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Backpacking Brothers: An Experiential, Adventure Education Program to Transform Rape Culture and Prevent Sexual Violence

Matt Lynn

PIM 74

A Capstone Paper submitted for partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont,

USA

December, 2016

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Date: December 16th, 2016

“On the purpose of training, I believe we have fallen prey to a model of education that produces technicians more than artists. The justification for this, which does indeed carry a certain weight, is the need for a skill base to conduct the management of processes. Missed in the pedagogical endeavor is the artistic side of our work. We do not expend an equal amount of time supporting people in trusting and developing their capacity to invent and create adaptive processes responsive to real-world situations and shifts. This requires something beyond rote skill training. It requires that we open a space for the development of the moral imagination, the capacity to recognize patterns and relational contexts yet think beyond the repetition of what already exists.” – John Paul Lederach

"The trouble is that once you see it, you can't unsee it. And once you've seen it, keeping quiet, saying nothing, becomes as political an act as speaking out. There is no innocence. Either way, you're accountable." - Arundhati Roy

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Abstract

Sexual violence is a public health crisis in the United States and globally, that has devastating interpersonal, social, psychological, spiritual and economic impacts. The root causes of sexual violence are tied to all forms of oppression. The normalization and perpetuation of sexual violence is buttressed by cultural paradigms used by media, religion, education and other systems that maintain rigid gender roles and power dynamics. There are promising initiatives for preventing sexual violence before it occurs. This paper explores one of those initiatives called Backpacking Brothers. The purpose of Backpacking Brothers is to engage middle school boys in an adventure education program aimed to address attitudes, beliefs and actions that uphold and perpetuate sexual violence. Through experiential, liberatory education the program strives to transform rape culture, a form of cultural violence that creates an environment that allows sexual violence to thrive. The paper explores the newly created programming through the lens of a trainer, highlighting important learnings about principles and theories of primary prevention, experiential and social justice education, innovative training design, and evaluation of programming. It offers practical examples, resources, lessons learned and guideposts for social justice educators and trainers to understand and dismantle rape culture and prevent sexual violence.

Introduction

Liberatory adventure education is about opening up to vulnerability, to challenge, and to being part of a supportive community. Adventure education can be a sacred rebellion. It can lead to silent meditation on the nature of existence. Adventure education can lift up voices that were previously unheard. It can push the body to do something it never knew it could.

Adventure education can spark ritual that is blessed by the trees and the stars and the fire. It can connect. It can provide safe space for the co-creation of transformation and positive change. It can bring peace. It can blow down walls. In the energy of adventure education there is also fear. In its processes, there is discernment between reality and illusion; between real and imagined fears. It is liberatory from screens, from Windows, from mirrors. Instead we see ourselves reflected in our fellow humans and non-humans. We see ourselves not reflected in competition, isolation and fear, but in cohesion, community and interconnection. When given the space to experience life in doing together, we learn to harmonize and to understand.

Rape culture on the other hand, is mundane and insidious. It blames victims for their perceived conspiracy in their own assaults; a banality so vile it is sickening. Rape culture perpetuates silence, when there is healing possible through the spirit of words. Rape culture dehumanizes and shames. Rape culture puts up walls. It “otherizes” and creates fear of difference, and fear of authenticity. Rape culture polices gender in a way that oppresses expression, liberation and wholeness. It uses dominant narrative and language to objectify human bodies and justify violence. It is consumption of the material earth, and consumption of bodies. Rape culture writes laws that set rapists free and incarcerate victims in a prison of their

own horrific traumas. It sets rigid social norms that say that sex is violent and violence is sexy. It sets rigid and rigged gender roles that entitle some to dominance over everybody's body.

Throughout this paper I will weave theory into practice and personal experience in order to highlight and gain a deeper understanding of some of the learnings from proposing, promoting, designing, recruiting for, finding funding for, implementing and evaluating a program called Backpacking Brothers. This program is an adventure education program for middle school boys, the purpose of which is to engage young men in the primary prevention of sexual violence. It was supported and ran through Our VOICE, a non-profit, rape crisis and prevention center in Asheville, North Carolina.

The paper is organized to provide a framework for understanding the dynamics of sexual violence and the prevention of sexual violence as a public health and anti-oppression issue. The background section offers a snapshot of the history of the rape crisis movement, of Our VOICE and of the newly created program, Backpacking Brothers. Next an exploration of the root causes of sexual violence lead to a discussion of several lenses to facilitate a deeper understanding of prevention approaches. The specific educational philosophies used to carry out Backpacking Brothers and a few of the key design and evaluation concepts are discussed in detail. Finally, the conclusion surveys some of the lessons, limitations and challenges of the program and social justice education in general. This is a personal, professional and academic endeavor to understand my abilities and contributions as a peacebuilder and a trainer. Along the way there are boxes labeled "Trainer lesson learned." These serve as reflections, learnings, guideposts, and discoveries about my role as a social justice educator. They are not meant to be definitive conclusions on training as a vehicle for social change, rather my hope is they will serve as self-reflection prompts for trainers, peacebuilders and social justice educators.

Background

Our VOICE

Our VOICE began in 1974 as an intrepid and rebellious group of volunteers answering a twenty-four-hour crisis hotline in a dark basement. It is one of the first rape crisis center in the state of North Carolina (either the first or second according to written documentation) (Our VOICE, 2016). These grassroots volunteers upset rape culture from underground, until 1982, when the agency officially gained its non-profit status. From then on, the agency has gone through periodic waves of growth, steadily increasing staff and volunteers. In late 2015, the agency employed six full time staff and had about 50 volunteers to support the crisis line (Our VOICE, 2016).

While the powerful and simple mission, *a community free of sexual violence*, has remained the same for 42 years, the agency has seen tremendous growth and community, county and statewide visibility during the last year and a half. Today there are 15 full time staff and a team of over 80 volunteers. Our VOICE offers many direct services in English and Spanish to survivors of sexual assault such as 24-hour crisis response and safety planning, hospital accompaniment, court advocacy, case management, and trauma counseling. In the spring of 2016 Our VOICE moved into the Buncombe County Family Justice Center (FJC), whose mission is *a resilient community free of sexual and domestic violence* (Buncombe County Family Justice Center, 2016). This county-run initiative houses non-profits and public agencies working on many aspects of interpersonal and family violence including: sexual and domestic violence, child abuse, and elder abuse. The FJC also houses the entire Special Victims Unit of the

Buncombe County Sheriff's Department. The initiative has been a vision of the county and the partner agencies for more than a decade.

During the past two decades Our VOICE has begun to increasingly focus on prevention education. In the public health model, there are three levels of prevention, primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary prevention efforts are employed before sexual violence occurs. Secondary prevention is the immediate response to sexual violence and tertiary prevention involves long term treatment and support of sexual violence trauma. It is one of the agency's core beliefs that while sexual violence affects individuals, it is buttressed and normalized by cultural messages and social norms (Our VOICE, 2016). Social norms are the rules of behavior that are considered acceptable in a group or society. There are many social norms that make entitlement and objectification acceptable. Through education, dialogue, and cultural transformation these harmful messages and norms can be changed and the perpetration of sexual violence can be stopped. My role as Prevention Education Coordinator has led me to dialogue with many diverse groups of people on the ways that sexual violence is part of all of our lives and planning what steps we can take to prevent it from happening. My role has involved many different aspects including training, offering technical assistance, curriculum design, and relationship and coalition building.

History of the rape crisis movement

It is important to look at the historical contexts of any social justice work for several different reasons. 1) History provides a framework for the understanding that we are not alone in this work, allowing us to connect our work to a movement, which in turn offers a broader and deeper perspective. 2) History allows us to see patterns of collective trauma and the vulnerability of certain groups of people and, 3) History sheds light on how social justice

movements become co-opted by white supremacy, patriarchy and capitalism. This light can help us refocus our efforts toward intersectionality and holistic healing.

Many good folks have been fighting against gender oppression, since the beginning of human history. Sojourner Truth is one of the many examples of these folks. In her speech “Ain’t I a Woman,” given in 1851, she offers one of the most profound and poignant meditations on the social constructions of identity and intersectionality. When she says, “I could work as much and eat as much as a man-when I could get it-and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman?” she highlights how fabricated identity constructions are manipulated, coerced and owned by power over (Truth, 1851). In this country rape has been used directly as a tool of slave-masters, for native subjugation and genocide, and gender correction of queer and trans* folks. During slavery, white slave owners, used sexual assault systematically and routinely against male and female slaves of African descent. After the Civil War, during the extremely violent era of Reconstruction, it is well documented that black men were lynched across the South and the entire country in startling numbers. Most were lynched on the false charge of raping white women (Greensite, 2009). What is less known is that during this time, black women were raped by white men, in equal or greater number as black men were lynched (Greensite, 2009). The systematic rape of black women was sanctioned by legal protections in many states well into the 1890s (Greensite, 2009).

Another group that has suffered sexual violence as a tool of genocide and patriarchal colonialism is the Native Americans. During European colonization, Native women were routinely raped as a tool of conquest and takeover of land. Native people were also forced into traditional European gender roles through the boarding school system (Smith, 2005). Currently one in every three Native American women experience sexual assault in their lifetime (Smith,

2005). They are nearly four times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than women of other races (Futures Without Violence, 2011). The rate of violent crime experienced by Native American women is nearly 50% higher than that reported by black males aged twelve and over (Futures Without Violence, 2011). Over 80% of violence experienced by Native Americans is committed by persons not of the same race, a figure substantially higher than for other races (Futures Without Violence, 2011).

Queer and trans* people are another group that have historically experienced sexual violence at higher rates than other social groups. Corrective rape is a hate crime and tool of the oppressor that has been used to correct perceived or actual sexual orientation or gender variance from the heterosexual, cisgender norm (United States Department of Justice, 2014). Currently in the United States, at least one in every two transgender people have experienced sexual assault (U.S. DOJ, 2014). Some statistics report as many as 64% of trans* folks experience sexual assault during their lifetime (Paulik, 2014). While not all of these assaults fall in the category of corrective rape, most sexual assaults against members of the LGBTQ community are classified as hate crimes in addition to the crimes associated with the assault. Corrective rape is a global issue that is much more critical in other countries, however we should not ignore nor be silent about its continued use and existence here in the U.S.

The statistics are also higher for all other LGBTQ persons than for straight, cisgender, white people. One in eight lesbian women and one in two bisexual women experience sexual assault during their lifetime (Paulik, 2014). A pressing and emerging issue intimately connected to sexual assault is the LGBTQ youth homelessness epidemic. Over 40% of the homeless youth population in the U.S. are LGBTQ (Durso & Gates, 2012). These youths flee their homes for a variety of safety reasons. One of the main reasons is family violence, oftentimes including

corrective rape or some other form of sexual violence. This risk coupled with the vulnerability of homelessness, lead these youths to be one of the most vulnerable populations for all forms of violence (Durso et al, 2012).

