Adolescent Dating and Disordered Eating: Does the Quality of Dating Relationships Play a Role?
Andrea E. Hamel, MA1, Shannon L. Zaitsoff, PhD1, Andrew Taylor, PhD2, Rosanne Menna, PhD3, & Daniel le Grange, PhD4
1Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada 2Teen Health Centre, Windsor, Ontario, Canada 3University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada 4Eating Disorders Program, Program of University of Chicago

INTRODUCTION
• Dating is associated with a number of negative outcomes for teens including low academic achievement and depression (e.g., Quatman et al., 2001). This is especially true for girls (e.g., Natsuaki et al., 2009).
• Although many studies have revealed a link between teen dating and depression, few studies have examined whether teen dating is associated with eating disorder symptoms.
• Furthermore, few studies in this literature have used a clinical sample or examined whether or not the quality of teens’ dating relationships plays a role.

PURPOSE
1. To compare the level of dating involvement across teens with an eating disorder, depressive disorder, and control group.
2. To investigate whether eating disorder symptoms are associated with greater dating involvement.
3. To investigate whether eating disorder symptoms are associated with the quality of teens’ dating relationships.

METHOD
PARTICIPANTS (N = 75)
• Females aged 12 to 19 years (M = 15.35, SD = 1.75).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eating Disorder (n = 25)</th>
<th>Depressive Disorder (n = 25)</th>
<th>Healthy Controls (n = 25)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 (68%) = anorexia</td>
<td>20 (80%) = MDD</td>
<td>4 (16%) = Dysthymia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 (32%) = bulimia</td>
<td>4 (16%) = Dysthymia</td>
<td>1 (4%) = Elevated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDI (21)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MEASURES
• Eating Disorder Inventory (Garner, 1991)
• Bulimia
• Drive for thinness
• Body dissatisfaction
• Current Dating Involvement (Kutlter & La Greca, 2004)
• 3 categories:
  1 Not dating now
  2 Currently dating one or more people casually
  3 Currently involved in a serious dating relationship
• Network of Relationships Inventory—Revised (NRI; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985)
• Survey measuring 8 positive qualities (e.g., affection) and 5 negative qualities (e.g., conflict) of relationships. Yields a composite factor for positive qualities (“Positive Qualities”) and negative qualities (“Negative Qualities”)
• Participants responded according to their current dating relationship (if applicable).

RESULTS

Table 1. Level of Current Dating Involvement Across Diagnostic Groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Dating Involvement</th>
<th>ED (n = 25)</th>
<th>DD (n = 25)</th>
<th>Control (n = 24)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not dating</td>
<td>13 (52%)</td>
<td>11 (44%)</td>
<td>16 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating Casually</td>
<td>6 (24%)</td>
<td>12 (48%)</td>
<td>4 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dating Seriously</td>
<td>6 (24%)</td>
<td>2 (17%)</td>
<td>4 (17%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ED = Eating Disorder Group, DD = Depressive Disorder Group.

Figure 1. Mean Bulimia Scores Across Current Dating Involvement Categories (Collapsing Across Diagnostic Groups).

Table 2. Partial Correlations, Controlling for Self-Esteem, Between NRI Factors and Eating Disorder Symptoms Among Current Daters (N = 34).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NRI Factors</th>
<th>Bulimia</th>
<th>Drive for Thinness</th>
<th>Body Dissatisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Qualities</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Qualities</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: NRI = Network of Relationships Inventory—Revised.
Note: NRI analyses were performed by collapsing across diagnostic groups, using only current daters.
*p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .005, ***p ≤ .001

DISCUSSION
• Levels of current dating involvement did not differ across diagnostic groups (Table 1). However, collapsing across diagnostic groups, symptoms of bulimia were associated with current involvement in a serious dating relationship (Figure 1).
• Contrary to expectations, negative qualities of current dating relationships were not associated with eating disorder symptoms. However, greater positive qualities (i.e., intimacy and support) were associated with increased symptoms of bulimia and/or drive for thinness (Tables 2 and 3).
• These results suggest that qualities of dating relationships that are generally considered positive (e.g., commitment, intimacy) may actually be detrimental to the mental health of teens. Future longitudinal research is needed to confirm this conclusion.

REFERENCES