



# Understanding Perceptions of Healthy Relationships and Romantic Competence

Alayna Crawford, Savanna Stowell, & Angelina Jones

*Campus Research Day - April 18, 2024*

# Introduction

Romantic relationships among college students can be difficult to navigate, and could result in various negative impacts on mental health and academic success.

**A national survey of 55,292 college students** (American College Health Association, 2022)

- 39.5% reported problems with intimate relationships
- 33.6% reported it negatively impacting academic performance
- 64.2% of those students reported it causing moderate or high distress

# Introduction Cont.

**In a study involving 6,818 female college students** (Wood et al., 2020):

- 31% experienced IPV at least once since starting college
- 12% experienced multiple forms of abuse, including cyber, physical, and psychological abuse

**In this study, a strong correlation was noted between:**

- Severe instances of IPV
- Depression
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- School disengagement behaviors
- Negative academic impacts, leading to decreased academic motivation and achievement.

# Romantic Competence

Romantic competence curricula have been developed to help college students develop skills to navigate relationships (Davila et al., 2021).

- Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program

Romantic competence is “the capacity for people to function adaptively in their romantic lives at all stages of the relationship process, regardless of relationship status and type” (Davila et al., 2021, p. 252).

- It is associated with positive relationships and mental health outcomes (Davila et al., 2017)
  - greater comfort with intimacy
  - lower anxiety about abandonment
  - healthier relationship decision making
  - greater relationship satisfaction
  - fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety



# Romantic Competence and Healthy Relationships

## **Community needs assessment survey** (Murray et al., 2021):

- Characteristics of healthy relationships were effective communication, respect, trust, honesty, and encouragement

## **Studies suggest factors associated with romantic competence:**

- Gender: Mixed results
  - o No gender differences (Kumar & Mattanah, 2018)
  - o Gender differences– women higher on perspective taking, men on temperament and conflict resolution skills (Faber et al, 2019)

# Romantic Competence and Healthy Relationships

## - **Family background: May influence romantic competence**

- Attachment to mothers is positively associated with romantic competence (Kumar & Mattanah, 2016)
- Individuals with opposite-sex siblings see their romantic competence increase from adolescence to adulthood, unlike those with same-sex siblings (Doughty et al., 2015)
- Romantic competence negatively associated with:
  - interparental conflict and parental intrusiveness (Kumar & Mattanah, 2018)
  - frequent conflicts with siblings (Doughty et al., 2015)
- Influence of two parent vs one parent households have been unexplored

## - **Religious commitment: Unknown impact**

- Associated with relationship quality and satisfaction (Choi & Toma, 2017; Gugliandolo et al., 2021) but no known studies explored impact on competence

# Gaps and Limitations in Existing Research

- Overall, limited research exists on how college students perceive healthy relationships and romantic competence, and what might influence these perceptions.
- Few studies fully explore how gender and religious affiliations impact romantic competence
  - Studies discussing gender affecting romantic competence are contradictory, yielding mixed results
  - No known studies discuss impact of religion on romantic competence
- No known studies exist exploring these factors among students attending a Seventh-day Adventist university

# Research Aims

**Research Question:** “How does family background, religious commitment, and gender influence the perception of healthy relationships and the level of romantic competence in college students at a private faith-based institution in the United States?”

**Research Design:** Quantitative

Due to inadequate or mixed results regarding gender, family background, and religious affiliation, no hypotheses were developed for the relationships between these variables.

---



# Methods

- **10-15 minute survey on SurveyMonkey**
- **Demographic questions:** Class standing, age, gender identity, relationship history, marital status, race, ethnicity, parents marital history
- **Romantic Competence:**
  - Perceived Relationship Knowledge Survey (Bradford et al., 2015, 6 items,  $\alpha = .663$ )
  - The Inventory of Romantic Relationship Competence (Faber et al., 2019; 35 items, 7 subscales,  $\alpha = .50- .865$ )
    - Locus of control, Perspective Taking, Romantic Appeal, Intimacy Avoidance, Emotional Regulation, Temperament, Conflict Resolution Skills

# Methods

- **Religious Commitment:** The Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10; Worthington et al., 2003;  $\alpha = .884$ )
- **Perceptions of Healthy Relationships:** 29 items created by the researchers based on responses from a community needs assessment survey (Murray et al., 2021).
- **Family Background:** What was your parents' marital status primarily during your childhood? (married, divorced, single, separated, widowed, living together but not legally married. Collapsed into 2 categories: one-parent and two-parent)

# Methods

## Sampling and recruitment

- Advertised via word of mouth, flyers, and social media
- Data collected from 18 and older undergraduate Southern Adventist University Students; Convenience sample of 88 participants

## Analytical Procedures

- IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29
- Descriptive statistics were used to summarize all variables
- To test family background, religious commitment, and gender on romantic competence, and endorsement of healthy relationship characteristics we used non-parametric tests as we did not meet the assumptions for regression, t-tests, and pearson's r using  $p=.05$