Other oppressed groups are no exception to the history and current epidemic of sexual violence being used as a tool of oppression. Currently some of the most startling statistics of rape and sexual assault are perpetrated against Latinx immigrants (especially poor, indigenous, trans* women from Central America), people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and elderly folks. The history of the rape crisis movement is important to reflect on and ground ourselves in as prevention specialists in order to craft programming that is effective, comprehensive and dismantles the systems of oppression that have created sexual violence.

Backpacking Brothers background

Engaging men and boys in the movement to end all forms of gender based violence is extremely important for several different reasons. Men and boys are often victims of sexual violence. It is estimated that 1 in 6 men are victims of sexual abuse before their eighteenth birthday (1 in 6, 2010). One in 4 gay men and 1 in 3 bisexual men is the victim of sexual assault during their lifetime (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2015). Incarcerated men are up to 4 times more likely than non-incarcerated men to experience sexual assault (NSVRC, 2015). At least 14,000 men in the U.S. military are raped every year (NSVRC, 2015).

Men are often witnesses and bystanders to sexual and other forms of gender based violence. And sometimes they are perpetrators of sexual violence. While it is estimated that less than 5% of men are rapists over 90% of all sexual violence is perpetrated by men (RAINN, 2015). It should be noted that there have been many questions raised recently about the data that led to the statistic that less than 5% of men are rapists (Lisak & Miller, 2002). Considering

this issue through a cultural framework and utilizing an oppression lens to view sexual violence, leads to the conclusion that this is a phenomena buttressed by many complex individual and societal factors. Thus, while it is important not to alienate men and possible perpetrators from this movement, it is equally important to provide balanced and accurate information about men's role in perpetuating rape culture. Three out of every four perpetrators know their victims, making this an interpersonal crime with devastating social, emotional and economic consequences for the victims, their loved ones and society in general (RAINN, 2015).

These and many other reasons make it critical that we engage men and boys in the prevention of sexual violence and all forms of gender based violence, because they must be part of transforming cultural norms, messages and practices that dictate and normalize sexual violence. Backpacking Brothers is a program aimed at the primary prevention of sexual violence. Primary prevention approaches take place *before* sexual violence has occurred in order to stop initial perpetration. An extremely important step for primary prevention is changing the focus of the conversation around sexual violence and assault to emphasize the behaviors and attitudes of those who perpetrate these crimes rather than focusing on the actions and behaviors of those who are victimized.

When I was hired by Our VOICE one of the main projects they gave me freedom to design and create was this program. The board of directors and administration of the organization wanted to create a program targeted at middle school boys. Since 2008 the organization has run a program called Climbing Toward Confidence a rock climbing empowerment program for middle school girls. The organization wanted to move towards a more holistic engagement of students around this complex social justice issue. This desire

coupled with my passion for adventure education and particularly backpacking, led me to create Backpacking Brothers.

The program is aimed to engage middle school boys in discussions of sexual violence, consent, and building healthy relationships. Through innovative, experiential, adventure education this program offers an alternative method to primary prevention. Backpacking Brothers can be adapted and modified for specific contexts and could also be run as an after-school and/or summer program. The point of the program is to offer fun, healthy, and challenging activities to young men with an overall purpose to engage them in their struggles to find connection, feeling, value and ownership over their own bodies and beings and *not* the bodies and beings of others. Backpacking Brothers also attempts to cultivate respect and empathy for ALL life, human and non-human alike.

Backpacking Brothers logistics

The program was originally imagined as a ten-day, 40-mile backpacking trip in the Pisgah National Forest. Many factors led us to realize this was too long and complicated to organize for the pilot trip of this new program. The trip was shortened to five days, with two full days and 12 miles of backpacking. Our base camp was where we did most of the program activities. We went on daily excursions to hike, swim, and visit environmental education sites in the Pisgah National Forest. Pisgah National Forest is the oldest national forest in North Carolina and one of the oldest in the U.S. It is a large area, encompassing parts of fifteen counties. It is the birthplace of mechanized forestry in the U.S. It, along with many of the nation's national parks and forests, has a history of Native American eradication. Many of the mountains, creeks and valleys of the Pisgah National Forest were sacred lands to the Cherokee nation, before their

people were brutally forced across the mountains along the Trail of Tears (Kays, 2016).

Trainer lesson learned: When designing training programs, context, culture and place are all important aspects to consider. Luckily we had some great interpreters from the Pisgah National Forest who were able to provide us with a lot of this context. However, I would have focused on place based education more in the design of this program. As a social justice trainer, transformation, liberation and solution can be reached much easier with careful and crafted attunement to connection to geography and the uniqueness of injustices in each place.

There were eleven participants on the program, who were all male identified and were all 12-14 years old. They were all middle school students, and were all from different schools from three different counties in Western North Carolina. They were recruited by Our VOICE mostly through flyers, e-mails and direct communication with school counselors and interested teachers. The program was free of charge and the majority of the students on this pilot program came from low income families.

Three full-time and one-part time instructor made up the team of leaders that worked with me to plan and implement this program. The assembled team had many years of collective experience working with youth in adventure education settings. All four of the instructors had comprehensive Wilderness First Aid training and certification. Of the three full-time staff, two were Our VOICE Prevention Education specialists and the other was a longtime advocate volunteer and outdoor leadership major at a local college. The part-time instructor was an employee of Pisgah Field School, a local non-profit partner, that specializes in field and environmental education.

The partnership with Pisgah Field School was instrumental in the design and implementation of the program. They supported with transportation, itinerary development and environmental and biodiversity education. We were also able to partner with a local boarding school to borrow all of the needed gear from flashlights, and water bottles to sleeping

bags and tents. Without these important partnerships, funding for the program would have been impossible with the reduced budget allotted by Our VOICE. Currently, the grant writers at Our VOICE and Pisgah Field School are working together to develop content and research grant opportunities for next year's program.

The content area of the program was planned as seven one-hour sessions. In practice we had the seven sessions each evening, and throughout each day we debriefed and discussed the topic area from the previous evening utilizing more informal methods. The seven sessions, in order, are: 1.) Identity, 2.) Power and privilege, 3.) Dynamics of sexual violence, 4.) Consent, 5.), Bystander intervention, 6.) Gender, and 7). Healthy relationships. These content areas will be discussed in varying detail throughout the paper, as they relate to a deeper understanding of training. Each of the areas is addressed in depth with accompanying activities in the facilitator's manual.

The Problem

Doing my own work

This is part of ALL of us, every living, breathing one of us. We each have a piece of the virility, the fear, the seeds of aggression and the power-over that can develop into the darkness of violence. An apt place to start out, is to peel back the curtain on my own experience in order to uncover some of the kernels of culture that have shaped that experience. It is dizzying to dive into the swirling disarray of thoughts, attitudes, opinions, beliefs, rules, images, impulses etc. that run around inside (the) mind daily.

The work I have to do does not feel easy or comfortable. Often, I look into the specter of my conditioning and I can witness the trauma throbbing back and forth across past and future.

It connects us all. It runs in rivulets of blood through our hearts and minds. Literally and tangibly. The work I have to do is to begin to acknowledge those seeds of aggression, fear, and control that are at the root of sexual violence and all manifestations of violence. St. Augustine advises us on this issue by saying, “Never fight evil as if it were something that arose totally outside of yourself” (as cited in Coffin, 1999, p. 57).

I feel aggression and violence in myself most conspicuously when I am behind the wheel of a car. Sometimes I am by myself and sometimes the people I most love in the world are in the passenger seat. Whether alone or with someone I love, I am in constant communication with the world and life. Even though tons of plastic, steel, rubber and glass separate us, there is another human managing the car that just cut me off. In my experience it is most easy to dehumanize in this and other circumstances of separation and disconnection. In our competition-based, monetary-striving, efficiency-centered culture, there are many of these circumstances. They disconnect us with cars, cubicles, computers, and other corruptive apparatuses of capitalism. There are surely many other ways I participate in oppression and violence. My aim is to become more aware of these, so I can begin to change my attitudes and actions.

Trainer lesson learned: *Never* forget to breathe. Sometimes I write it in all caps at the top of my training notes: (BREATHE!) Sometimes I even add a Spanish style upside down exclamation point like this: (¡BREATHE!). Working with the breath has become an integral part of my personal and professional practices to cultivate mindful awareness and presence.

My socialization in a relatively conservative, southern, religiously fundamental, rurally rooted, segregated, overtly anti-queer environment has shaped me in ways that I continually learn about every day. I am grateful for the complexity and challenge that this socialization has brought. Through my work at Our VOICE and on this paper, I am left with powerful questions

about my personal relationship to family, to place, to spirit, to gender, and to sex. Open discussions about sex were never part of my socialization. The little education I received in school about sex was strictly based on heterosexual relationships and rooted in an abstinence only, fear-based approach. Thus, part of this work and this exploration is selfish. This work has allowed me to understand my relationship to sex and consent. I hope with this deepened understanding I can be a support and a guide to young people navigating the murky waters of intimate relationships. I especially hope to learn ways to be supportive of queer and trans* youth in their explorations of sex. They are still immersed in largely heterosexist and cissexist structures and systems, that fail to make space for their identity locations.

This paper will not focus on an in depth exploration of personal privilege and the manifestations of that privilege into power. However, I have learned through this program that situating and grounding myself in my multi-faceted identities is an important part of understanding my role and impact as a trainer. As briefly aforementioned, the issue of sexual violence is so intimately tied to systemic racism, sexism, and all oppression, that it is important to position the subjectivity of my worldview into the framework of oppressive structures. As a white, cisgender, male-identified, relatively wealthy person, I hope to continue to seek ways to include the voices of people with more marginalized identity experiences into my work. I am left with large questions about the role that young men play in the prevention of sexual violence, and more generally the role that oppressors should or could play in dismantling oppression.

Sexual Violence defined

As a trainer, no matter who the participants are, I always present the same definition of sexual violence:

Any unwanted sexual touch or attention

Trainer lesson learned: Offering complex definitions of social injustices to participants is not an effective means of transmitting knowledge. The societal and cultural attitudes and beliefs that support and sustain sexual violence are rigid and lack complexity. Individuals hold these rigid belief structures and are generally unwilling to engage in an alternative narrative about sex and rape (Bar-Tal, 2013).

This definition offers an apt starting point to talk about response to and prevention of sexual violence. There are many cultural and societal views about rape and sexual assault and this broad, umbrella definition allows space for deconstructing the myth that sexual assault is only a stranger jumping out of the bushes on a dark pathway. Or the myth that verbal street harassment is an acceptable form of flirtation. For middle school boys it is important to begin to break down rape myths like these in order to generate awareness of the unhealthy relationship patterns that may already exist within themselves, their families, their schools, their communities and society at large. Rape myths constitute part of a larger cultural mechanism called rape culture. Rape culture is a dominant narrative, promoted by media images, social practices, language, legalese, religion, pop culture and other cultural mechanisms that support and normalize sexual violence. Rape culture is primarily responsible for blaming victims for their assaults and making it challenging for rape victims to disclose their assault to anyone (Southern Connecticut State University, 2016).

On this program, during the first introduction lesson to sexual violence, this definition was our starting point. From there we collectively brainstormed behaviors along a spectrum

that fall under the umbrella of ***any unwanted sexual touch or attention***. The middle school boys that participated on this trip, were able to name many of the most common forms of violence that fall along this imaginary spectrum such as rape, stalking, and sexual harassment. However, it became apparent that more nuanced behaviors like cat-calling, telling sexist jokes and even unwanted groping or kissing were less obviously violent to them (**see Appendix I**).

