not discuss someone else’s responses outside of the group. However, I cannot control what people discuss once they leave, and therefore this is a potential risk. If at anytime a question may make you feel uncomfortable, you are not obligated to answer it. There is no penalty for not answering questions.
Limit to Confidentiality: If you report in the group discussion that there is a threat to your life, would like to harm yourself, or someone else, I am required by law to report this to the appropriate authorities.

How do I benefit from this research?
There is no direct benefit for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:
I will not use your name or any information identifying you, unless your permission is given. No one but the PhD committee, my advisory board, and myself will read the transcripts from the focus groups. The information you provide will be kept on my computer, which will be protected by my password.

What if I don’t want to participate in the study anymore?
You will have a one-week period after the focus group is completed to withdraw from the study. If you choose to withdraw after this period, your information will not be destroyed.

Information about the Study Results:
I am planning to have a 2 to 3-page report made for you by September 2016. This will give you a summary about what this study taught us. I am also creating a report for the Ministry of Education and teachers. The information we learn from this study can be very helpful for people within the community and other adolescents in Guyana, The Caribbean, and other parts of the world. So I also hope to present these findings at professional conferences and publish some of the findings.

If you have any further questions or concerns regarding this study please contact my supervisor or me with the information provided below.

Ruth Rodney, RN, PhD Candidate
Ruth.rodney@mail.utoronto.ca
Gyuanese Number: xxx-xxxx

Denise Gestalt, PhD
PhD Supervisor
denise.gastaldo@utoronto.ca

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Participant
By signing this form I confirm that:

- The study has been explained
- All of my questions have been answered
- I understand what is required of me
- I understand the potential harms and benefits of participating in this study
- I understand that I have a one week time period after the focus group is completed to withdraw my information. If I choose to withdraw after this time my information will remain in the study.
- I don’t have to answer any questions that I am not comfortable with
- I have carefully read each page of this consent form
- I have been given a copy of the consent form

Print Name of Principal/Teacher/Parent: ______________________________

Signature of Principal/Teacher/Parent: ______________________________

Date: ____________________

**Principal Investigator**

By signing this form I confirm that:
- I have fully explained this study to the participant
- I have answered all questions asked by the participant
- I have given the participant a copy of the consent form

(Print)____________________________

(Signature)__________________________

Date: ____________________
### Socioeconomic Conditions and Discourses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.1 Poverty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.1.1 Lack of access to basic needs</td>
<td>Basic needs often unmet from home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.1.2 Family separation</td>
<td>Parents and teenagers separated by availability of work, parent relationships ending etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.1.3 Exploitation in family</td>
<td>Teenagers exploited in family environments through child labour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.1.4 Family interaction</td>
<td>Limited quality time in families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.1.5 Gendered poverty</td>
<td>Poverty experienced by a girl or woman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.1.6 Deprived culture in school System</td>
<td>Using material or structural things for one's personal needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.1.7 Societal resources not available</td>
<td>People do not feel confident to leave abusive homes because organizations to help are not long term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.1.8 Struggling to survive</td>
<td>Families are in such destitute situations it resorts to violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2 Community Violence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2.1 Witnessing domestic violence in the community</td>
<td>Experiencing domestic violence from the perspective of outside the relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2.1a Parents discussing causes of unhealthy relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2.2 Violence in schools</td>
<td>Violence that occurs on school grounds not related to dating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2.3. Experiencing violence in the Community</td>
<td>Participants as victims of assaults, robberies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2.4 Violence related to race</td>
<td>Determining whether race places a factor or not with violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2.5 Exploitation in the Community</td>
<td>Girls’ experiences with older men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2.6 Talking about violence in the Community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2.7 Adults seeking help from men and Women</td>
<td>Speaking about trying to obtain help from those in positions to help but do not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2.8 Location of community</td>
<td>Violence is determined by where you live. Particular areas are more violent than others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.3 Laws</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.3.1 Adult knowledge of laws</td>
<td>Adult awareness of current laws to protect themselves from domestic violence, dating violence, and/or any other forms of violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.3.2 Teen knowledge of laws</td>
<td>Teenagers’ awareness of how laws work with dating or domestic violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.3.3 Lack of confidence in justice System</td>
<td>Perspectives on the current usefulness of laws against violence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### B.1 Normative Femininity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B.1.1a Female sexual respectability and responsibility</td>
<td>Respectability and responsibility heavily related to sexuality and reproductive features of female body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.1.1b Women and girls prevent and/or cease violence</td>
<td>Women and girls are responsible if violence occurs towards them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.1.1c Femininity related to race</td>
<td>Perspectives on racial differences of gender roles for women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.1.1d Women’s roles</td>
<td>Teen girls perspectives on women’s roles in relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.1.1e Women’s roles – Adults Perspective</td>
<td>Men and women discussing what roles women should have in relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.1.1f Respectability related to school Uniform</td>
<td>Wearing a school uniform is presenting yourself with respect. Participating in behaviours while in the school uniform causes shame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.1.1g Violence as a corrective tool</td>
<td>Discussing violence towards women not seen as such when action of women is considered wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.1.1h Discomfort with lesbianism</td>
<td>Teachers discussing their perspectives on lesbianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B.1.2 Normative Masculinity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.1.2a Asserting masculinity</td>
<td>Establishing power in roles as student/partner/family member.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Men take action even if it’s a stupid thing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.1.2b Masculinity related to race</td>
<td>Perspectives on racial differences of gender roles for men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.1.2c Male sexual respectability</td>
<td>Respectability related to sexual prowess.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Building Healthier Relationships: Guyanese Perspectives on Adolescent Dating Violence