# Healthy Relationship Characteristics

- Effective Communication
- Respect
- Trust
- Promotes the growth and well-being of individuals in the relationships
- Honesty and openness
- Encouragement/support
- Effective conflict management and problem solving
- There is a give and take ( middle ground or compromise)
- There is mutual service to one another
- Warmth/caring/comfort
- Love
- Accountability and responsibility for one's own role in the relationship
- Produces joy and happiness
- Acceptance
- Partners aim to learn about and understand the other person
- Shared values and life goals
- Partners manage responsibilities together
- Kindness
- Free from abuse
- Free from control
- Equality
- Fun and laughter
- Partners feel safe
- Forgiveness
- Gratitude and appreciation
- Shared interest
- Spending time together
- Commitment
- Intimacy

# Demographic Results

- Parents Marital Status (n=88) - Two Parent 72%
- Marital Status (n=78) - Single 79.5%
- Been in a relationship (n=78) - yes 74.4%
- Gender Identity (n=78) - Female 79.5%
- Class Standing (n=78)
  - Junior - 24.4%
  - Senior - 37.2%
  - Sophomore - 20.5%
  - Freshman - 17.9%
- Full time student (n=73) - 87.2%
- Religious Affiliation (n=84) - SDA 96.4%
- Hispanic or Latino (n=78) - No 73.1%
- Race (n=78)
  - White - 47.4%
  - Black - 12.8%
  - Asian - 28.2%
  - Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander - 3.8%
- Age
  - 18 - 2.1%
  - 19 - 11.3%
  - 20 - 11.3%
  - 21 - 17%
  - 22 - 6.4%
  - 23 - 2.8%
  - 24-45 - .7% each

# Family Background and Endorsement of Healthy Relationship Characteristics (29 Characteristics)

N=79	Mean Rank One Parent	Mean Rank Two Parent	<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>P</i>
Love	34.27	42.21	<i>u</i> =753	<i>z</i> = 2.292 <i>p</i>	<i>p</i> = .022
Commitment	33.25	42.61	<i>u</i> =775.5	<i>z</i> =2.602	<i>p</i> =.009
Trust - approached significance	34.95	41.96	<i>u</i> =738.5,	<i>z</i> =1.955	<i>p</i> =.051
Effective Communication	33.55	42.99	<i>u</i> =769	<i>z</i> =2.489	<i>p</i> =.013

Mann-Whitney U test

# Endorsement of Healthy Relationships (29 Characteristics)

- **Gender Identity**

Statistical significance found with there is a give and take (partners find middle ground or compromise) mean rank males =29.70 females =41.25  $u= 604.5$ ,  $z=2.045$ , and  $p=.045$ . No correlations were found between the other items

- **Religious commitment** - Ran bivariate correlations Kendall Tau/b

Statistical Significance found with shared values and life goals  $p=.018$

# Perceived Relationship Knowledge

## - **Family Background**

There is a significant correlation between Parent Structure and total knowledge ( $r = -.271$ ;  $p = .017$ ), with students from 2 parent households having higher knowledge scores

There was a statistical significance between parent structure and item: my awareness of how to settle disagreements well ( $r = -.229$ ,  $p = .045$ )

## - **Religious commitment** Kendall Tau/b

No significant correlation between the two -  $T_b = .110$   $p = .167$

## - **Gender Identity**

Found no statistical differences between males (mean rank=39.3) and females (mean rank=38.97) in their mean rank scores for perceived relationship knowledge ( $u = 463$ ,  $z = -.026$   $p = .979$ )



# Inventory of Romantic Relationship Competence (7 subscales)

## - **Family Background**

There were no statistically significant relationships with the seven romantic relationship competence subscales

## - **Religious commitment** – Ran bivariate correlations

Significant Positive correlation to conflict resolution  $t_b = .258, p = .001$

There are no other significant correlations to other subscales

## - **Gender Identity** – Mann-Whitney U test

Romantic appeal scores for males (mean rank = 49.23) and females (mean rank = 36.52) were statistically significantly different,  $u = 311.5, z = -1.987, p = .047$ , There were no statistically significant differences on the other romantic competence subscales

# Results Summary

- Studies found that when it came to gender differences, women were higher on perspective taking, men were higher on temperament and conflict resolution skills (Faber et al, 2019)  
We found that men were only higher in romantic appeal and no other romantic competence subscale possibly due to small sample size
-

# Results Summary

- Endorsement of Healthy Relationships  
Significant correlation with family background, gender, religious commitment
  - Perceived relationship Knowledge  
Significant with family background,  
No significance found with religious commitment and gender
  - Romantic Relationship Competence  
Significant correlation with gender  
No significant correlation with religious commitment and family background
-

# Strengths & Limitations

## Strengths:

- **Most scales and subscales were valid and reliable Scales:** Religious Commitment Inventory-10 and the Inventory of Romantic Relationship Competence