Trainer lesson learned: When I am teaching, one of the few material resources I am always sure to have available is a whiteboard. I have come to understand that my personal learning style takes in information best when there are diagrams, graphics, maps and other visuals that allow me to form a mental picture of the process. This appendices of this paper will contain some key diagrams that I have been studying and teaching with.

Exploring root causes

This broad definition of sexual violence allows for a spaciousness in the conversation and the participants were able to easily make the transition into thinking about root causes. The root causes of sexual violence are intimately related to some of the most pressing systemic issues of social injustice such as sexism, racism, classism, homophobia and transphobia. Thus in any group exploration of root causes, I have attempted to involve participants in ways they can relate their lives and identities to the topic. During Backpacking Brothers, gender socialization, identity and oppression were the main roots I hoped to explore with the young men.

While we did not explore the definitions and meanings of violence on the program, a deepened understanding of violence in general is an important component of my learning for the design and implementation of Backpacking Brothers. There are many concepts and definitions that attempt to explain violence. During this phase of personal and professional reflection, my understanding of violence has deepened. Johan Galtung (1969), defines violence as, “the cause of the difference between the potential and actual, between what could have

been and what is. Violence is that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that impedes the decrease of that distance” (p. 168). This definition is intriguing for many reasons and it generates much thought about human nature and human potential. It postulates that we are all capable of certain psychological and physical potential and any action, attitude, behavior, or influence whether intentional or unintentional that impedes that potential is violence. For example, potentially we can all walk down any street without receiving unwanted verbal harassment, yet that is not the current reality. Moving from a more structural definition to a more direct understanding, the psychologist Bruno Bettelheim says, “violence is the behavior of someone incapable of imagining other solutions to the problem at hand” (as cited in Lederach, 2005, p. 29). I appreciate this definition because it moves us from a place of problems and darkness to a place of being capable and able to imagine solutions and a world of peace. Through education, training and dialogue we are able to move from problems to imagining solutions and collectively generating liberatory frameworks.

Backpacking Brothers used Johan Galtung’s (1990) triangle of violence to move from the definition and spectrum of sexual violence to an in-depth exploration of the root causes. The triangle of violence is a diagram that attempts to typify different forms of violence into three broad categories, direct, structural and cultural violence. Galtung (1990) defines the three types of violence as follows: **(see Appendix II for several diagrams for use in training settings)**

Direct violence involves the decisions and actions made by a particular person against another person. Direct violence is the visible, often physical expression of violence. It is the bullets flying in war, rape, murder, verbal attacks etc.

Structural violence is injustice and exploitation built into a social system that generates wealth for the few and poverty for the many, stunting everyone's ability to develop their full humanity. By privileging some classes, ethnicities, genders, and nationalities over others, it institutionalizes unequal opportunities for education, resources, and respect. Structural violence forms the very basis of capitalism, patriarchy, and any dominator system.

Cultural violence involves aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of existence, that can be used to justify direct or structural violence. Ideas of superiority/inferiority based on class, race, sex, religion, and nationality are taught to us as children and shape our assumptions about us and the world. They convince us this is the way things are and have to be (Galtung, 1990).

After attaining a basic understanding of the three types of violence we moved into a whiteboard brainstorm, filling in the triangle with manifestations of sexual violence at each of the points. The following table represents some of those manifestations at each level:

Direct	Structural	Cultural
Rape	Health care discrimination of transgender people, women and queer folks	Myths about sexual and interpersonal violence
Rape as a tool of war or genocide	Unequal pay for women, gender minorities and racial/ethnic minorities	Religious backlash against the women's and LGBTQ movements
Child sexual abuse	Lack of women and gender minorities in positions of political power	Media images, video games, social media, pornography that degrade women and gender minorities
Interpersonal violence	The criminal justice system not prosecuting rape cases	Gender roles that dictate men as powerful/strong and women as weak/emotional
LGBTQ hate violence	School to prison pipeline	Hyper and toxic masculinities
Unwanted groping of any body part	Education system (lack of non-heteronormative sex education, race and class segregation)	Social norms that say that sex is violent and that violence is sexy
Sexual harassment	Homelessness (LGBTQ youth especially vulnerable)	Pop music that degrades women and promotes rape

One of the ways I have been modifying the triangle of violence is to ask participants to consider the foundation of the pyramid, in other words, factors that have held the pyramid up for many generations and continue to hold it up. The oppressive systems, structures and cultural mechanisms at the base of the pyramid are the points of entry for all social justice work. It is the taproot of the cycles of socialization, fear and aggression that create all forms of violence. If I can get participants to consider the connections of sexual violence to racism or sexual violence to transphobia, that is where we can begin to tap into liberating ourselves from these scriptures and strictures that write rape culture.

Trainer lesson learned: It has been more effective to allow participants to explore the root causes of sexual violence on their own, instead of giving them a prescribed list during the training. I have tried to find moments in the agenda of my trainings that invite participants to turn inward and do some self-reflection on gender messages and media influences they have received. Given the time and space to think about where you first heard a particular rape myth (or any violence supporting myth) opens the door to attitudinal shift.

The main focus of Backpacking Brothers and most of the programming I have done with Our VOICE has been on transforming the culture of violence that perpetuates rape and sexual violence. The discussion that follows will highlight some more of the learnings around cultural transformation and co-creating a shift in social norms with participants. Co-creation of learning environments will be discussed briefly. One of my main learnings in co-creating a shift in social norms around sexual violence, is that it takes a lot of time and a critical mass of young people speaking out against violence. This program only scratched the surface of the co-creation of a movement of young men and young people in general who are willing to openly speak out and co-create new social norms that dismantle the power over that sustain rape culture.

Impacts of sexual violence

This program and this analysis is not meant to explore the impacts of sexual violence. However, it would be remiss not to mention some of the implausible emotional, spiritual, physical and economic impacts of sexual violence in the United States. Some of the statistics of people who experience sexual assault and sexual violence have been mentioned earlier. A quick search of statistics of sexual assault, those direct, physically violent incidences of sexual violence, leads one easily to the conclusion that this is a national and global public health epidemic. Sexual assault, falls under the umbrella definition of sexual violence. Sexual assault is also an umbrella term that includes direct (physical) violence such as forced intercourse, forcible sodomy, child molestation, incest and attempted rape (United States Department of Justice, 2014).

Sexual assault is an extremely traumatic event. Trauma affects our bodies and brains physiologically. With sexual assault and sexual violence, there are individual, collective and historical components to trauma. Trauma energy from an event like rape gets frozen in the brain and nervous system. This trapped energy, which deregulates the nervous system, is the cause of many common trauma responses (Yoder, 2005). "Traumatic events shatter the world as we know it, leaving us disordered, disempowered and feeling disconnected from other people and from life" (p. 24). As I have begun to gain a deeper understanding of this world-shattering that people experience, I have also come to understand the need to become a more trauma-informed trainer. The stories of survivors are a key element to a comprehensive prevention program. Trauma informed training is a framework that involves understanding, recognizing and responding to the effects of all types of traumatic response among participants. While I still lack concrete tools and more research in this area, I think one of my strengths is

being able to recognize a response to trauma. Nature and adventure education offer a powerful resource for healing and grounding trauma energy.

One of the ways I am learning to be more trauma-informed when I teach about sexual violence is to have a few key exercises and activities in my back pocket that can re-channel trauma energy that may be present in the room. Some of these activities were particularly effective on Backpacking Brothers in order to bring participants into mindful, bodily and emotional awareness. Every evening we had structured campfire circle dialogues centering around a different topic related to sexual violence. After these discussions it became clear there were strong reactions, whether cognitive, emotional or in some cases possibly trauma-related responses. After each of these hour-and-a-half to two-hour long sessions, we gave students free time to play, did a structured energizer, or offered some type of guided meditation or grounding exercise. Students responded well to all of these and were more grounded and calm after internally processing or releasing excess energy in this way.

Towards a solution: a theoretical background

Doing my own work: Part II

The good news is that the work is hard and grueling and never-ending. We cannot disconnect from suffering, because it is ever present and connects us all. Many times I have felt overwhelmed by the suffering in the world and seeing it and experiencing it first-hand feels insurmountable at times. As mentioned above the traumas running across histories connect our bodies, our minds, and our spirits, and are ever intertwined. Another piece of good news is that joy and peace and love also connect us across the geographies and ecologies of history. One of the ways that has become powerful for me in doing my own work is through meditation and

silent reflection on the nature of reality. Thich Nhat Hanh (2014) is of constant inspiration and teaching to me. He says in a discussion on the nature of suffering:

“If we can learn to see and skillfully engage with both the presence of happiness and the presence of suffering, we will go in the direction of enjoying life more. Every day we go a little further in that direction, and eventually we realize that happiness and suffering are not two separate things” (p. 11).

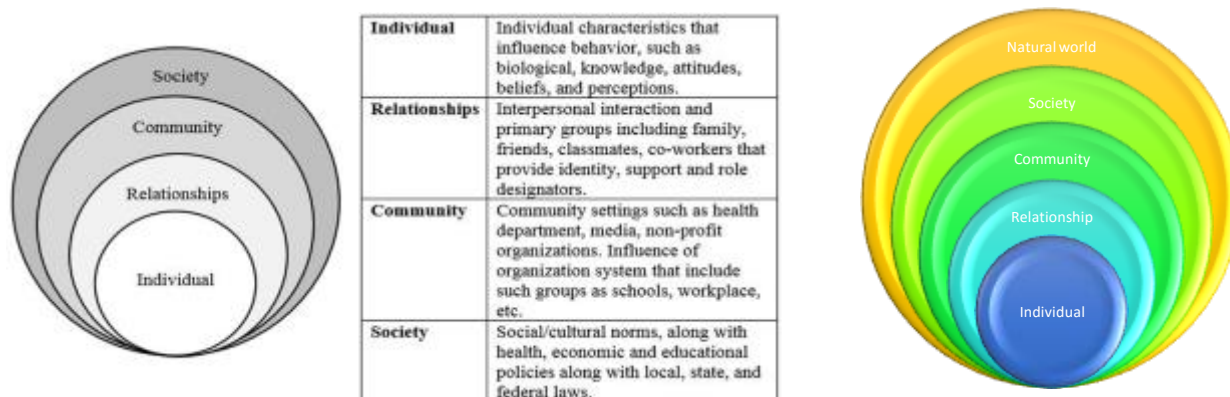
Another way that I have been doing my own work is to overcome internalized homophobia and shame around being gay. In this work, one of the ways I can be more effective is through opening up to vulnerability when talking about gay sex and gay relationships. This work requires that barriers and taboos about sex be broken down and untangled. This is only one of the many ways I can break down internal and external systems of oppression. This feels like the most tangible and connected way for me to work as an educator on issues of injustice. I believe that through dialogue, ritual, rebellion, resistance, and education, we can collectively change systems of oppression and end social injustice.