Teacher’s Retreat

Prepared for: Ministry of Education
Prepared by: Mr. Baydewan Rambarran, Principal Education Officer
Mr. Cliston Joseph David, District Education Officer
Mrs. Ruth Rodney, RN, MSc, PhD Candidate

November 4th, 2015
Building Healthier Relationships: Guyanese Perspectives on Adolescent Dating Violence

Teacher’s Retreat Proposal for Ministry of Education

**Prepared for:** Finance Department, Ministry of Education

**Prepared by:** Mr. Rambarran, Mr. David, and Mrs. Rodney

**Description:**
Mr. Rambarran, Mr. David, and Mrs. Rodney are seeking funding from the Ministry of Education for a Teacher Retreat for XXX high school teachers. The development of the proposed retreat arose from the data collected under the ongoing research titled “*Building Healthier Relationships: Guyanese Perspectives on Adolescent Dating Violence*” (Refer to pg.4 for study overview). The funding request, retreat objectives, expected outcomes, budget, and proposed dates are included in this proposal.

**Executive Summary:**
The purpose of this proposal is to secure funding for the teachers of XXX high school to participate in a one-day retreat located at Pandama Retreat and Winery. The above-mentioned study is focused on preventing violence through a community approach. We know that teachers are our most valuable assets in the education system and their dedication to adolescents positively contributes to healthy development both academically and socially. Teachers at XXX high school have actively participated in the research focused on violence prevention in adolescent relationships. These discussions have produced incredibly rich data that have provided insight into the positive benefits of group discussions amongst colleagues and the triumphs of being a high school teacher. However, teachers have also articulated the frustrations, building tensions, as well as other life stressors that impact their teaching relationships with students.

**Retreat Objectives:**
The objectives for this retreat are threefold. The first objective is to rejuvenate teachers so that they can return to classrooms with more positivity. The second objective is to learn different techniques for classroom management that will provide them with better ways to engage teenagers who are in crisis, as well as to gain and keep the attention of a classroom with greater ease. The third objective is to have experiential learning, which contrasts the didactic manner that is the norm. Teachers benefitted and learned from one another in the focus group discussions. This retreat will extend this learning through doing. Teachers will understand what it feels like to ask students to participate in these learning methods.

**Expected Outcomes:**
1) Teachers will learn new techniques that account for different learning styles of students.
2) Teachers will gain new ways to engage students.
3) Teachers will have better understanding of self, resulting in effective ways to deal with stress thereby decreasing negative interactions with students and in the classroom.

**Beneficiaries:**
18 Teachers, School Officials (XXX high School)
2 Welfare Officers (MoE)

**Proposed Dates and time:**
November 24th or November 25th, 2015: 0900-1500
Schools are closed during the week of November 23\textsuperscript{rd} – November 27\textsuperscript{th}, 2015.

