Reviewer's report

Title: Adolescent Females' Perceptions of the Dating Experience: Grounded Theory

Version: 1 Date: 19 December 2006

Reviewer: Diann M. Ackard

Reviewer's report:

General

This manuscript describes a research study involving 22 adolescent females who participated in a qualitative interview on dating experiences, including descriptions of various stages of dating and definitions of abusive experiences. Adolescent dating violence is known to be a significant concern among today's youths, and thus this area of research is of importance. That being said, there are a number of limitations in the background research and rationale, methodology, and clinical implications that raise concern about the manuscript's appropriateness for publications. These limitations are addressed below.

-----------------------------------------------

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. Background and introduction. This section could be significantly strengthened by including more background information on grounded theory, more recent references on adolescent dating violence (nearly 50% of references are from 10 or more years ago), and a review of other theories of adolescent dating experiences that have been published. If none have been published, the author should state this.  
2. Background and introduction. Based on the literature reviewed, please indicate your a priori hypotheses in the last paragraph of this section.  
3. Methods. You begin to discuss grounded theory, but have provided the reader with no background information on this theory. Please include this information, either here or in the Background and Introduction, including significant references and how this theory has been applied to other topics, issues, or health concerns.  
4. Methods. There is potential for significant rater bias in how the study was conducted. First of all, it was not discussed how the eight previously piloted questions were tested (who developed the questions, is there any other research to back up these questions, on whom were they piloted?). Second, the lack of multiple raters introduces the possibility of significant bias on behalf of the interviewer. For example, the author states that "...I clarified concepts formed from interview data and converged responses from participants." Without an additional interviewer, or without allowing a non-biased individual or computer program to determine themes, the methodology of the study is questionable.  
5. Methods. It is not clear to me whether you allowed the adolescents to develop the theory, or whether they were asked to confirm an a priori theory. The methodology does not seem to support being able to do the former. If the latter, then that needs to be stated. For example, on p. 6, first paragraph under "results and discussion" section, the author states that "these female adolescent participants overwhelmingly agreed on seven stages of dating." It seems highly improbable that the theory was developed in the interviews without a bias on behalf of the interview, and then confirmed during the interviews with the students. Rather, it reads as though the students were asked to confirm an existing theory.  
6. Results and Discussion. Please separate these 2 sections. Report your results first, then offer interpretations within the discussion section.  
7. Results section. Please note how many participants agreed to the number of and description of the dating stages if these stages were developed during the course of the interview.  
8. Discussion section. Please clarify how your study adds "new" information to the field of adolescent dating violence. In order to best address this, you may wish to review articles written more recently.

-----------------------------------------------

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. Background and Introduction. The paragraph flow could be more smooth, allowing for better transitions between one paragraph or idea and the next.
2. p. 3, please include references or reviews to the first sentence.
3. p. 3, please clarify the comparison sample for paragraph 2, sentence 1. "Emotional and verbal abuse are more common in the adolescent (dating) population..." than whom? I assume you mean than adults, but this should be stated.
4. p. 3, last paragraph, first sentence starting "Data also suggest..." Please include %s and ranges.
5. p. 3, last paragraph, second sentence. Please identify a comparison group "... least likely....." out of what groups?
6. p. 4, second paragraph of Methods. What does it mean to be "purposely" selected; doesn't this introduce bias? Why wouldn't you choose randomly?
7. p. 5, first paragraph. What does it mean that "sample size was determined when theoretical saturation had been reached"?
8. p. 5, first paragraph, second to last sentence. note Typo in capitalization.
9. Methods. Did the schools also need to provide approval for the study? If so, this should be noted.
10. Methods. How were consent and assent procedures handled? Did the IRB require consent? Consent procedures must be documented.
11. Methods. What do you mean by microanalysis?
12. Methods. p. 6. What does it mean that "relational statements, grounded in the data, were connected using memos created during data analysis."
13. Methods. How was the terminology of "The Circle" generated? By whom? Is this a term used in grounded theory, if so, please state and explain.
14. Please add a year of publication to reference #2.
15. Please conduct a more recent literature search and add more recent publications to the entire manuscript.
16. Please reference Figure 1 within the body of the manuscript.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests