Anusha: Hi, and welcome to DigiHealth Talks, a podcast created and hosted by the Brown-Lifespan Center for Digital Health in Providence, Rhode Island. I'm your host, Anusha Rahman. Join us as we meet some of the masterminds behind the field of digital health, leveraging the innovative technology around us to help the public improve their well-being. Today we are interviewing Dr. Charlene Collibee, an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Human Behavior. Doctor Collibee studies social media and dating violence etiology among court-involved adolescents. She is also a practicing staff psychologist and a consulting clinical psychologist. We are so excited to have her join us for this episode. Before we dive in, I'd like to provide a quick trigger warning. **This episode focuses on research involving dating violence. Please take care of yourself if you choose to continue listening.** Dr. Collibee, thank you so much for joining us.

Dr. Collibee: Thank you so much for having me!

A: To start us off, can you tell us a little bit about your educational background and your current research focus?

C: Absolutely. So I received my PhD from the University of Denver in child clinical psychology. From there, as a part of getting your PhD in clinical psychology, you do complete a one year internship, sort of at the culmination of your training. I did that here at the Brown Training Consortium. And then from there, I pivoted to a postdoctoral training fellowship that was specifically focused on understanding dating violence among court involved youth. And then I pivoted from that into receiving what's called a K01 grant from the National Institute of Health, which funds me as a faculty member here in the Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at Brown.

A: Can I ask what drew you to this work?

C: Yeah, I really appreciate that question. So, I started working clinically with court-involved youth and oftentimes, we talk a lot about the risk factors that these youth are experiencing, and in working clinically with them, I saw so many instances of resilience. And so I was really interested in bridging out, moving past a focus on pure risk factors for things like dating violence and instead thinking about protective factors or strengths that these youth might have. And so it really drew me to thinking differently about how we studied dating violence, particularly among court involved youth.

A: And can you describe how that is?

C: Yes. So now what I'm really interested in doing is rethinking our measurement of the relationship characteristics among court involved youth. So to date, research focusing on

romantic relationship characteristics, which is a really important set of risk and protective factors for dating violence. This is things like conflict, which could be a risk factor, and jealousy, who would be a risk factor, but also things like intimacy and support and self-disclosure which would be thought of as more protective factors. That's all been really studied to date using self-report data. But none of us are always that great, actually, sort of introspecting about our ways of handling relationship stressors and how we are in relationships. And so my work is really focused on rethinking our methods and using more naturalistic-type data like social media data to look at what these characteristics really look like and code them for features like conflict and jealousy, and that allows us to capture these romantic experiences more in vivo, which to date has been something that has eluded us.

A: Do you mind quickly just telling us what risk and protective factors are?

C: Oh. For sure. So, risk factors are things that would increase the likelihood of what we would consider to be kind of a negative outcome. So in this case, thinking about dating balance, so risk factors would include things like depressive symptoms or substance use or relationship characteristics, like conflict. And protective factors are things that are thought to protect against those potential negative outcomes, like dating violence. So that would be really supportive other relationships for example, or a really high-quality romantic relationship. So that would be things that again, would be thought to protect against dating violence.

A: So it sounds like you work to try and get a really good, well rounded understanding of teenagers who are dating and who are experiencing dating violence.

C: Absolutely. Yeah. So trying to get a good understanding of many different facets of their lives and trying to get an accurate idea of what their relationships in particular look like to try and understand how dating violence emerges in their relationship, so we can try and disrupt those patterns.

A: Can you tell us a little bit about your current research study, Project Social?

C: Yeah. So Project Social is that study that I mentioned a little bit earlier that's funded by the National Institute of Health through what's called a K01 mechanism. And that project is really focused on trying to understand within-relationship development of dating violence. So what's fascinating is that in the field, more broadly, we actually are pretty good at understanding and studying how dating violence sort of occurs across the lifespan. But what we don't have a good understanding of at all is how dating violence develops within specific relationships. So for example, you know most relationships will start off with that honeymoon phase of excitement and a lot of positivity. But somewhere along the way, things change and that's what we don't understand is: how do things change? What are the things that predict that change, and what does that mean for these youth? And court-involved youth are at greater risk for involvement in dating violence, so it's especially important to understand how dating violence is developing in their relationships. So, Project Social is aimed at trying to look at this exact question. So we are using a lot of data collection points with shorter time periods between when we collect this

data. So traditional longitudinal data in this area will go for like a year, for example, between assessments. But teen relationships aren't a year long. So naturally, you're going to be looking across relationships. So my Project Social is really instead doing an assessment every month, so that I can look at how dating violence is developing within their relationships themselves. And so it's data collection once a month for six months, and a big part of that data collection is social media data to be able to look at how their relationships with their romantic partners, but also with caregivers and with peers, are related to risk for dating violence both really close together. So like same day dating violence and then also how it predicts dating violence across that relationship.

A: For those of us who are a little less familiar with social media research, could you describe a little bit of what that entails?

C: Absolutely. So what we do is we use a program called Sochiatrist, and we download the teen's social media data, including things like text messages, Facebook, Instagram, and it all gets anonymized, but it gets linked up to different types of relationships. So for example, we know if they're talking to romantic partner number one or romantic partner number two, say they're seeing two people at the same time, for example, or their best friend, or their cousin or their caregiver, and then we end up looking at those interactions and it's their actual text messages, right? Like this is how they're communicating with people in their lives, and we code that for different characteristics and are using that data to try and predict who's going to be at greater risk for dating violence, and also when they're going to be at greater risk for dating violence.

