

Exploring the Influence of a Wilderness Therapy Program on Reported Emotions and Attitudes about Teen Dating Violence

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October 12, 2007

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of wilderness therapy programs on adolescent girls' attitudes and emotions about teen dating violence. Semi-structured interviews and surveys were utilized to explore the reported attitudes and emotions of eleven adolescent women at an established all-female wilderness therapy program. Research explored the attitudes about teen dating violence, definitions of dating violence, previous exposure to dating violence, and changes in attitude attributed to their time at the wilderness therapy program. Results revealed that: 1) program participants' understandings of dating violence were fairly well aligned with common definitions except when defining sexual abuse; 2) program participants' overall do not accept dating violence; and 3) program participants' experience at the wilderness therapy program increased their feelings of self-efficacy, recognition of prior experiences with dating violence, and belief that they had the ability to make choices in their dating relationships.

I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period of exploration and development. During their first intimate relationships, teens focus on these relationships and are self-conscious about how others perceive them (Montgomery, 2005). A 2006 study found that one in two teens who have been in a serious relationship report going against their beliefs in order to please their partner (Teen Research Unlimited). Teen culture places high value on romantic relationships and their relationships become closely tied to their sense of identity (Montgomery, 2005). It was also found that 15% of girls who have been in a serious relationship said they've had a partner hit, slap, or push them; 25% of girls were pressured to only spend time with their dating partner; and 29% said they've been pressured to have sex or engage in sexual acts when they didn't want to do so (Teen Research Unlimited, 2006). In light of this, there is a need for effective therapeutic and prevention programs to address the problem of dating violence. One method of therapy that aligns with existing domestic violence prevention methods is wilderness therapy. The goal of this qualitative study was to explore whether participation in an all-female therapeutic wilderness program can influence reported emotions and attitudes about dating violence.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

All-female wilderness therapy programs have been found to provide a therapeutic value. Although domestic violence prevention programs and wilderness therapy for women differ, both focus on individual empowerment as an outcome. The domestic violence prevention movement promotes empowerment therapy, which allows survivors to make choices not to just adapt to cultural oppression (Walker, 1994). This comes from the feminist model that concludes that, "male dominance within families is part of a wider system of male power, is neither neutral nor inevitable, and occurs at women's cost" (Buzawa, 2003, p. 67). This model requires that therapy addresses the individual challenges and proactively addresses oppression. Susan Schechter (1982:109) describes empowerment as "combin[ing] ideas about internalizing personal collective power, and validating women's personal experiences as politically oppressive rather than self-cause or 'crazy?'"

Research shows that wilderness therapy programs may have the potential to meet this standard by affecting participants personally, interpersonally and possibly systemically (Pohl, Borrie, & Patterson, 2000). On a personal level, wilderness therapy programs provide young women with the opportunity to challenge themselves. The majority of the explanations for the success of wilderness programs have been attributed to personal empowerment (Pohl et al., 2000). Many studies report that wilderness programs empower women and offer a variety of other benefits (Angell, 1994; Bialeschki & Henderson, 1993; Mitten, 1994; Pohl et al., 2000, Powch, 1994). Other benefits include increased feelings of capability and efficacy. Findings also support the notion that women become more action-orientated, physically skilled and better decision makers (Pohl et al., 2000; Whittington, 2006; Bialeschki & Henderson, 1993). These programs force women and girls to engage in intra-personal reflection and inter-personal communication with other women or girls.

On an interpersonal level, wilderness experiences have also been found to increase women's comfort with others. Wilderness programs have been used with adolescent girls because the wilderness provides an opportunity to connect with peers while challenging norms and traditional roles of femininity (Pohl et al., 2000; Whittington, 2006).

"The oppression of women remains an intractable worldwide problem" (Parsons, 2001: 159). Despite this stubborn reality domestic violence programs and other organizations work towards social change. Wilderness therapy program have been reported to make individual changes that have the potential to work towards creating collective social change. All-female wilderness therapy programs offer women respite from media and society. For instance, one researcher states: "by simply 'stepping out-doors', girls challenge stereotypes" (Whittington, 2006:209). In Whittington's qualitative study she found that outdoor programs offer girls the opportunity to challenge stereotypes and "notions of femininity"(2006:218). Additionally, it was found that girls and women were less inhibited by gender roles in their everyday lives (Bialeschki & Henderson, 1993; Pohl et al., 2000; Whittington, 2006). Price, Byers and the Dating Violence Research Team (1999: 22) found that girls with "traditional attitudes toward gender roles" accepted dating violence more. These findings support the possibility that wilderness therapy can help women and girls make positive personal, interpersonal and systemic changes by changing their attitudes.

Considering the prevalence of people who experience trauma, researchers Berman and Davis-Berman (2005) suggest that it is imperative that wilderness therapy programs understand and study the impact of trauma on their program participants. The alignment of the findings about wilderness therapy programs with accepted therapeutic methods for people experiencing domestic violence supports the utilization of wilderness therapy for teen dating violence. Additionally, it suggests the possibility that wilderness therapy programs can also create changes in attitude, which may serve as a preventive strategy.