A few of the theoretical models I have been utilizing to comprehend primary prevention are highlighted below. There are a multitude of theories and models being applied and researched to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of how to stop sexual violence before it happens. Here I offer several different lenses that I utilized to design and implement Backpacking Brothers.

The public health lens

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has been the leader of primary prevention research, design and evaluation as a public health issue. They have designed a theory-based model, the social-ecological model, which considers the complex interplay between individual,

relationship, community and societal factors (Hammond, n.d.). The model allows prevention practitioners to analyze and understand the range of connected factors that put people at risk for experiencing violence or for being perpetrators of violence. Risk factors are associated with an increased likelihood of sexual violence perpetration. They are factors that are contributing factors and might not be direct causes. The social ecological model is an embedded model, normally depicted with four levels (as depicted on the left):



For the purposes of this program, I chose to add an outside circle that includes the natural world. An example of a possible risk factor at the natural world level would be unnecessarily destroying life. This outer ring begins to shape and define the connections this program strives to make between the continued epidemic of sexual violence to human treatment of the natural world. There are many disciplines which could be useful in deepening the articulation of the natural world ring. For Backpacking Brothers, I see links to wilderness therapy, eco-pedagogy, eco-feminism, cultural ecology, and other disciplines that would provide powerful links between individual attitudes and the natural world ring. Education that aims to humanize and dismantle oppression should also foster a more reciprocal, nurturing and mutual relationship with the environment. Paolo Freire (2004) echoes this idea when he says,

“the notion seems deplorable to me of engaging in progressive, revolutionary discourse while embracing a practice that negates life- that pollutes the air, the waters, the fields, and devastates forests, destroys the trees and threatens the animals” (p. 120).

Primary prevention efforts that have traditionally focused on consent education have consistently focused on the ideas of being reciprocal, nurturing and making our relationships mutual and respectful (Our VOICE, 2016). As educators and prevention specialists it is our task to love the world, to take care of the earth and of each other, and locate individual and community praxis in order to live what we teach. Freire (2004) echoes this when he says “I do not believe in loving among human beings, if we do not become capable of loving the world. Ecology has gained tremendous importance at the end of this century. It must be present in any educational practice of a radical, critical, and liberating nature” (p. 25). Thus, we are unable to enter into healthy, balanced, and mutual relationships without a reconsideration of our attitudes, knowledge, and actions towards the natural world.

Trainer lesson learned: Mindful, daily discovery of praxis is a lifelong journey for an educator. For me learning and practicing communication, reciprocity and connection with all sentient beings is a cornerstone of my worldview as a social justice educator and peacebuilder.

The social-ecological model has many applications to the prevention of sexual violence. As mentioned, it can shed light on risk factors that increase the likelihood of perpetration or victimization, it can be used as a planning template for prevention interventions and it can be used as an evaluation tool to map desired program outcomes. One of the main ways I have been using this model is to analyze protective factors that buttress against violence. This strengths-based, empowerment approach to prevention, is where I have begun to focus my

attention as a trainer and part of the reason that liberatory and adventure education couple so well with primary prevention. Some of the specific learnings I have gained from applying this model to Backpacking Brothers are highlighted in a table which can be found in **Appendix III**.

The intersectional, anti-oppression lens

While the social ecological model, and the other public health approaches espoused by the CDC do consider the complex interplay of societal and individual factors, they are not explicitly anti-oppression theories. Thus, considering the history of sexual violence and recognizing that the movement to respond to it has historically focused on white, straight, cisgender, women, it is important to re-ground ourselves in an intersectional, anti-oppression approach to prevention (Zandik & Grove, 2010). It is critical that the movement re-engage with the intersections of race and gender and of course, other identity locations that make each person whole. To uncover the root causes of sexual violence, our analysis must not be limited to sex and gender identity, we must include race, class, sexual orientation, ability and other social identity locations in the conversation (Crenshaw, 1993). This will help create a deeper understanding of each victim's experience of sexual violence and paint a broader picture of cultural and structural factors that contribute to rape culture.

The boys who participated on this program came together in the field with many individual experiences of oppression, especially classism, heterosexism, cissexism and racism. The main privilege areas we focused on during the program were male privilege and heterosexual privilege, however all prevention education (and education in general for that matter) should aim to capture the wholeness of experience. Our journey began with a personal and group exploration of identity. Each of us created "I am from..." poems in order to share

some of our experiences and social locations, upon entering our newly created learning community (Christensen, & Watson, 2015). This allowed us to open a dialogue about stereotypes and assumptions that we carry about race, gender, sexual orientation, class, religion and other identity locations. It became clear to me on this program that the apparent and visible social identities of participants cannot be understood as the entire picture of the complexity of individual and collective experience. It is of utmost importance to allow experience and voice to be present in any learning environment that aims to be transformative and liberatory. This is a representation of “the need for critical thinkers to engage multiple locations, to address diverse standpoints, to allow us to gather knowledge fully and inclusively” (hooks, 1994, p. 91). One of the reasons an outdoor setting works well for dialogue on social injustices is that the constant limitation of time, usually present in a classroom, is lessened. The campfire and the hike offer enormous spaces and times to truly begin to gather knowledge more fully and inclusively, on group and on one-on-one levels of interaction.

This fullness of knowledge and inclusivity of all voices becomes an intense training challenge when there are multiple layers of intersecting, and oppressed identities among participants. On this program, it was especially helpful for participants to ground themselves in a deeper understanding of their social location within the social injustices caused by rape culture, misogyny and sexual violence. As facilitators we will never be able to truly engage all of the inter and intra-personal intersections of identity in a group. If we continually nurture strong self-concepts of justice and equity within the group, we can collectively make meaning that is empowering and anti-oppressive.

Trainer lesson learned: I am still learning a lot about anti-oppression work and determining as a trainer what is useful, transformational and liberatory. One of the ways that has been helpful for me to think about this work is a recurring theme of this paper; connectivity. I have been re-imagining identity as circular, rather than linear as it is oftentimes displayed. Imagining identity as circular allows us to come closer to understanding what each person can uniquely contribute to the beloved community. The linear spectrums traditionally presented for everything from racial categories to gender identities, perpetuate and reinforce violence producing notions of superiority and inferiority.

The social norms lens

Health terrorism or the “scared-straight” approach, has traditionally been used to teach students about unhealthy and healthy behaviors. It is clear through years of practice and research that this approach is not an effective means to create healthy behavior change for a variety of reasons (Orchowski, Malone, Berkowitz, & Pearlman, 2015). This approach reinforces the problem by fostering misconception and it does not speak to the majority of people who are already practicing or want to practice healthy behaviors (Ochowski et al, 2015). On the other hand, promoting the positive, undermines those who are engaging in the problem behavior and makes it socially unacceptable for the problem behavior to continue (Orchowski, et al, 2015).

Social norms are powerful and unspoken group or community rules about what is normal or acceptable behavior. Perceptions of social norms predict what people will say or do and how they will react in certain circumstances (Berkowitz, 2014). Some of the social norms that contribute to sexual violence at the school level include the norms that guys like to hear about each other’s sex lives, that rape is shameful for the victim, that nobody is bothered by bullying but the victim, or that sex is a taboo subject (Berkowitz, 2014). “Social norms research suggests that most males are mistaken about other males’ attitudes and behaviors towards sex. Similarly, most males are uncomfortable with violence against women and with the attitudes,

behaviors, and language of men who commit such violence” (Berkowitz, 2014, p. 3). While this statement is hetero-centric and heteronormative, it is a powerful assertion for the focus of engaging men in the primary prevention of sexual violence.

Another social norm that is a powerful force that perpetuates sexual violence is that people should not get involved or intervene in uncomfortable and potentially violent situations to stop sexual violence. Along with understanding social norms that exist along the social ecology to support sexual violence, it is important to teach students bystander intervention skills. Bystander intervention is a promising approach to ending sexual and other forms of violence. The principle behind bystander intervention proposes that when we witness uncomfortable, offensive, harmful, or potentially violent behavior we intervene to interrupt the potential harm and transform the outcome to a more positive one for everybody (including the perpetrator).

Bystander intervention is a powerful, and research-proven way to transform harmful social norms. If folks are empowered to intervene and interrupt violence, then it is no longer acceptable to continue to do the violent behavior. As a trainer, one of my areas of growth is learning ways to be more focused on skill-building. Bystander intervention requires many new communication and awareness skills. Throughout my time with Our VOICE my main training focus has been creating movement on participants’ attitudes and beliefs. While I think this is a crucial first step, and one that can take time, I want to infuse more empowerment based skill-building into my work as a trainer.

The gender lens

There is the possibility for wholeness and truth within each of us. Constructs of masculinity and maleness, and constructs of femininity and femaleness, inhibit many folks from

being able to encounter that wholeness. In order to work towards transforming rape culture, and gender oppression the experiences of trans* and gender non-conforming people must be centered and brought to the forefront. The movement for the prevention of sexual violence requires that a new lens be applied to the socio-cultural constructs of gender. What is typically viewed as masculine and/or feminine is certainly debatable. There are powerful cultural, social, spiritual, technological, familial, and media influences that shape this dualistic and often discriminatory binary.

Trainer lesson learned: The gender binary is deeply entrenched into our social, cultural, political, religious and economic systems. There are many other binaries such as Republican/Democrat, rich/poor, gay/straight that are a complex part of perpetuating this and all binaries. The gender binary, and all binaries, offer simplistic notions of gender identity and expression and are extremely harmful to many people. As trainers, we must find strategies to move participants from such either/or thinking about issue areas toward more critical, intersectional, authentic and compassionate dialogues.

Much of the current literature and discourse in the field of sexual violence prevention, revolves around engaging men in healthy or authentic masculinity. There is much debate and question of whether healthy masculinity can even exist. Is teaching, promoting and encouraging healthy masculinity the response to the toxic masculinity that is at the root of sexual and other forms of violence in our society? Kimberle Crenshaw (1993) posits that, “implicit in certain strands of feminist and racial liberation movements, is the view that the social power in delineating difference need not be the power of domination; it can instead be the source of social power and reconstruction” (p. 3). I certainly relate to feeling social power, reconstruction and healing from delineating difference with my identity as gay. However, does this type of social power and reconstruction apply to identities that have been privileged and oppressive, such as masculinity?

To open these complex questions during Backpacking Brothers, participants were asked to think about personal identity and specifically about the gender messages they have each received throughout their lives. While those messages are certainly not all harmful to the self and others, it is important to begin conversations around gender socialization with young male identified participants. This was accomplished on this program through a variety of identity and self-reflection activities early in the course. We used Paul Kivel's (1998) gender box activity in order to discuss the restrictions that rigid gender roles place on us as boys and men. The act like a man box is a training tool used to ask young men important questions about the gender messages and expectations they have received. Often ideas of anger, strength, lack of emotional vulnerability, protecting women and children, power, money, fame and being able to take charge come up in these discussions. These and many other elements are the dominant role identity for masculine or male identified people in our society (**see Appendix IV for more details on resources for facilitating this activity**).