A: So it sounds like this research study is more data collection. Do you see opportunities to intervene and prevent violence in the future using the social media data?

C: Yeah, that is our long-term goal. So right now we're trying to figure out what are the things that are most important in the social media data, what's going to be most predictive of dating violence among these youth. And then from there, our goal is to try and figure out how can we disrupt these patterns. So, a really basic thought that we have is we hypothesize that if you're having sort of rapid communications with their romantic partner, let's say that you're sending, you know, 20 text messages in a minute, and that might be a predictor for potential risk for dating violence, because you're not sort of taking that minute to breathe and think about what it is you want to say. And so you might be at greater risk because of the ways in which you're communicating from a structural level. So, if we find that that is to be the case, that the sort of frequency of messaging during a short period of time is predictive, we imagine that we could work on an intervention that identifies when that's happening and sort of disrupts that pattern, encourages that teen to stop, maybe text a friend instead, or use a coping skill or some other strategy that we think might deescalate the potential conflict that is budding.

A: That sounds like a really awesome intervention for teenagers in the future. What software would that be? Would that be an app that a teen downloads?

C: Yes, so right now, I mean we haven't developed this at all, right? So we're in the stages of trying to collect the data that will help inform that development. That's just kind of our long-term goal. But yeah, I think we envision it as an app that would be really encouraging coping skills and trying to disrupt patterns that are emerging in the social media data and also just encouraging and networking and outreaching to other important figures in these teens' lives.

A: It sounds like using social media data is really helpful, but what are some of the drawbacks?

C: I mean, I think the privacy concerns are always going to be at the forefront of everyone's minds including our teens. I think our teens being court-involved can be extra skeptical very often, and so we have to work really hard to let them know that their confidentiality is our most important priority. And so I think that that can be difficult in terms of doing research in this area of social media.

A: Sure. Thank you. I also imagine that researching this topic and working, even indirectly, with these teens who've experienced dating violence can be draining for you as a researcher, as a clinician. What advice do you have for novice researchers who are entering this field and want to pursue work that's kind of in the same line?

C: That's a really, really great question. And I think it's relevant for so much of work, you know, in broader clinical psychology. But I think for myself, the things that I found to be most helpful are to take a break from this content. So you know, for example, the recent Netflix show "Maid" came out, right, and everybody was talking about it. And I had to be mindful and say, alright, I actually can't watch that because that doesn't feel like relaxation to me, that feels like work because it's so directly relevant to what we do. So just being mindful of how you take space and what boundaries you set up for yourself in your personal time. I think also just having really good collaborators who have sort of shared experience working with these youth and working with dating violence so that you can seek support and have them there to understand when you're starting to feel drained and can help you balance that. So those are just two strategies that I use as I try and really just take the space that I need to be able to feel refueled to do this work.

A: Sure. Thank you. Stepping back a little bit, what role do you think social media plays in exacerbating teen dating violence?

C: I think in the same way that we believe that, you know, the distance that you have in using social media allows you to sometimes say things that you wouldn't say to peoples' faces is highly relevant for romantic relationship experiences. And so in that way, I think that it can escalate conflicts that maybe otherwise wouldn't have escalated. I also think that privacy concerns of teens are really, really important and the sort of general acceptance of partners' access to passwords and information about who you're with and where you are is becoming really pervasive, and those sorts of behaviors can exacerbate things like jealousy and also increase potential risk for dating violence and controlling behaviors that would be part of dating violence.

A: How is researching teen dating violence different from researching adult dating?

C: Yeah, I mean the nature of the relationships are really different. So among teens, you have shorter relationships. You also have a much higher rate of dating violence involvement. So that means that individuals are engaging in mutual dating violence as both the victim and a perpetrator. So that means that we want to think about what's going on for risk and protective factors differently using a developmental lens for what's happening. Is it that they don't have other strategies for navigating this conflict, and it is developing out of that conflict? So our interventions are going to be targeted differently because the source of the behavior is different.

A: Sure. Thank you. And to wrap us up, as the field of digital health advances, how do you see it impacting teen dating violence interventions in the future?

C: I think it's where a lot of interventions are going to be. I think ultimately one of the problems in the field of dating violence, more broadly, is that we're really pretty good at changing attitudes, and we're much worse at actually changing behaviors themselves. And part of that is likely related to practice, and part of that is likely related to the nature of again, teen relationships. You're gonna have a really hard time convincing a teen to enroll in an intervention that involves bringing their romantic partner in to learn relationship skills. That's gonna be really, really tricky. So get around that in the field more broadly by doing games or virtual reality and trying to help them practice these skills in different contexts so that it hopes to bleed over into their romantic relationships. But if we can use digital health platforms to be able to let them practice it with their romantic partner, using the ways in which they are often communicating anyway, like text messages, then I think we can get closer to what these experiences are actually like for teens to disrupt the patterns that develop that increase the risk for dating violence.

A: Well thank you so much for taking the time to be on this episode of this podcast. I learned so much, and the work you're doing is absolutely incredible.

C: Thank you so much for having me it was wonderful chatting with you all.

A: To learn more about and for resources about dating violence, check out the links in the description.

A: To learn more about the Brown-Lifespan Center for Digital Health, check us out at digitalhealth.med.brown.edu. Don't forget to listen to our past episodes, available wherever you get your podcasts.