III. METHODS

Participants

An all-female wilderness therapy program was chosen as the context for this study. This program was a recipient of the Woodbury Reports, Inc. “Excellence in Education Award”, which are selected on the basis of their excellent reputation for producing positive and consistent results with at-risk children and their families. Girls between the ages of 13-18, who are having difficulty with self-expression, body image, mental health and self-esteem come to this program. Program participants come from all over the nation. The program provides intervention and empowerment for struggling girls, with their stays lasting from six to nine weeks. Therapeutic processes includes acquisition of wilderness living skills, backpacking and canoeing expeditions, a nutritious diet, individual and group clinical therapy with trained counselors, letter communication with parents/guardians, and on-going interactions with peers and field staff.

Permission was received from the University of Colorado at Denver Human Subjects Research Committee to conduct this research. Data was stored in a locked draw by the Principal Investigator. A pseudonym was assigned for each student and survey content was entered manually by the Principal Investigator into a data file in a password protected laptop.

During a three month period, all parents/guardians of program participants were solicited to complete an informed consent form for their daughters to participate in this study. When parent/guardian consent forms were received program participants were also asked to sign a separate informed consent form. One program participant declined from participating. Participants were interviewed during their sixth to ninth week at the wilderness therapy program.

A total of eleven girls participated in the research project. Investigation of intake records revealed that seven of the eleven girls struggled with depression. Participants were from all over the United States: Maine, Vermont, New York, Illinois, Texas, California, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut. The participants ranged in age from 13 to 18 years old. All the participants were Caucasian. Due to high costs of enrollment, program participants were generally from families with significant economic means. Each participant was sent their by their parents.

Nine of the eleven young women identified their relationship with their parents as a primary reason they were at the wilderness therapy program. Substance abuse, communication and aggression were other common themes. One young woman identified dating violence as part of the reason for her enrollment. Two young women identified sexual relationships they had as reasons for being enrolled. All of the girls said that they had gone out with someone and used the term “he” to describe their dating partners.

Data Analysis

The methods employed to gather data were a pen and pencil survey and two qualitative interviews. The survey and interviews were administered in one sitting by the Principal Investigator. The pen and pencil survey, “Attitudes on Teen Dating Violence Scale,” was revised from previous research conducted by Price, Byers and The Dating Violence Research Team (1999) (Appendix A). The survey was followed by questions about their definitions of teen dating violence and screening questions about their own experiences with the teen dating violence (Appendix B). The screening questions were modified from a study conducted by Bergman (1992) and Molidor & Tolman (1998). This tool was used to explore how the young women described their own experiences with teen dating violence. After the screening questions, participants were asked open-ended questions, which required the girls to reflect about their experiences at the wilderness therapy program and how it affected their thoughts about previous and future intimate relationships (Appendix C).

IV. FINDINGS

Three themes emerged from the interviews with the young women: 1) reported definitions of dating violence aligned with common definitions except when defining sexual abuse; 2) program participants’ overall did not report accepting dating violence; and 3) the

girls' reported that their experience at the wilderness therapy program increased their feelings of self-efficacy, recognition of prior experiences with dating violence and belief that they had the ability to make choices in their dating relationships.

Understanding Dating Violence and Their Own Experiences

At the beginning of the interview, the girls were asked about what they understood about the different dimensions of dating abuse. After the girls defined dating abuse, they were asked a series of screening questions. Each screening question was pre-empted with, “has someone you have gone out with...” done any of the following to you. If the girls disclosed any experiences, the disclosure was followed up with how often, when and what happened. Figure 1 presents the number of girls who reported actions that are considered abuse by domestic violence prevention community. Incidents that the girls did not describe as abuse were classified as abuse if they fit commonly accepted definitions. These findings are similar to other research findings, which found that most young women have experienced some sort of dating violence—most commonly psychological abuse (Jackson, Cram & Seymour, 2000).

Figure 1: Girls Reports of Experiences of Dating Violence			
N=11			
	Physical	Psychological	Sexual
	N	N	N
Never Experienced This Type of Violence	6	2	7
Experienced It Once	3	0	1
2-4 times	1	2	2
5 or more times.	1	7	1

A definition commonly accepted by the domestic violence prevention community and posted by the United States Department of Justice (2007) is:

a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone.

When the girls were asked about what they understood about dating violence, the majority of the girls recognized that dating violence included physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.

A few girls identified control as a central component of dating violence, but none of them specifically stated that it is a series of incidents or pattern of behavior. Ellen Pence, a leader in the battered women's movement describes this concept, "violence is used to control people's behavior... the intention of batterers [is] to gain control over their partner's actions, thoughts and feelings... violence is part of a pattern of behaviors rather than isolated incidences of abuse or cyclical explosion of pent-up anger, frustration, or painful feelings" (Pence & Paymar, 1993).

Research on dating violence estimate that 9% to more than 40% of adolescents experience physical violence (Bergman, 1992; Feiring, Deblinger, Hoch-Espada, & Haworth, 2002). The definition of physical abuse modified from Molidor & Tolman (1998) and commonly accepted within the domestic violence prevention community includes: throwing objects, pulling hair, pushing, grabbing, shoving, slapping, hitting, punching or kicking. When asked to identify physical abuse, the girls interviewed easily named the different dimensions of physical abuse. The acts named above were used to screen the girls for experiences with physical violence.