Many men and boys feel an immense amount of pressure to maintain the man box, and thus maintain the other gender box, the woman box. When some men perceive that women, gender minorities and non-heterosexual men or women are switching boxes or acting outside of either box, it creates fear and a threat to the status quo. It should be highlighted with groups of young men that this pain and un-comfortability is not the same pain of those who are oppressed. However, in social justice work, I believe an important norm is to embrace paradox and validate young men's pain as real and present in the world. Before this program, I did not understand the depth of how male-identified folks are affected by this issue. I wish I had more tools and resources to connect them to the vulnerability of their authentic pain. Through a lens of compassionate understanding young men can become agents for recognizing the immense

privileges they benefit from by perpetuating the act like a man box. This recognition and awareness is a first step towards cultural transformation of harmful gender norms.

Trainer lesson learned: During my time at SIT and even more during this practicum, I have been doing lots of self-exploration about the gender messages I received through my personal experience and context. I have been struggling with finding clear and appropriate boundaries of how much of my personal story to share with participants. I often get requests from students to “just be real” with them about sex and violence, so I have become more comfortable divulging certain parts of my identity and experience. The internal question I use to determine what experiences I choose to share is: *Does this piece of information have the potential to create positive transformation or movement for participants?* If it does not, then I will choose not to share.

Training approach

Experiential, Liberatory, Adventure education

In many ways the experiential learning cycle mirrors natural rhythm, energy and impulse. It can strip language away and use only sounds or sights to teach. It can transform language and blow participants like the wind into other realms of knowing. It can instill fear in an instant and channel it through knowledge, attitudes and beliefs to turn that fear into cohesion rather than aggression. This is partly the reason that experiential education works so well in the out of doors. There people can run and jump and climb and feel the sweet touch of the sun on their human faces. Participants in adventure and outdoor education programs can connect. They can connect their lives to other humans’ lives and to other beings’ lives. They can connect their questions, concerns and worries to a common source. The experiential learning cycle becomes not only the framework for attitude and behavior shift, but an applicable and practical tool for teaching about difficult and challenging topics. Finally, liberatory education is about envisioning a world without oppression and violence. Liberation is about creating and shaping wholeness and humanization.

Experience coupled with adventure and liberation create a compelling educational philosophy for the prevention of sexual violence. The remainder of this section will highlight how these three connected, yet distinct educational paradigms can create a unified, co-created learning community. It will analyze and define these frameworks as used on Backpacking Brothers, how they were implemented on the program and the main learnings that can be applied to each of them.

Experience

Experience and the intentional processing of experiences in a way that leads to positive and empowered transformation, is the cornerstone of my understanding of experiential education. While action and experience are at the core of experiential education, the processing and transformation of those experiences is the product. David Kolb (1984) says of education via experience that, "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). In many ways the students that participated in the program had experienced classroom and family settings that silence their voices, their experiences and their worldviews. Paolo Freire (1970) critically and directly engages this type of silencing when he writes,

"An act of violence is any situation in which some men prevent others from the process of inquiry...any attempt to prevent human freedom is an 'act of violence.' Any system which deliberately tries to discourage critical consciousness is guilty of oppressive violence. Any school which does not foster students' capacity for critical inquiry is guilty of violent oppression" (p. 74).

When students were given the space and a focal point to discuss acute and personal issues related to sexual violence, they felt empowered to share personal experience and

narrative. This personal narrative became the catalyst for the acknowledgement of the seeds of aggression and rape culture and then commitment to transformational thinking and action (hooks, 1994).

Trainer lesson learned: One of my trainer areas of strength is the ability to cultivate compassion, kindness and safety on an individual and group level. An area of growth for me as a trainer that I am learning more about is being aware of picking favorite students/participants based on traits that remind me of something I like within myself or admire.

The experiential learning cycle proposes an educational framework for integrating phenomenological meaning into new experiences with the final goal of creating more harmonious relationships with ourselves and the world. Paolo Freire (1992) says of the oppressive educational paradigm that, “implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely in the world, not with the world or with others; the individual is a spectator, not re-creator” (p. 247). As educators, we can guide participants through the experiential learning cycle in order to co-determine ways to be with the world and to recreate culture and society. I used a simplified model of David Kolb’s original model, that can be used with training participants in order to grasp a deeper understanding of the purpose of each activity. The model is based on four stages of processing, 1) experience, 2) what? (what happened? Looking at the elements of the experience), 3) so what? (how is the experience relevant to me?), and 4) now what? (how do I use the experience to improve my life and the lives of others?) (**see Appendix V for the model that was used**).

Training lesson learned: I am a lifelong learner. I am so excited and passionate about learning. A few areas of growth that I am learning about myself are that I want to focus my learning more on the stories of people; their passions, their fears, their essence rather than focusing on the “facts and figures” based education that I have been indoctrinated with. Also many times I feel inundated by too many ideas, inhibiting my ability to be fully present with the world.

Many of the experiences on the Backpacking Brothers program were intentionally planned and there were also many improvised teachable moments. These teachable moments are a cornerstone of my educational philosophy. I have learned that I have a strength in the aspect of improvisation that involves seeing teachable moments in each experience and facilitating those experiences well. The way I can grow as a trainer is to focus more on building my “bag of tricks,” of games, energizers and other structured activities that build group cohesion. The experiential learning cycle allowed for each experience of the program to be discussed and processed in a way that was intentional and tangible. One of the ways this program would have been improved is by presenting this model to participants in the beginning of the program. In past programs I have worked on, this model has become a piece of shared group language that then becomes part of routine group processing. Unfortunately, we did not make the space nor the time to present this model as our learning framework. “Education should not be an entity isolated from outside society. Freire stressed that students need to learn within a contextual framework which is meaningful to them, as opposed to banking education” (William, 2015, p. 15). In the brilliant conversations I heard students engage in on this program about vulnerability, being challenged and transforming rape culture, I strongly believe the experiential learning cycle can be challenged, modified and reinvented by participants. It is a tool that can be used to create positive and collective group cohesion, solidarity and transformation.

Trainer lesson learned: I am still learning and thinking about co-creation in many different ways and from many different perspectives. I am fascinated with how experiential and adventure education can foster co-creation. One of the ways I learn best is by making mind maps of how I am thinking about certain issues, problems or perspectives. It has been a useful tool to help me improve and focus on my trainer areas of growth (I have notebooks full of them). For a few examples of mind maps that relate to Backpacking Brothers see **Appendix VI**.

I used the experiential learning cycle as a planning template to plug different activities into and conceptualize how to process and debrief them in order to create movement with carefully crafted questions. For an example of how I used the experiential learning cycle as a planning template see **Appendix V**.

This planning format does not directly consider purpose, goals, objectives (PGOs), material resources, or learning styles. However, it offers a different lens for planning that can be used for several different applications of implementation and evaluation. The experiential learning cycle also offers a reminder to integrate learning into daily life. “An experiential learning exercise is a complex event. It needs to provide learners with the basis for understanding why and how the new knowledge they acquire is related to what they already know” (Dennehy, Sims, & Collins, 1998, p. 9). The art of debriefing each activity and experience is one that I am constantly looking for ways to fine tune. Often I do not plan debriefs for each stop along the experiential learning cycle. One of the ways I would like to grow as an educator and a trainer is to explore my strengths facilitating debriefs and the opportunity to practice strategic questioning more as a trainer resource for processing and debriefing.

Trainer lesson learned: (A debrief) What do I need to process experiences? As a trainer, how can I be sure each participant is able to process in the way that is most effective for them? When do I know the appropriate time to offer parts of my own experience as impetus for processing?

Adventure

Adventure education was first pioneered in the 1940s by Outward Bound, and created by the philosopher and educational pioneer Kurt Hanh (Hutchinson, & McCann, 2015). His prolific writings on the philosophy of education offer a starting place for defining adventure

education when he says, “I regard it as the foremost task of education to ensure the survival of these qualities: an enterprising curiosity, an undefeatable spirit, tenacity in pursuit, readiness for sensible self-denial, and above all, compassion” (Hutchinson et al, 2015, p85). As a result of the destruction of the First World War, Hanh desired to create an education that promoted peace. The cornerstone of his philosophy was based on the belief that physical challenge, outdoor expedition, projects and crafts, and first aid and survival education could ameliorate social injustice and violence (Hutchinson et al, 2015).

Adventure education is the promotion of learning through adventure-centered experiences. It requires active engagement of all of the senses from the learners as well as the instructors (Ford, 1986). It uses human-powered outdoor pursuits to help people learn about interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships (Ford, 1986). Adventure is specifically used as opposed to the often interchangeable terms, recreational, outdoor or environmental education. These terms represent different paradigms and philosophies for approaching the outdoors. Adventure education as used here is a holistic approach to building community and group cohesion coupled with self-reflective growth and individual contribution to group cohesion.

There is currently a growing awareness in the movement to prevent sexual violence for the need to refocus education and outreach efforts towards promoting positive attitudes and behaviors, rather than focusing on risk factors (DeGue, Valle, Holt, Massetti, Matjasko, & Tharp, 2014). Adventure education can provide a powerful platform for promoting positive attitudes and behaviors such as, inclusivity, respect, solidarity, and self-esteem. There is still much research needed to determine specific protective factors that prevent sexual violence and

precursors to sexual violence (DeGue et al, 2014). A few protective factors that have been researched and are relatable to the outcomes of adventure education programs are, empathy and concern for how one's actions affect others, confidence, and emotional health and connectedness (DeGue et al, 2014).

Empathy can be encouraged and fostered on adventure education programs through sustained activities that promote trust-building, teamwork, community, and getting through physical and emotional challenges as a supportive and nurturing group (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997). On the Backpacking Brothers program, a variety of structured activities and teachable moments were used to promote empathy. One of the most tangible examples from the program of empathy based education working, was during an instance when we were hiking through particularly challenging terrain through a storm and were required to implement our lightning protocol. The lightning protocol requires each person to spread out approximately 15 to 20 feet apart and crouch into a tight ball on top of a sleeping pad. During the debrief of this challenging day, many of the students expressed feeling deep concern for their fellow group members, while they were hunched alone on their sleeping pads. Respect and considering how one's actions affect others, were central themes of the course. While there were many moments of empathic demonstration from leaders and students on this course, empathy based education would need to be more sustained at school and home in order to truly create a strong protective factor against violence. This is one of the reasons I hope to continue engagement with parents and teachers of the boys.

Trainer lesson learned: Connectivity and building a social justice movement requires excitement and passion. As a trainer one of my main goals is to look for ways to shift social norms that make violence cool and enticing to social norms that make peace, respect and consent fun and exciting.

Confidence, another protective factor that research indicates will reduce sexual violence, was a cornerstone of this program. Each student had a leadership role each day, and at the end-of-day debrief, each student would receive feedback from their fellow group members on the tasks they had performed as leader. Throughout the debriefs and in the closing ceremony, students continually cited feeling empowered by the day's physical challenges. None of the students had ever done a backpacking trip, and completing the trip as a group was a powerful way to build confidence (Hattie et al, 1997). Confidence is also an important component of bystander intervention skills. When we create a community where people step in and speak out when they hear concerning language or see potentially violent behaviors, we must give them the self-confidence to assume personal responsibility. Practical skill building for intervention strategies is only one aspect of bystander intervention training.