**Budget**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost (GYD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retreat Fee (20 persons)</td>
<td>$ 20 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In-kind Support from Ms. Rodney</strong></td>
<td>$20 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch (If provided by Pandama) Menu</td>
<td>$ 2000 per person $ 40 000 (for 20 persons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoked Chicken</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet Potato Salad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Vegetables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banana Custard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Cost for MoE</strong></td>
<td>$20 000 (without lunch) $60 000 (with lunch)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Retreat Facilitator: Tracy Greene Douglas**

Ms. Douglas is an artist, motivational speaker, and counsellor. Since opening Pandama in 2009 she has hosted several groups including NGO organizations, Ministers, Church groups, Youth organizations, and many more. Her style and technique of relating to people often encourages emotional and mental break-through that helps people to continue living more enriched lives.
Title of Study: Building Healthier Relationships: Guyanese Perspectives on Adolescent Dating Violence

Principal Investigator: Ruth Rodney, RN, MSc, PhD Candidate
University of Toronto

Background: Dating in adolescence is an experience that has been thought to provide positive opportunities to learn and hone social and interpersonal skills. However, some adolescents are exposed to physical, psychological, sexual, and economic forms of violence in their dating relationships, which can lead to poor health outcomes for both perpetrator and victim regardless of gender, race, or class. To prevent this from occurring adolescents as well as the communities in which they grow and live require opportunities to address this issue and brainstorm ways of tackling dating violence that is community specific. With this in mind, my motivation for conducting this research in a country that has the highest reported incidence of domestic violence for the Caribbean is to create a space for this conversation to occur.

Objectives: To move forward and improve the health of adolescents in Guyana by addressing violence prevention through a societal lens. This will be achieved by creating a more comprehensive understanding of adolescent dating violence. Secondly, that future preventative initiatives, will utilize the data provided through this research to accurately target adolescents.

Research Question: How is dating violence and its prevention perceived in Guyana?
   Sub-questions: a) How are discourses on age, gender, sexuality, and race used to explain the phenomenon?
   b) How do Guyanese adolescents, teachers, and parent perspectives on dating violence differ or relate to each other?
   c) How do Guyanese adolescents, teachers, and parents envision successful prevention initiatives on dating violence?

Methodology & Methods: This will be a critical exploratory qualitative study, taking place over a 6-8 week period at XXX high school. This study is guided by an advisory board located within the country and will use a combination of interviews and focus groups to obtain information on how adolescent dating violence is understood in the community. In total 6 interviews and 8 focus groups were completed. I recruited a diverse sample of approximately 45 parents, teachers, school officials, and adolescents, from this secondary school. I will first analyze the data looking for ways in which ethnicity, gender, class, and age intersect and are used to understand and explain adolescent dating violence. Secondly, I will compare and contrast perspectives between adolescents, parents, and teachers, on this issue and brainstorm ideas for an ideal prevention program or initiative.

Knowledge Translation: Two community reports will be created. The first report will be a 2 to 3 page summary of the study results in plain language for parents and students. A second report of 3 to 5 pages with more technical language will be presented to the Ministry of Education, all school staff, and other interested stakeholders. I hope to complete both reports by September 2016 and return to Guyana for community presentations. I will also be submitting the results of this study for publications and presenting at numerous conferences. If further funding is obtained, the knowledge translation portion of this study will be extended and enhanced with greater oral format engagements in Guyana.

Ethical Considerations: This study has undergone a full board review by the Research and Ethics Board at the University of Toronto. Protocol Reference # 31833. The Ministry of Education in Guyana has accepted this REB review for this study.
Dear President Granger:

Thank-you for the opportunity to write to you on an issue that I believe is important for the continued betterment of Guyana.

Three years ago, I had the pleasure to make your acquaintance at the Kwanzaa festivities here in Georgetown. I am not sure if you may recall, but we discussed my research interests, which are violence prevention, adolescents, and health. Currently, I am focused on adolescent dating violence and it’s prevention in Guyana.

As a member of the Guyanese diaspora, my love for this country was instinctive since I began visiting as a young child (I am the youngest in a family of four and the only child born in Canada). As I have matured, so too have my interests in what I can contribute to the land of my heritage. It is with this genuineness that I have continued to further my education enhancing and broadening my skills to contribute to this country in the areas of health and education. This journey has taken me to my doctorate, where I am now in my 4th year in the Faculty of Nursing with collaboration in Global Health at the University of Toronto.

Presently, I am in the country completing data collection and will also be guest lecturing at University of Guyana in the Faculty of Nursing. In these lectures, I am providing further information on qualitative research and research proposal writing skills.

I would be grateful to meet with you in person to briefly discuss my research and also an experience of violence that occurred on a prior trip. I will be in the country tentatively until October 28th, 2015 and would be appreciative of a meeting before this date.

Respectfully with warmest regards,

Ruth Rodney, RN, MSc, PhD Candidate