Figure 2: Experiences with Dating Violence
N=11

Physical		Psychological		Sexual	
	N		N		N
Grabbed	2	Yelling & swearing	3	Stranger rape	1
Threw something	2	Insulting their intelligence	3	Date rape	1
Kicked	1	Degrading their womanhood	5	Statutory rape	1
Pushed	4	Excessive calling	2	Acquaintance rape	1
Slapped	2	Excessive jealousy	3	Refusal of protection	1
Pulled hair	1	Monitoring activities and attempts to isolate	6	Sexual coercion	2
Spit	1	Threats to physically harm	2	Sexual harassment	1
		Threats or actions self harm	3		
		Damaged property	1		
		Stalking	1		

* One incident is recorded for each research participant

Five of the eleven girls had experienced some sort of physical violence at the hands of a dating partner (See Figure 2). The most common physical abuse experienced was pushing. A central theme emerged that abuse often occurred when a girl was trying to physically leave a location or emotionally leave the relationship. For instance one girl stated, "whenever he would get mad, he would get pretty physical. He only threw something once,

but he would pull my hair to keep me from walking away.” This coincides with national statistics about adult domestic violence, which find that it is common for batterers to assault or murder their partners when they try to leave the relationship (Garcia, Soria & Hurwitz, 2007).

Psychological abuse tends to be even more common (Sears et al., Feiring et al., 2002; Hird, 2000; Jackson et al., 2000). The most common type of abuse the girls in this sample experienced was psychological abuse. Psychological abuse or emotional abuse commonly defined by the domestic violence prevention community includes: constant verbal abuse, humiliation, intimidation, harassment, excessive possessiveness, isolation from friends and family, threats to harm, and destruction of personal property. When asked specifically about their definition of psychological abuse the girls interviewed recognized many facets of psychological abuse; which they described as pressure, guilt, yelling, teasing, swearing, manipulation, criticizing, and an attempt to change someone. When asked to define psychological abuse, no one described the dynamics of isolation.

The men and boys who dated the young women used various tactics to psychologically abuse the program participants (See Figure 2). The screening questions revealed high incidences of verbal abuse. Nine of the eleven girls experienced someone they were dating expressing verbal abuse including: insulting them, putting them down, swearing at them, or making fun of them. Degrading their womanhood and belittling their intelligence were common themes. One girl shared,

He told me that I walked like a guy and he wouldn't touch me until I walked like a girl. I couldn't hang out with anyone else until I got it right. I had to call him Sergeant. And he called me Kitty Cat. My dad explained that Kitty Cat probably meant pussy.

This example exhibits a variety of tactics one abuser used to control his girlfriend: humiliation, isolation, power, and control. He demeaned and humiliated her by telling her she could not live up to the society's standards of femininity. He then isolated her from her friends and also exhibited great desire for power by requiring her to call him Sergeant. Additionally, he used physical violence, when she did not walk as he deemed fit for a woman he kicked her. She was not the only young woman to receive attacks on her womanhood. “Slut,” “whore,” and “bitch” were common terms used by the research participant's dating

partners. Such language is exceptionally prevalent in society and especially teen culture. For instance, Valenti (2007:5) the author of *Full Frontal Feminism: A Young Woman's Guide to Why Feminism Matters*, opens with the provocative question:

What's the worst possible thing you can call a woman?... You're probably thinking of words like slut, whore, bitch, cunt... Okay, now, what are the worst things you can call a guy? Fag, girl, bitch, pussy, I've even heard the term "mangina." Notice anything? The worst thing you can call a girl is a girl. The worst thing you can call a guy is a girl. Being a woman is the ultimate insult.

These young women receive messages about their value of woman on a systemic and personal level.

Other incidences of verbal abuse included threats. Two of the girls had experienced someone they had gone out with threatening to hit them or throw something at them: “sometimes you make me want to hit you” and “if you ever do that again I'll do this [motion with fist].”

Similar to the girl who was required to call her partner Sergeant, many of the young women interviewed had experienced very controlling behaviors at the hands of their dating partners. Although none of the girls described isolation or monitoring as a component of dating violence, more than half had experienced it or the person they had gone out with attempted to isolate them. The interview asked questions about whether a dating partner attempted to keep them from their friends and monitor their behavior. Some of the behaviors described during this question were tied to jealousy of other males. For example, “don't cheat on me” was a common phrase that the girls relayed during the interviews. Seven of the girls described situations where their partner did not want them to see their friends or family. One girl stated:

He didn't even like it when I went out with my family. He'd call me a jerk and said he could not trust me. I changed my phone number and he called everyone in my family to try to get a hold of me: parents, siblings, and even my cousins.

Later in the interview she also shared: “I went to a friend's house and he waited in his car. I was there until midnight. He then keyed my car. We had already broken up by this point.” This behavior happened more than three times and could be defined as stalking. Stalking includes repeat victimization and is generally defined by its impact on the victim. The

Stalking Resource Center defines stalking as a “pattern of behavior directed at a specific person that would put a reasonable person in fear.” (USDOJ, 2004).

The same girl to report this stalking behavior was also one of three to report that their partner threatened to hurt themselves. In teen and adult relationships, abusive partners often threaten to hurt themselves or commit suicide as a control tactic. One of the young men went as far as mutilating himself:

The first time I broke up with him. He told all of his friends he was going to kill himself. The second time we broke up he carved "death" into his own arm. He told me it was for 'til death do us part'.