Trainer lesson learned: There was a powerful moment during the course where one of the leaders and myself had to model bystander intervention. There was a person, that was not part of our group, who made overtly racist remarks to one of the participants and most of the other participants were present. It was challenging for me to confront the adult bully, as I am still learning about the confidence it takes to call people out, especially strangers. There did not seem to be much movement or acknowledgment on the part of the adult bully. However, the incident and response opened important discussions in the group about racism, interrupting violence and the complex elements of creating a culture of intervention and calling people out.

Emotional health and connectedness, as with all of the aforementioned protective factors, cannot be built only through a five-day adventure education experience. All of these, especially building emotional health and connectedness requires deep reflection on the current

state of our learning environments. One of the powerful ways nature can transform disconnection is through beginning this reflection as self and group reflection on connection (Hattie et al, 1997). Nature has the power to transform and heal. One of the ways our broken and harmful gender constructs affect men and young boys is by shutting them off to the power in emotional health and vulnerability. Adventure education has the potential to foster emotional connectedness through positive group dynamics, co-creation of safe space and physical challenge as a medium for connecting to the body and the world. The boys on this trip made strong friendships and this was an important strength of the program. I have run into a few of them in their schools and community groups after the program and they have continually cited the new friendships they made, as a powerful bonding experience.

Liberation

Liberation is envisioning a transformed world. Liberation is wholeness. It is seeing ourselves reflected in each other. Liberation is open to change. Liberation sees, acknowledges and validates suffering in the world. It does not retaliate and get angered at the seeds of suffering. Liberation, just as experiential education, is a process, a lifelong process of standing up compassionately and strongly to internal and external oppression. Liberation is critically engaging with the world and continually questioning one's role and position in the world.

The cycle of socialization teaches us how to play our role identities based on what we have been taught through school, family, religion and other cultural paradigms. This cycle often perpetuates fear, silence, and oppression thus hindering change and consciousness. Liberation on the other hand is freeing ourselves from this socialized cycle and developing critical awareness of our social reality. The cycle of liberation starts with a critical incident, called the waking up phase, followed by the getting ready phase which involves intrapersonal

empowerment, dismantling of previous beliefs, and making internal connections to external realities of oppression and injustice (Adams, Blumenfeld, Castañeda, Hackman, Peters, & Zuñiga, 2013).

The path towards liberation is long and requires dedication and action. On Backpacking Brothers, I hope to have fostered the waking up and getting ready phase in some of the students. We explored personal identity, power and privilege, and relationships as they relate to rape culture. Students had many questions and concerns about rape myths, indicating cognitive dissonance about what they used to believe about sexual violence (Adams et al, 2013). There were several activities designed to offer students a prompt and then create spaces for individual self-reflection. In one of these instances we had students write a letter to their 18-year-old selves. The prompt for the letter was to write about ways they had educated themselves and intervened to prevent sexual violence. While nobody shared the content of their letters, during the debrief students cited understanding the need to take a stand against bullying and harassment they see in their schools. This represents movement from the getting ready phase into the reaching out phase of the cycle of liberation (Adams et al, 2013) (**see Appendix VII for a model of the Cycle of Liberation**).

Trainer lesson learned: “There must exist a paradigm, a practical model for social change that includes an understanding of ways to transform consciousness that are linked to efforts to transform structures” (hooks, 1996, p. 193).

Training design

Transformation and movement

The fear of discussing sexual violence and sex in general is be part of the reason that people are reluctant to change their rigid attitude and belief structures. I believe that this fear

comes from a mostly internalized place of misunderstanding, misconception and shame (Bartal, 2013). Programs like Backpacking Brothers and other prevention programs can find constructive ways to name those personal fears and co-create personal and collective reflection about transformation. I will briefly highlight several of those mechanisms or strategies that can lead to transformation and movement. Some of these are non-traditional elements used in the training design for this program.

The role of ritual

Nature and learning ways to participate more fully and completely in the natural world are extremely important to my work as a trainer, as a social justice educator and as a human. In the design work that was done prior to the course, during the course and continues to evolve after the course, ritual was an important focal point for pondering transformational and liberatory learning. In *Ritual as Social Change*, Bobby Alexander (2004) defines ritual as “a planned or improvised performance that effects a transition from everyday life to an alternative framework within which the everyday is transformed” (as cited in Schirch, p. 16). This is the type of deep and lasting transformation I sought to encourage through designing the program utilizing the lens of ritual.

The purpose of this program is engagement and transformation. Engagement means that participants will become allies in the movement to end sexual violence, will commit to not perpetrating sexual violence and will learn about gender and gender based violence.

Throughout the training design for the program, rituals and ceremonies were included in order to ensure the transformation of the everyday and for providing students with an educational format that many of them had never participated in. “Ritual connects people to the shared cultural values and beliefs that help them understand the world” (Schirch, 2004, p. 100). By

participating in ritual and ceremony, the boys on this trip were able to form new concepts of the way the world can be understood. Ritual is not about solving a social problem, rather it is about guiding participants to an understanding that there is an alternative to the status quo (Schirch, 2004).

Circle processes used during this course were the most powerful and profound examples of ritual that stewarded movement and transformation. Each evening we had a fire circle, which we built, lit and maintained together. We would debrief the day, offer gratitude to fellow group members and discuss a different aspect of sexual violence and prevention skills. Daily physical and emotional challenges and risks offered the catalyst for students to engage in emotional vulnerability and openness during these circle dialogues. While not everyone was required to participate, we had full participation each evening.

Trainer lesson learned: I have been learning that I learn and process effectively in circle processes. If a safe container is created, I feel the ability to become vulnerable and speak my truth. I also feel like one of my strengths as a trainer is facilitating these processes without much prior planning. However, an area of growth for me as a trainer is to include a wider variety of activities to educate. I can do this by exploring learning styles more and infusing this variety into the planning phase.

Ritual was infused in many other aspects of the program as well. Each participant had a leadership role, which was rotated daily. The ritual of performing the leadership role and debriefing the effectiveness of those roles, became a space where every day routine was transformed into more collective action. Another daily ritual that was used on this program was eating together. Before our meal we would gather as a group, read from a quote book and offer a moment of gratitude. Surprisingly, the students responded well to this ritual and our mealtimes were fun, inclusive and peaceful.

Trainer lesson learned: Our closing ceremony was probably the most powerful activity of the entire program. I believe in the power of creating ceremony as a unique exercise for creating and envisioning social change. I enjoy crafting a quality ceremony and think that the role of spirit is undervalued in all of our current political, educational, social and economic systems. One caveat that is important to consider is to be aware of cultural appropriation when planning ceremonies.

In settings of conflict and violence, identity becomes rigid and one specific identity is usually salient, subsequently being defended and/or attacked. In an analysis of sexual violence, gender identity and sexual identity are two salient identities that become defined by rigid roles and stereotypes. These rigid and socially constructed role identities are harmful to everyone, including young boys and men. The lens of ritual, allows space for designing this program to be potentially transformational for individual participants and the group as a whole. The concept of a rite of passage is one that has been used to socialize young men in many different cultures around the world for generations. On this program the rite of passage encouraged mutual respect, nurturing care, vulnerability and consent.

Trainer lesson learned: I have often underestimated the complexity of consent, respect, care, nurture. It has become important for my understanding of social justice to see that these are all practices and thus require daily challenge and commitment.

Group norms and managing risk

Lisa Schirch (2004) says, “rites of passage both mark and help transform identities while helping group members make the psychological adjustments needed to adapt to new social constellations” (p. 127). To prevent sexual violence and heal our broken identities truly requires new social constellations, impactful and positive transformation of harmful social norms and identity salience based on superiority over others. Positive tone setting from the beginning of a training program such as Backpacking Brothers is a key element to movement and

transformation. On an adventure education course, such as this one, tone setting involves a blend of co-creating group norms and managing risk.

Risk management is a cornerstone of adventure education, and arguably any form of education. On a program where participants are swimming, hiking, camping and doing other outdoor activities, a certain level of physical risk is automatically assumed by everyone. Risk management is about minimizing or mitigating the probability that someone will get injured, it is not eliminating or trying to eliminate risk (Hattie et al, 1997). In fact, participants are encouraged to make healthy decisions about risk. John Paul Lederach (2005) explores four disciplines of peacebuilding, of which risk is the fourth discipline. In his discussion of how risk can light the path toward peace he says, "Risk is mystery. It requires a journey. Risk means we take a step toward and into the unknown. By definition, risk accepts vulnerability and lets go of the need to a priori control the process or outcome of human affairs" (p. 163). This exploration of risk offers much fertile ground for envisioning a world free of violence, beginning with the relinquishment of the desire and drive to control other people.

There were many tools used to create a risk management plan for this course. Certain areas of physical and emotional risk management were planned and controlled by the leaders of the trip. However, the idea of risk management was shared extensively with participants and offered them a way to think about individual and group decisions from a more collective and responsible perspective. Physical risk and discussions and plans on how to avoid physical injury, open the door to re-conceptualizing emotional safety and vulnerability as well. In her article on managing conflict in the classroom bell hooks (2010) echoes the core principle of adventure risk management when she says, "if we rather think of safety as knowing how to cope with risk, then we open the possibility that we can be safe even in situations where there is disagreement

and even conflict” (p. 87). Risk management looked at with this lens is a comprehensive training design task, that must be considered on a physical and emotional level.

Trainer lesson learned: I am beginning to realize how risk management can be a core piece of training design for social justice educators. One of the ways I would have been more pro-active in using risk management in the design of this program, is by taking more training risks. I have skills such as speaking Spanish and playing music that I could have infused in many areas of the course. I could have also pushed myself towards theater and play activities that would have been vulnerable and risky for me. This type of risk taking (and all types of healthy risk taking) can encourage participants towards confidence, security, transformation and ultimately liberation.

One of the most important and powerful ways to manage risk appropriately is by setting group norms. During Backpacking Brothers, group norms were a critical part of any of the successes we had as a training team. In the course of this particular program and other trainings I have had the opportunity to facilitate or participate in, I have seen the power of co-created group norms to shape movement, transformation and change. As mentioned earlier, one of the main tasks of an effective sexual violence prevention program is changing the social norms that support violence. Violence and power over is often motivated by belittling others in the pursuit of individual gain. “When people align their individual intelligences in shared inquiries or undertakings, instead of using their intelligence to undermine each other in the pursuit of individual status, they are much more able to generate collective intelligence” (Atlee, 2003, p. 55).

Trainer lesson learned: Taking the time to co-create group processes, to hear each person’s voice, to consider everyone’s needs is a challenge for me. This involves a key piece of time management that I have known for a long time is one of my areas of growth. What could I have focused on in the design work that could have led us more towards a co-created learning environment? This is an area that still feels largely uncharted and I want to develop more.