## Limitations:

- **Lack of Control for Variables:** Other variables that influence romantic competence ex: parental attachment
- **Limited generalization to Southern Students due to Convenience Sampling and small sample size**
- **Limited variation across categories:** Gender (15 males, 62 females) and parents marital status during childhood
- **Potential for Response Bias:** Self-reported survey responses
- **Healthy Relationships Scale:** Not Validated
- **Low reliability in scales and subscales:** The Perceived Relationship knowledge Scale

# Applications

- **Research and Academic Discourse:**
    - Use research to deepen understanding of relationship dynamics among students.
    - Explore factors influencing relationship competence and healthy perceptions.
    - Support diverse research on relationships in educational settings.
    - Create seminars based on findings and overall romantic competence.
-

# Applications Cont.

- **Curriculum Development:**
    - Utilize research findings to shape curricula promoting healthy relationships and romantic competence among undergraduate students.
    - Integrate modules or courses focusing on relationship education, communication skills, conflict resolution, and understanding romantic dynamics.
    - Course specifically created based on findings.
    - Tailor programs to address specific challenges or misconceptions related to healthy relationships and romantic competence.
-

# References

- American College Health Association. (2022). American College Health Association–National College Health Assessment III: Undergraduate Student Reference Group Executive Summary Spring 2022. Silver Spring, MD: American College Health Association. [https://www.acha.org/documents/ncha/NCHA-III\\_SPRING\\_2022\\_REFERENCE\\_GROUP\\_EXECUTIVE\\_SUMMARY.pdf](https://www.acha.org/documents/ncha/NCHA-III_SPRING_2022_REFERENCE_GROUP_EXECUTIVE_SUMMARY.pdf)
- Bradford, K., Stewart, J. W., Higginbotham, B. J., & Skogrand, L. (2015). The perceived relationship knowledge scale: An initial validation. *Family Relations*, 64(2), 305–318. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43695498>
- Brown, A. (2020, August 20). Nearly half of U.S. adults say dating has gotten harder for most people in the last 10 years. *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/08/20/nearly-half-of-u-s-adults-say-dating-has-gotten-harder-for-most-people-in-the-last-10-years/>
- Choi, M., & Toma, C. L. (2017). Social sharing with friends and family after romantic breakups: Patterns of media use and effects on psychological well-being. *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications*, 29(3), 166–172. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000226>
- Davila, J., Zhou, J., Norona, J., Bhatia, V., Mize, L., Lashman, K., ... & Latack, J. A. (2021). Teaching romantic competence skills to emerging adults: A relationship education workshop. *Personal Relationships*, 28, 251–275. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12366>
- Davila, J., Mattanah, J., Bhatia, V., Latack, J. A., Feinstein, B. A., Eaton, N. R., ... & Zhou, J. (2017). Romantic competence, healthy relationship functioning, and well-being in emerging adults. *Personal Relationships*, 24(1), 162–184. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12175>
- Doughty, S. E., Lam, C. B., Stanik, C. E., & McHale, S. M. (2015). Links between sibling experiences and romantic competence from adolescence through young adulthood. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 44(11), 2054–2066. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-014-0177-9>
- Faber, A. J., Chin, E. G., Wilburn, V. R., & Shafae, S. M. (2019). Measuring romantic competence in young adults: The Inventory of Romantic Relationship Competence. *Interpersona: An International Journal on Personal Relationships*, 13(1), 72–95. <https://doi.org/10.5964/ijpr.v13i1.341>
- Gugliandolo, M. C., Costa, S., Lo Cricchio, M., & Liga, F. (2021). Exploring the role of time perspective in emerging adult couples: A mediation model. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 22(7), 3221–3239. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-021-00368-3>
- Jones, B. C., & DeBruine, L. M. (2017). Family relationships and the shaping of facial preferences. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 8(5), 479–487. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0214261>
- Kumar, S. A., & Mattanah, J. F. (2016). Parental attachment, romantic competence, relationship satisfaction, and psychosocial adjustment in emerging adulthood. *Personal Relationships*, 23(4), 801–817. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12210>
- Kumar, S. A., & Mattanah, J. F. (2018). Interparental conflict, parental intrusiveness, and interpersonal functioning in emerging adulthood. *Personal Relationships*, 25, 120–133. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12231>
- Murray, C. E., Ross, R., & Cannon, J. (2021). The Happy, Healthy, Safe Relationships Continuum: Conceptualizing a Spectrum of Relationship Quality to Guide Community-Based Healthy Relationship Promotion Programming. *The Family Journal*, 29(1), 50–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480720960416>
- Wood, L., Schrag, R. V., & Busch-Armendariz, N. (2020). Mental health and academic impacts of intimate partner violence among IHE-attending women. *Journal of American College Health*, 68(3), 286–293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2018.1546710>
- Worthington, E. L., Wade, N. G., Hight, T. L., Ripley, J. S., McCullough, M. E., Berry, J. W., Schmitt, M. M., Berry, J. T., Bursley, K. H., & O'Connor, L. (2002). The religious commitment inventory--10: Development, refinement, and validation of a brief scale for research and counseling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 50(1), 84–96. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.50.1.84>
-