Such behaviors can be very manipulative and make someone fearful of ending a relationship.

Sexual abuse commonly defined by the domestic violence prevention community typically includes: criticizing sexually, forcing sex, cheating, refusing to use protection and uncomfortable touching and insisting that their partner dress or act in a more sexual way than they want. When interviewed about their definition of sexual abuse, the girls simply described it as “forced sex” or “rape.” It is unknown what the girls defined as “sex.” Only three girls made a statement that encompassed other sexual acts that may not be described as “sex.”

When interviewed about their experiences with sexual abuse, the girls reported varying experiences with sexual abuse (See Figure 2). Three of the girls reported being raped by someone they were dating and two other girls reported being raped by someone they were not dating. Another girl who is 15 years old reported that she had three relationships with men who were much older than her sometimes more than 20 years. She reported that her parents have pressed charges against all three men and two have received jail sentences for statutory rape. She claimed that the sex was consensual and said that the older men never forced her to have sex. But later in the interview, she reported that these men would get mad at her if she did not have sex and she would get in a fight with them. She identified “fighting” with these men as the primary reason for her enrollment in the wilderness therapy program. This description can be easily defined as coercive sex and was legally considered to be statutory rape. Another young woman reported that someone pressured her and refused to use a condom during sex, but never “forced” her to have sex.

In the early stages of adolescent development, teens express a lot of self-conscious behavior and focus on how attractive they are to others (Montgomery, 2005). Such feelings may increase likelihood that young women endure pressures from intimate partners and continue in these relationships despite recognition that something is not right.

Attitudes Towards Dating Violence

When asked whether any forms of physical, psychological or sexual abuse were acceptable, all of the girls said no. The Attitudes Towards Teen Dating Violence Scale (See Figure 3) revealed varying attitudes.

<i>Figure 3: Attitudes Toward Teen Dating Violence</i>	
<i>N=11</i>	
Response options range from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).	
	Mean
A dating partner should not insult you.	4.82
There is never a reason for someone you are dating to threaten you.	4.91
You should always change your ways to please someone you are dating. *	1.55
You should always do what your dating partner tells you to do.	1.18
A dating partner does not need to know your every move.	4.64
It's understandable when a dating partner gets so angry that s/he yells at you.	2.00
It is O.K. for a dating partner to bad mouth you.	1.09
There is never a reason for a dating partner to yell and scream at you.	4.27
You should not see your friends if it bothers your dating partner.	1.09
You should break up with a dating partner if they hit you.	5.00
It is never O.K. for a dating partner to hit you.	5.00
There is no good reason for a dating partner to push you.*	4.18
Jealousy can make a dating partner so crazy that they can not stop themselves from slapping you.	1.27
If you cheat, you should be slapped by your dating partner	1.09
Sometimes love makes a dating partner so crazy that they may hit you.	1.18
When a dating partner gets really sexually excited, they cannot stop themselves from having sex.	1.09
Someone should never get you drunk to get you to have sex.	5.00
When a dating partner pays for a date, it is O.K. for them to pressure you for sex.	1.09
It is all right for someone to use force to kiss you.	1.09
You can prove your love, by having sex with your dating partner.	1.27
If you go into your dating partner's bedroom you are agreeing to sex.	1.27
It is no big deal to be pressured into having sex.	1.09
It is alright to pressure a dating partner to have sex if the dating partner has had sex in the past.	1.00
When you are dating, your dating partner should not force you to have sex.	4.64
* outlier	

Although there is a small sample and it is impossible to ensure that the girls did not make mistakes while filling out the scale, themes emerged. When the outlying data was removed, the following theme of acceptance emerged: girls were more accepting of physical abuse if a dating partner felt angry or jealous. Girls expressed more acceptance for sexually coercive behaviors. This finding was consistent with other research, which found that girls were more likely to continue a relationship with someone who pressured them to have sex than with someone who used other tactics of abuse (Price et al., 1999). In the survey with program participants, their tolerance of sexual pressure was tied to their role in sexual relationships and sexual boundaries. For instance, “you can prove your love, by having sex with your dating partner” and “if you go into your dating partner’s bedroom you are agreeing to sex,” were two of the statements that revealed a higher tolerance. Both these findings could potentially be related to the young women’s feelings of responsibility in a relationship and desire to please a dating partner.

Reported Changes Attributed to Experiences at the Wilderness Therapy Program

During the interviews, the girls reported various reasons for changes in themselves. These included: peer support, which included group therapy, individual therapy, journaling, physical activity in the wilderness, and the opportunity to be in a different situation and have time to reflect. These findings support other literature, which identifies the wilderness as an environment that instills self-confidence and efficacy in young women (Angell, 1994; Baileschki & Henderson, 1993; Mitten, 1994; Pohl et al., 2000, Powch, 1994). One girl stated,

Women can do anything men can do. I felt this way before, but now I can prove it. I can solo paddle a canoe in winds, I don't have to shower every day and still have a sense of pride. I can stay clean and healthy in the wilderness.