On an adventure education program, it is especially important to establish group norms that have the power to move the group through challenging circumstances and focus on shared

challenge. We used several methods to establish group norms on Backpacking Brothers. The first activity we used was the five finger contract, an established series of norms that can easily be recalled throughout the course of the program in order to highlight when group members are not adhering to the norms. Each finger represents a different value or norm agreed upon and followed by all group members (Frank, 2004). **(See Appendix VIII for the full activity)**

The benefit of this activity is that it is easy to implement and does not require any materials. However, it is important to spend some time crafting norms as a group as well as this is an already structured set of rules. There were several participants who had used these group norms on other programs and were able to utilize them and hold others accountable. This allowed for more buy-in from the other participants. On the program, we did this through a bandana that we collectively wrote norms on. Some examples of the norms the group wrote on the bandana were integrity, confidentiality and respect. The group then selected a person to hold and wear the bandana. That person could choose to pass on the bandana to someone they felt was struggling, or not following the norms in some way, or was being especially supportive and respectful. Needless to say, that was one smelly bandana at the end of the five-day program.

Backpacking Brothers: Reflections and moving forward

Developmental concerns and learning styles

One of the benefits of adventure education is that there are many resources available to design training programs, that respond to and meet the needs of many different types of participant learning styles. An outdoor classroom where participants can move through group challenge tasks with a variety of natural obstacles, tell stories, do role-plays, sit in solo

reflection time by a stream or build a fire together and process the day, allows space for many different types of learning, sharing and teaching. On Backpacking Brothers there was usually engagement in the evening circle process from each participant. They had been allowed to play and move and learn in ways that seemed fun and not monotonous nor overwhelming. The factory atmosphere of schools, stifles play, movement, creativity and imagination. We need all of these things to prevent sexual violence, and they are also an essential part of being a child.

Trainer lesson learned: I am recognizing the immense importance of play in social justice work, and also recognize that this is a large area of growth for me as a trainer. I am always ready to dive right into the hard, deep conversations and taking participants to really vulnerable places. Previously, in my work as a trainer I have not seen the importance of energizers, team-builders, icebreakers and free play in general to break down barriers and create movement.

Middle school is a period of many important cognitive, emotional, social, spiritual and physical changes. Infusing regular adventure education components into standard middle school curriculum, would allow a response to many of these vital changes. While the entire educational system requires reform and transformation, the changes middle school students are going through need to be attended to with more holistic, caring approaches. This is an area where Our VOICE's two adventure education programs could work closely with the public school system. The county has launched an initiative to focus on resiliency that uses a compassionate schools model. Adventure education and programs that focus on education aimed at compassion, would be an excellent complement to this model.

Sexual violence, dating violence and pre-cursors to these types of violence are occurring at alarming rates in middle schools. This is why targeted, innovative and holistic prevention approaches are so important at this developmental level (and at all developmental levels). Some of the most common forms of sexual violence at the middle school level according to a nationwide study are unwanted sexual touching, sexual rumors and comments, and

homophobic name calling (Orchowski et al, 2015). While leading Backpacking Brothers, we witnessed each of these types of violence at different levels of action. These types of violence are so ingrained in the everyday lives of middle school students, and it is important to acknowledge that young girls are not the only targets for these types of violence. These types of violence become challenging obstacles for young boys, inhibiting connection and vulnerability. It was a training challenge to balance a zero-tolerance policy for all forms of violence while creating teachable moments that allowed for group and individual growth. Some of the feedback we got from the students was that we did not draw enough of a hardline and let some things slip, while we drew a hardline on other behaviors. This is one of the many reasons it would be ideal for the program to be built as a mentorship program, where each young man would have an adult mentor. For next year's program we will at least strive for a higher instructor to student ratio.

Kids ages 12-15 go through an intense stage of identity development, during which they explore and experiment with various identity roles (Erikson, 1968). On this trip, the group connected quickly, and new friendships were formed easily. This was extremely positive for creating a sense of community, however pressure to fit in also manifested quickly. One evening in our circle check-ins we had a discussion about romantic relationships. Several students were forthcoming about the multiple partners they had been with. Others, although uncomfortable, followed suit and talked about the girls they had been with. Only a few students were confident enough to say they had never flirted with anyone, kissed anyone or had a girlfriend. From my perspective (most likely biased), the students did not create a safe container for any gay, bi or other queer experiences to be voiced.

The sexual identity of middle school boys presents an opportune platform for discussing power and control and how it manifests into violence. It was clear that the boy with the most relationships, was the most revered and had the most power in the group, even if he was bending the truth. The heteronormative language used by participants also made it clear that romantic relationships with girls were the norm. This program was really only able to scratch the surface of some large components of education that are being left unattended in most public schools in this geographic region. For the prevention of sexual violence, it is vital that sexual identity at the middle school level be stewarded with empathy and respect.

Trainer lesson learned: One of my trainer areas of growth is confidence in my own voice and identity, especially my gay identity. I did not share my sexual identity with participants, mostly because I did not know their parents and families. I am still unclear whether or not that was a wise decision. What is clear is that I can be more vulnerable and confident in that vulnerability with participants.

Evaluation

Trainer lesson learned: Evaluation is the first and last thing that should be considered as trainers and program designers. I did not understand or carry this out adequately from the beginning of the visioning and planning phase. This program would have benefited from a more thoughtful evaluation process.

With these limitations and learnings in mind, there are some elements of evaluation I have been considering as I transition out of the organization and think about next year's program. One of the big picture community pieces of evaluation is a county-wide initiative to use the social-ecological model to look at risk factors for sexual and domestic violence. This is being led by the Buncombe County Sexual and Domestic Violence Task force, of which Our VOICE is a lead facilitator. I had the opportunity to present to this task force about some of the successes and challenges of Backpacking Brothers and the importance of streamlining our

evaluation efforts to understand the areas where we can collectively address risk factors and build protective factors.

The social ecological model provides a useful framework for understanding the impacts of the program. As I was designing and planning the program, I thought about risk and protective factors a lot, yet did not specifically use the social ecological model to evaluate the program. For an example of how I have been using this model during the follow-up of the program, in writing this paper, and in presenting this model of evaluation to the sexual and domestic violence task force, see **Appendix IX**.

There were several other strategies for evaluation during the course of the program. The parents filled out a survey following the course, the trip leaders also filled out a feedback form, and the students wrote evaluations. There is also much potential for developing evaluation indicators through the pre-planning meetings and verbal feedback captured from participants and leaders during the course.

The standard evaluation tool for primary prevention programming are pre and post-tests, which measure participants' knowledge of sexual violence and normally measure their acceptance of certain attitudes such as rape myths. As I continue to develop the facilitator's manual for this program, I am also working to create pre and post-test surveys that would measure qualitative and quantitative knowledge increase and attitude change.

Connection

Sustainability is the ability to sustain, in this case to sustain Backpacking Brothers, financially, logistically and organizationally. Connection is a word I find more useful than the overused word sustainability. Connection is more accepting and fluid of the way change happens naturally. This is why it is so crucial that we slow down and listen to those connections.

The purpose of this program is engagement, bringing folks, particularly young men, into the movement. To do this, we must build connectedness, a theme that has emerged at various points previously within this paper.

The most viable way I know how to sustain and connect this program is to network with other local agencies, entities, organizations, foundations, healers, wilderness therapists, school counselors, businesses, musicians, guides, outdoor enthusiasts, educators, artists, spiritual communities, mentorship groups and others to build a prevention movement based around adventure education. I have already had the opportunity to connect with some amazing people doing work that easily relates directly to violence prevention. I believe there is potential in deepening our practice of training community educators and leaders in the complexities of sexual violence prevention. One of the projects I have also been working to design and will be implemented in the spring of 2017 is a train the trainer program for adult educators and leaders. I have developed a toolkit and training manual that will be used for these sessions. This will deepen our relationships and connections to many important individuals and organizations that have the potential to create social change. Some of the organizations that were included in the design and implementation of Backpacking Brothers can be found in **Appendix X**. I have also included organizations that I reached out to and got a late response, or did not reach out to at all, yet feel would be a good fit for next year and beyond.

Our VOICE will also have to put energy and funding into making this program connected to the broader anti-violence movement in Buncombe County. Coupled with the rock climbing program for young girls, we have had discussions about focusing our summer prevention education initiatives on these two programs. The organization is committed to being the leaders and innovators of prevention in Western North Carolina.

There are and have been extreme challenges to working closely with local school systems. This is important to mention, as a strong and sustained relationship must be built with the two school systems in order for this and all of Our VOICE's programming to be effective. Some of the challenges have been internal such as capacity, funding, time and others. Many of the challenges are external such as education around sex being widely taboo, schools being on strict time schedules because of testing and meeting common core standards and administrators, parents, and teachers unwilling to acknowledge the depth and importance of the problem of sexual violence. Adventure education offers hope for renewed engagement with the school system and involving parents, which is of utmost importance to holistic education. For a deeper discussion of some of the lessons, questions, limitations and visions for the future for Our VOICE and my professional path see **Appendix XI**.

On finding voice and spirit

Spirit and voice

A recurring theme for me throughout this work is locating voice, spirit and understanding my various identity locations as they connect to this movement. One of the ways I am working on this understanding is to have the confidence to believe in myself and to hear and listen deeply to where my thoughtscape come from. Parallel to this listening, I strive to listen more deeply to the voices of those most controlled, oppressed, shackled, bound and tethered to systems that do not support their wholeness. I think an important part of spiritual work is to find creative and constructive ways to move those voices toward the center of the movement. I am still looking for constructive ways to practice that, and some of that movement

can happen by asking who has been featured at the center of the movements we are working in and why they have been positioned there.

Another important aspect of locating spirit and voice while throwing our hearts, minds and bodies into the movement to end injustice is to be aware and wary of self-righteousness. As a trainer, I believe this to be an especially challenging task. My challenge to truly foster co-creation in training settings, is met with the desire to stand-out, to be the best, most intelligent, most capable social justice activist and educator there is. I will actively seek out strategies to cultivate humility, un-comfortability and vulnerability. I will strive to place myself in circumstances that foster challenge and growth, rather than fame and notoriety. On the opposite side of self-righteousness, I hope also to be aware of not shaming, blaming or judging myself or others.

Much of this consciousness raising of mindful awareness can be achieved through meditation, or looking deeply at the origin of my own thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and actions. Meditation has been a challenging, yet helpful tool for me to understand many of the complexities of social injustice which live within me and will forever be a part of me. It has allowed me to deepen my understanding of my own privileges and the spiritual manifestations of my own social power. Meditation allows me to dig into every cell that makes up the boundaries of my body. It allows me to confront suffering and to not become overwhelmed by it. It also allows me to feel more rooted to the earth, the air and everything.

Many activists and social justice educators that I have talked with about spirituality seem to have some aversions to its practices. However, I believe that spirituality offers us another lens with which to view social justice and training. I hope this lens can deepen my compassion and understanding of others. Spiritual practice is not an answer to our internal or

external problems, yet it offers a powerful resource for breathing through problems in a way that fosters connections and leads us on the path towards healing. The Dalai Llama (2001), affirms this by delineating an important distinction between spirituality and religion when he says,

“Spirituality I take to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit—such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony, which bring happiness to both self and others. While ritual and prayer, along with questions of nirvana and salvation are directly connected with religious faith, these inner qualities need not be, however. There is thus no reason why the individual should not develop them, even to a high degree, without recourse to any religious or metaphysical belief system. This is why I sometimes say religion is something we can perhaps do without. What we cannot do without are these basic spiritual qualities” (p. 19).