From the sample of 11 girls, many girls expressed similar feelings. They had felt women were capable, but now had gained confidence that they themselves were capable. In general, the girls attributed their changes to time away from their everyday settings. One girl stated, “Time away from a normal setting gave me the opportunity to talk and view things through a different lens.” More than one girl used the term “forced” to describe why they changed. For instance, “I was forced to grow physically, emotionally, mentally.” Not only were these

young women forced to come to the wilderness therapy program, but once they arrived they had to do many activities to ensure their own safety. For instance, being in the wilderness they needed to be able to depend on themselves. Their choice about whether they were going to paddle or hike was limited. They were accountable to the entire group. If one girl chose not to paddle in high winds, she was jeopardizing the safety of her boat partner and possibly the entire group. This helped many of the young women recognize their abilities that may have remained unknown had they not been exposed to such an experience.

The themes that emerged were self-acceptance, respect, and esteem; the belief that they have the power to choose, and the recognition of prior unhealthy relationships, and identification that they needed healthy relationships.

Although many of the girls reported feeling “okay” before being enrolled in the program, both those who felt “okay” and those who felt “horrible,” “crappy,” or “unhappy” with themselves reported increased self-confidence. One girl when asked how she felt about herself before entering the program stated: “I’m cool.” She followed up the comment later with: “I know I can do things that I did not know I could do before. I did not give myself credit before. Even though I liked myself.” One girl who felt “horrible” about herself before said: “There isn’t really anything to change I just need to accept who I am.” Each of the eleven girls reported important lessons about self-acceptance, respect and esteem that could be utilized in their lives outside the wilderness therapy program.

Not only did the girls express higher feelings of self-worth and acceptance, but the girls also expressed an increased ability to recognize dating violence and their need for healthy relationships. One girl stated,

I have thought a lot about how those relationships are not healthy. I had not realized how unhealthy some of the people I was going out with were before coming here and how unhealthy the relationship was. At the time it seemed okay.

Another girl stated, “Yes, I have had a change in definition. I used to see my ex as mean, but now I see him as violent. He scared me into staying with him.” The girls recognized the abuse they suffered, but focused on future relationships and how they could prevent abuse. For instance, “I thought about how horrid my ex’s were and I try to focus on

the future and think about how I am not going to let that sort of thing happen to me again. I wish I hadn't jumped into a relationship so fast.”

The girls identified that future relationships would be different because they believed they had the right and ability to make choices in their lives about their intimate relationships. One girl stated, “I realize what is okay and what is not. I am more healthier in general. When I have thought about things I've done in the past, I have changed my idea of what's being good to myself.” Another girl stated,

Yes, I am able make better choices. I'll be able to realize it's not okay before it goes too far. I will have healthier relationships in general. I can stand up for myself more and avoid bad relationships. Hopefully, I won't ever have to stand up for myself because I will stop a bad relationships ahead of time.

Two young women described the reason for dating someone as feeling bad for them and stated that they were no longer going to date someone they pitied. Throughout the interviews girls used the words “[my] power” and “choice.” These comments were often specific to their dating relationships. For instance, one girl stated, “I realize that I am a good person and don't deserve to be treated wrong. I can say no.” Another girl stated, “I am able to now choose my path. I can say I want this man. I know I can choose them. I have more power than I used to think I did.” One girl eloquently shared a therapy session that she summed up as, “I need to be the chooser not the chosen.”

Validity

It is possible that conducting this research increased the discussion and education about dating violence, which may have skewed results. Additionally, it was possible that these girls were more inclined to report abuse because of the subject nature of the study. Results may have also been skewed because the girls had varying degrees of interest in the study. For instance, if they had recently completed an intensive therapy session they may have been less inclined to talk where as one young woman was very eager to participate and routinely asked if her parents had signed the consent form.

While this study contributes to the growing body of literature on teen dating violence prevention and wilderness therapy programs, generalizability is a concern due to the small

sample. Despite this concern, interesting themes emerged that are consistent with other studies on both topics.

V. DISCUSSION

Rather than offering conclusive answers, this study offers themes that girls revealed when discussing teen dating violence and their experience at a wilderness therapy program. Experiences with dating violence were common among these young women. The most common form of abuse was psychological abuse. The findings of this study show that the girls' in this study can clearly identify and understand many facets of dating violence. When asked to define dating violence they do not articulate it as a pattern of behavior, but when asked to describe their own experiences they do in fact describe patterns of behavior. Some do not consider sexual coercion or pressure to be sexual abuse. Overall, the girls in this study do not accept dating violence, but expressed higher rates of acceptance for sexual pressure and physical abuse that is tied to anger and jealousy. This could be tied to these young women's feelings of what it means to be a dating partner. Research shows that adolescents often place great value and focus on pleasing their dating pleasing partners (Montgomery, 2005). Therefore, adolescents may have increased feelings of responsibility if their dating partner is displeased with them. In turn, they may be more tolerant of physical or sexual violence if they feel responsible for their partner's anger, jealousy or sexual expectations.

During the interviews, the girls' described increased feelings of self-acceptance, respect, and esteem as a result of participating in the wilderness therapy program. They expressed a belief that these changes would make them more capable of dealing with future abuse and potential unhealthy relationships. They also expressed an increased recognition that had been involved in prior violent relationships as a result of the program.

Participants also reported increased belief that they could make choices in their relationship and choose better partners. The dynamics of dating violence are incredibly complex. Lundy Bancroft (1998:4), an expert on batterers states "batterers are typically charming and persuasive, and are often kind and attentive early in relationships." Research shows that men's violence against women escalates and becomes more serious overtime (Kimmel, 2001). Therefore, it may be impossible for a young woman (or adult woman) to recognize abuse before getting into a relationship. Additionally, someone experiencing abuse

may remain in abusive relationships for many reasons, including “fear of the perpetrator, self-blame, loyalty, love for the perpetrator, social stigma, or lack of understanding” (USDOJ-OVW, 2007). Despite these complexities, it is still imperative for young women to believe they can choose their dating partners. Two of the young women interviewed reported that they dated someone because they “felt bad” for them. The belief in one’s power and right to choose is a necessary component of prevention. With this said, it is important to remember that the ultimate prevention lies with stopping the perpetrator from committing the violent act.

Additionally, it is not possible to know whether these changes in attitudes and emotions will result in short term or long-term changes in behavior. Teen dating violence prevention programs work to change attitudes based on the assumption that attitudinal changes will create behavior changes, but there is limited research validating this assumption (Hickman et. al, 2004). Studies also need to examine whether reported changes in attitudes transfer outside of the wilderness setting. After the program, girls either return to their homes or enroll at therapeutic boarding schools. Attending the boarding schools allows girls the opportunity to continue their therapeutic plan while returning home exposes them to situations that they left and places them at risk of returning to pre-program behavior patterns. This difference will also affect long-term outcomes. Additional studies need to be conducted to examine longitudinal outcomes of wilderness therapy programs on reported emotions and attitudes about teen dating violence.

Many of the young women reported increased confidence in themselves as women. These reported changes in emotion and attitude are significant because programs like this must also work towards systemic changes. Programs must be available for women to address and overcome “blaming the victim” or internalized oppression while addressing the collective oppression of women (Pohl et al. , 2001:432).

Previous studies support the idea that wilderness programs work towards systemic social change by supporting shifts in gender roles (Bialeschki & Henderson, 1993; Pohl et al., 2000; Whittington, 2006). The importance of social change becomes evident after hearing the various methods young men used to devalue the program participants as women.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

In the words of a feminist scholar, Alison Symington: “if our baseline analysis and project planning do not begin with a complete picture of the economic, social, political and cultural situation, then our interventions and programs cannot possibly achieve their full potential” (2004: 4). It is important that programs do as Symington suggests and continuously examine how various social constructs affect the program and how program participants have the potential to effect change. By their inherent nature wilderness therapy programs encourage young women to confront existing norms that oppress women. This study supports the idea that wilderness therapy programs have the potential to provide girls with the opportunity to increase their self-efficacy and esteem. The girls in this study expressed feelings of increased confidence in their decision-making and viewed women as strong and capable people. This study has important implications for dating violence prevention and therapy. It suggests that wilderness therapy has the potential to provide girls with the opportunity to examine their own experiences and make beneficial changes in their reported emotions and attitudes about teen dating violence. This study suggests that wilderness therapy programs may need to provide additional programming to address sexual violence and attitudes about sexual coercion. Overall, wilderness therapy programs may provide an avenue for social change.

VII. COURSE APPLICATION

Each of the courses completed at the University of Colorado at Denver for the Master in Public Administration provide necessary information that guided this work.

Research and Analytical Methods prepared me to review existing literature and to critically analyze original data gathered. Additionally, this class provided me with understanding of research techniques like surveys and interviews, which were utilized.

Organizational Management and Change provided an understanding about the theoretical and practical issues involved in managing public organizations. Most wilderness therapy programs work with participants with varying issues, therefore, careful considerations need to be made before deciding the most effective way to implement programs to address one issue like dating violence. Before making program or management recommendations one must critically and analytically think about the pressing issues that an

organization faces. These issues must be carefully weighed with basic assumptions, organizational values and empirical evidence. This class provided me with the basis to consider the many facets when implementing programs and policies.

The elective courses for the domestic violence certificate provided me with in-depth knowledge about the complexity of domestic violence and need for mindful analysis. For instance, the *Women & Violence A Sociological Perspective* provided me with the understanding that domestic violence prevention and programming must not only address the individual, but must also provide a systemic response that encourages social change. *The Psychology of Violence Against Women* offered knowledge about best practices for working with battered women and their children in a therapeutic setting. *Battered Women and the Legal System* informed me about the necessary steps to review and analyze literature while increasing my knowledge of the varying degrees and possibility for systemic responses to the epidemic of domestic violence. *Advocacy and Social Change: Not All Sweetness & Light* offered knowledge about the importance of examining how the health and well being of each practitioner or manager can play a pivotal role in providing an effective response. Although none of these courses focused on teen dating violence, they informed me as researcher about the historical perspective of domestic violence prevention and existing trends. This knowledge is the basis for this research study.

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*Appendix A**Attitudes toward Teen Dating Violence*

Response options range from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

A dating partner should not insult you.	1	2	3	4	5
There is never a reason for someone you are dating to threaten you.	1	2	3	4	5
You should always change your ways to please someone you are dating.	1	2	3	4	5
You should always do what your dating partner tells you to do.	1	2	3	4	5
A dating partner does not need to know your every move.	1	2	3	4	5
It's understandable when a dating partner gets so angry that s/he yells at you.	1	2	3	4	5
It is O.K. for a dating partner to bad mouth you.	1	2	3	4	5
There is never a reason for a dating partner to yell and scream at you.	1	2	3	4	5
You should not see your friends if it bothers your dating partner.	1	2	3	4	5
You should break up with a dating partner if they hit you.	1	2	3	4	5
It is never O.K. for a dating partner to hit you.	1	2	3	4	5
There is no good reason for a dating partner to push you.	1	2	3	4	5
Jealousy can make a dating partner so crazy that they can not stop themselves from slapping you.	1	2	3	4	5
If you cheat, you should be slapped by your dating partner	1	2	3	4	5
Sometimes love makes a dating partner so crazy that they may hit you.	1	2	3	4	5
When a dating partner gets really sexually excited, they cannot stop themselves from having sex.	1	2	3	4	5
Someone should never get you drunk to get you to have sex.	1	2	3	4	5
When a dating partner pays for a date, it is O.K. for them to pressure you for sex.	1	2	3	4	5
It is all right for someone to use force to kiss you.	1	2	3	4	5
You can prove your love, by having sex with your dating partner.	1	2	3	4	5
If you go into your dating partner's bedroom you are agreeing to sex.	1	2	3	4	5
It is no big deal to be pressured into having sex.	1	2	3	4	5
It is alright to pressure a dating partner to have sex if the dating partner has had sex in the past.	1	2	3	4	5
When you are dating, your dating partner should not force you to have sex.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B

Screening for Experiences with Teen Dating Violence

Interview questions are drawn from research by Molidor & Tolman (1998), who utilizes a modified Conflict Tactic Scale; and Bergman (1992). The following questions will be asked.

What do you understand about dating violence? How would you define physical abuse?... psychological abuse?... and sexual abuse? Do you think any of these forms of abuse are ever acceptable?

Participants will be asked: *have you dated or gone out with someone?* If not, the following questions on personal experience will be omitted. If yes, the following are examples of the types of questions that will be asked.

Think about people you have gone out with and whether you have experienced any of the following experiences and tell me whether you 1) never experienced this or 2) experienced it once, 3) 2-4 times, 4) 5 or more times. If a student has any of these experiences, what happened and when was the last incident?

Has someone you have gone out with:

- (a) *insulted you, put you down, sworn at you, or made fun of you;*
- (b) *threatened to hit you or throw something at you;*
- (c) *kept you from your other friends;*
- (d) *threatened to hurt him/herself if you did not do what you said; and*
- (e) *kept watch on your every move.*

Has someone you have gone out with:

- (a) *thrown something at you; pulled your hair;*
- (b) *pushed, grabbed, or shoved you; and*
- (c) *slapped, hit, punched, or kicked you.*

Has someone you have gone out with:

- (a) *forced you to do something sexual that you did not want to do;*
- (b) *forced you to have sex against your will.*

Is there any other incident that you experienced that is similar to the questions I asked you?.

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

What prompted you to come to NHYW?

How did you feel about yourself when you came to NHYW? How do you feel about yourself now? What caused that change?

Were you in a dating relationship before you came to NHYW? If so, has the way you think about that relationship changed?

If you have been in a dating relationship, did you think about some of your past dating partners and your relationships with them while at NHYW? Can you tell me about that?

Has your sense of yourself been changed by this experience, and if so how?

Has your sense of yourself as a young women been changed by this experience, and if so how?

Do you feel these changes could influence your dating relationships? Do you think these changes will affect your ability to deal with pressures from boyfriends?

Do you have anything to add regarding the issues covered in the survey?

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMED CONSENT FORM- STUDENT

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the Influence of a Wilderness Therapy Program on Reported Emotions and Attitudes about Teen Dating Violence

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study and tells you how your privacy will be protected. The Principal Investigator (the person in charge of this research) will describe this study to you and will be available in person and by phone to answer any questions you may have. Before you decide whether or not to take part in this study, please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand. If you do not want to participate in this study you will not be penalized in any way.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Nicky Blanchard, Graduate Student in the Program on Domestic Violence at the University of Colorado at Denver.

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY: The purpose of this research is to examine how a wilderness therapy programs can influence reported emotions and attitudes about dating violence among females.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to complete a self administered survey about your attitudes towards teen dating violence. You will be asked to complete this survey when you enter the program and again when you leave the program. This survey will take no longer than 20 minutes.

You will also be asked to participate in an interview that will not take longer than an hour and a half. The Principal Investigator will ask you questions about a) your experience with teen dating violence and b) your experience at New Horizons for Young Women (NHYW). This interview will take no longer than a hour and half.

RISKS: This study will in no way affect the services you receive from NHYW and your participation is completely voluntary. If you participate in this research, some of the questions might make you feel uncomfortable or may be upsetting to you. Although unlikely, these questions may elicit sad feelings based on your prior experiences.

To reduce this risk you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and you can stop participating in the study at any time. In addition, the Principal Investigator is trained as an advocate and New Horizons for Young Women's Clinical Director, Eilean Mackenzie will be available to speak with you if any of the questions are upsetting to you.

As a mandated reporter, the Principal Investigator will report: child abuse and neglect; threats of suicide and homicide. This includes someone who is 19 years or older engaging in a sexual relationship with someone who is less than 16 years of age.

The following referral information is being provided to you if you would like to contact a trained professional about teen dating violence after you exit NHYW: National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline 1-866-331-9474 or <http://www.loveisrespect.org>.

BENEFITS: It is not possible to guarantee that you will personally benefit from participating in this study. However, there are three ways that you could potentially benefit from being involved in this research. 1) If you have prior experiences with dating violence participating in this study may provide you with the opportunity to talk about your experiences in a safe environment with therapists available. 2) Participating in this study may increase your awareness about teen dating violence. 3) By participating in this research your insight could potentially help shape changes to prevention and treatment program strategies to address teen dating violence, which would benefit future young women who attend wilderness therapy programs.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The Principal Investigator is taking all necessary precautionary steps to ensure your confidentiality. Do not write your name anywhere on the survey instrument. Your identity will not be revealed.

VOLUNTARY: The choice of whether to participate in this study is completely up to you. Your participation is completely voluntary, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to you. No one will be upset or angry if you decide not to participate. As I mentioned above, if you decide to participate in the study, you don't have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. If you come to a question that you do not want to answer, just skip to the next question or say "pass".

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY: You have the right to discontinue your participation in the study at anytime for any reason and without consequence.

WHOM TO CONTACT ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT IN THE STUDY: HSRC Administrator, University of Colorado, 1380 Lawrence Street Suite 300, Denver, CO 80204 or by phone (303) 556-4060.

WHOM TO CONTACT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY: If you have any questions about this project, you may contact Nicky Blanchard, 207-266-8964 or e-mail: Nblanchard80@hotmail.com

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws.

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMED CONSENT FORM- PARENT/GAURDIAN

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the Influence of a Wilderness Therapy Program on Reported Emotions and Attitudes about Teen Dating Violence

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to consent to your daughter's participation in this study.

Your daughter is being asked to take part in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study and tells you how her privacy will be protected. Your daughter will also be provided with an informed consent form and her consent is necessary for participation. The Principal Investigator (the person in charge of this research) will describe this study to your daughter and will be available by phone to answer any questions your daughter may have. Before you decide whether or not to provide consent, please read the information below. If you do not want your daughter to participate in this study neither you or your daughter will be penalized in any way.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Nicky Blanchard, Graduate Student in the Program on Domestic Violence at the University of Colorado at Denver.

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY: The purpose of this research is to examine how a wilderness therapy programs can influence reported emotions and attitudes about dating violence among females.

PROCEDURES: If you and your daughter decide to consent, your daughter will be asked to complete a self-administered survey about her attitudes towards teen dating violence. Your daughter will be asked to complete this survey when she enters the program and again when she leaves the program. This survey will take no longer than 20 minutes.

Your daughter will also be asked to participate in an interview. The Principal Investigator will ask your daughter questions about a) her experience with teen dating violence and b) her experience at New Horizons for Young Women (NHYW). This interview will take no longer than a hour and a half.

RISKS: This study will in no way affect the services your daughter receives from NHYW and your daughter's participation is completely voluntary. If your daughter participates in this research, some of the questions might make her feel uncomfortable or may be upsetting to her. Although unlikely, these questions may elicit sad feelings based on her prior experience.

To reduce this risk your daughter does not have to answer any questions that she does not want to answer and she can discontinue her participation in the study at anytime. In addition, the Principal Investigator is trained as an advocate and New Horizons for Young Women's Clinical Director, Eilean Mackenzie will be available to speak with your daughter if any of the questions are upsetting.

As a mandated reporter, the Principal Investigator will report: child abuse and neglect; threats of suicide and homicide. This includes someone who is 19 years or older engaging in a sexual relationship with someone who is less than 16 years of age.

The following referral information is being provided to your daughter if your daughter would like to contact a trained professional about teen dating violence after she exits NHYW: National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline 1-866-331-9474 or <http://www.loveisrespect.org>.

BENEFITS: It is not possible to guarantee that your daughter will personally benefit from participating in this study. However, there are three ways that she could potentially benefit from being involved in this research. 1) If she has prior experiences with dating violence participating in this study may provide her with the opportunity to talk about her experiences in a safe environment with therapists available. 2) Participating in this study may increase her awareness about teen dating violence. 3) Your daughter's insight could potentially help shape changes to prevention and treatment program strategies to address teen dating violence, which would benefit future young women who attend wilderness therapy program.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The Principal Investigator is taking all necessary precautionary steps to ensure your confidentiality. Your daughter's identity will not be revealed.

VOLUNTARY: The choice of whether to participate in this study is completely up to your daughter. Your daughter's participation is completely voluntary, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to you or your daughter. No one will be upset or angry if you decide not to consent to your daughter's participation. If your daughter comes to a question that she does not want to answer, she can skip to the next question or say "pass".

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY: Your daughter has the right to discontinue her participation in the study at anytime for any reason and without consequence.

WHOM TO CONTACT ABOUT YOUR DAUGHTER'S RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT IN THE STUDY: HSRC Administrator, University of Colorado, 1380 Lawrence Street Suite 300, Denver, CO 80204 or by phone (303) 556-4060.

WHOM TO CONTACT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY: If you have any questions about this project, you may contact Nicky Blanchard, 207-266-8964 or e-mail: Nblanchard80@hotmail.com

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws. Participant

Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____