Conclusion

As I move into winter, looking toward Vermont iciness, I commit to non-closure. The stories, traumas, questions, and curiosities follow me like the wind; like a candle. This work is truly ancestral and so many brave people have embarked upon its completion, which represents the utter ruin of violence and pain.

What I am looking for is authentic experience. I want to live that experience within my every step and breath, and hear it in the voices of everyone. Can the voice of everyone be heard if we are zooming so fast? We sit in our glass and plastic isolation chambers, and fail to experience the full moon rise in red and orange glow. The bright autumn leaves fall and turn

into powder, earth, food, stone, soil, life. Fall like feathers and like wraiths, like silent dewdrop.
Eat together. Laugh together. Be warm together. Be silent together. Fear together. Be
vulnerable together. Be individual together. Be grateful together. Practice reciprocity together.
Practice love together. Practice. Practice. Practice.

The tools and resources of violence originate with practice. Socialization.
Marginalization. Exploitation. Indoctrination. Recitation. Sanctification. Reification.
Beatification. Objectification. Isolation. The tools of peace also must originate in practice.
Breath. Ease. Softening. Nurture. Care. Respect. Love. Compassion. Peace. Tranquility. Silence.
Solidarity. Pride. Humility. Light. Hope.

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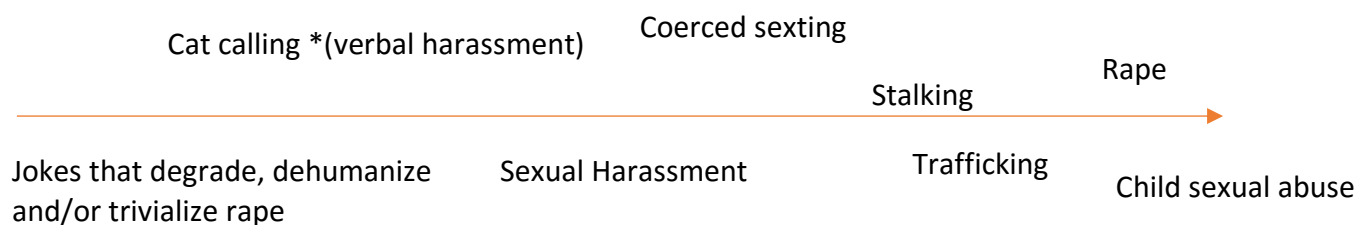
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Appendix I: The Spectrum of Sexual Violence

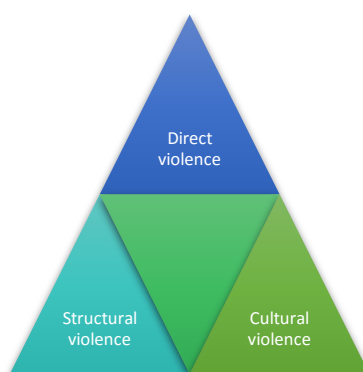
This is a teaching tool that can be applied to many different contexts. While it is a simplified model, it begins to open participants up to the idea that there are many forms and types of sexual violence and they fall on a spectrum from more violent to less violent. It also highlights the importance that all forms of sexual violence (from making rape jokes to rape) are interrelated.



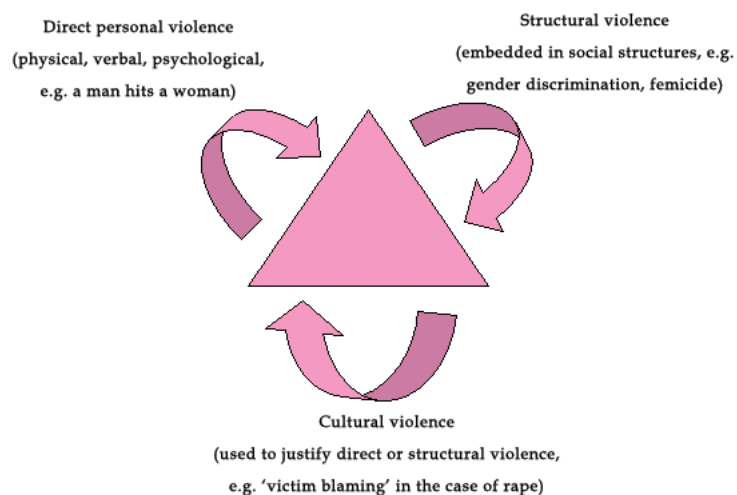
Appendix II: The triangle of violence

The triangle of violence is a teaching tool for understanding the many different types of violence. This is an important part of anti-violence work, and trainers will benefit from presenting participants with several different learning models of this triangle.

1. The simplified triangle of violence. This can be used to provide definitions and beginning to fill in the different types of violence.



2. This triangle shows how all forms of violence are interrelated and can be used to deepen participants understanding of the three forms of violence.



Appendix III: Specific learnings from Backpacking Brothers as applied to the social-ecological model

Individual level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were many misconceptions and questions about rape and sexual assault among the participants. • I would include activities and discussions about boundaries and setting appropriate boundaries. I think this is an important lesson developmentally that is connected to the prevention of sexual violence. • Many participants had expressed experiencing traumatic events and violence in their families, at school or in their community. In the facilitator’s manual that accompanies the program, I plan to include trauma-informed activities trainers can use to ground students and connect them to community resources for further support. • Beliefs and attitudes about sexual orientation and gender are changing rapidly with societal movement around these ideas. Middle school students are developmentally ready to have complex conversations about sex, violence, and oppression. I would have pushed them even further to dive into how critical and present issues of oppression connect to sexual violence. • Almost across the board, and in other middle schools that I visit, the boys’ main passions are video games. I would model future programming around more simulation, role play and play in general in order to mimic the powerful influences of video games and other social media on their beliefs and attitudes.
Relationship level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building cohesive, lasting relationships among young men is a key component of this work. • Some are part of a local men’s empowerment and mentoring programming. However, none of them seemed to discuss their relationships in a way that is emotionally nourishing nor vulnerable. • There seems to be lots of isolation, even though most of them have a large relationship “support” network through their families and friends. • There was rather emotionless discussion of all of these heavy social issues (the need to create a more vulnerable/open space for healing on the program and in their daily lives is an important relationship piece of this work). • I would have had more intentional talks about sex and sexuality, gaining a broader understanding of what they had done and the concerns they have. • The need to continually work with parents, school counselors, teachers, school Title IX coordinators, and others to create comprehensive programs that address prevention and response. • Listening to extremely intimate stories of abuse, incarceration, divorce, domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse, rural poverty, unstable housing status, unemployment and large numbers of siblings made me aware of the precedence that risk factors take before protective factors can become the foundation. Many families that I work with in all of my trainings are participants in the systems of care offered at the Buncombe County Family Justice Center (FJC). While those systems become more streamlined and easier for folks to navigate, there is no system of prevention and transforming oppression in place, as of yet.
Community level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asheville and Buncombe county has a mix of progressive, even radical citizens and conservative, fundamentalist Christian citizens.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is also an extremely high level of economic inequity, especially between urban and rural people and black and white people (urban and white people being privileged by higher levels of economic wealth). • The county has seen enormous increases in undocumented immigrants fleeing violence and persecution in Central America. North Carolina is in the top ten for total number of undocumented immigrants. Related to this and many other issues, North Carolina is also in the top ten states for human trafficking cases (Polaris Project, 2016). • I would have considered carefully crafting our conversations around privilege and power around the specific issues and points of conflict we see in our community. I have previously made conversations about power and privilege generalized. Each community's context is unique, and the Blue Ridge mountains have an extremely unique history of violence, oppression and social inequality. The way this type of history manifests at the individual and relationship levels is an important prevention piece, that is still largely missing from the local analysis and intervention.
Societal level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The images and messages from social media, video games and porn that students are seeing everyday are extremely violent and often sexually violent. I would have learned more about specific outlets that students use to get these images and address them directly. • Sex education and sexual health is still a largely controversial issue in the North Carolina education system. The Healthy Youth Act of 2009 was the first time that sex education could be taught in public schools (North Carolina General Assembly, 2009). However, the act makes it explicit that abstinence-only education must be taught first and as the preferred method for health and safety. • The criminal justice system in this region of North Carolina is full of victim-blaming, gender oppression (i.e. HB2¹) and legal language that keeps perpetrators from being prosecuted. This was addressed on the program, and participants responded with outrage to know that our society puts few rapists in jail.
Natural level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a generally low knowledge of the natural world (everything from identifying plants and geographical features to the principles of Leave No Trace to backcountry skills). We did our best to integrate these skills into our discussions of sexual violence. I would love to reflect and practice more with different ways to connect this level to the other more "familiar" levels. • I would definitely have infused more activities that encouraged mindful awareness, self-reflection, solo time with nature, solo hikes and general opportunities to be with and see nature in a different way. However, I think that students were able to see the natural world with a new lens than they ever have before.

¹ This harmful law prevents local governments from passing nondiscrimination protections for the LGBT community, taking away protections some communities have had for years. With no state law protecting LGBT people, it makes discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity legal across the state. It also forces many transgender people to use restrooms that don't match their gender identity, putting them in harm's way. Remarkably, the law also took away the right to sue for employment discrimination based on race, religion, sex and other categories that were protected by state law, making our state one of only two with no right to sue in state court for discrimination. Retrieved from: <http://turnoutnc.org/>

Appendix IV: Act like a man box activity

(Created by Paul Kivel and the Oakland Men's Project)

This exercise can be a lead-in for discussion around multiple issues. The facilitator could concentrate on sexism and its relationship to domestic and sexual violence or use the exercise to look at how sexism, heterosexism and transphobia are related to one another.

Also explain that while we are looking at the dominant mainstream ideas of gender we want to acknowledge that gender roles may vary depending on ethnicity, culture, class, ability and family etc. Let participants know that in this exercise we are going to ask them to say words that are offensive to some people.

Draw two boxes on the board.

"Act Like a Man" Box

1. Ask if anyone has ever been told or heard someone being told to "act like a man". Write "Act like a man" on top of the first box. Ask "what does it mean to "act like a man" – what are the expectations (which may not be the reality).

Participants can be invited to come to the board and fill in the boxes or you can do it as a brainstorm. Participants can also do the handout as individuals or in pairs/small groups first. Remember that this exercise seeks to look at stereotypes, not at individual behavior.

How are men supposed to be different from women? - Stronger, tougher, in control
 What feelings is a "real man" supposed to have? - Anger, superiority, confidence
 How do "real men" express their feelings? - Yelling, fighting, silence
 How are "real men" supposed to act sexually? - Aggressive, dominant, with women

2. What are names applied to persons outside the box? (Write these outside the box and around the box)

Wimp, fag, queer, pussy, gay

Note: These words are important to say and to write down, but ask participants to answer this question calmly and respectfully as possible.

3. What things happen physically to people outside the box? (write these outside the box and around the box)

Fights, beat up, harassed, teased, abused, ignored

"Act Like a Lady" Box

1. Ask if anyone has ever been told or heard someone being told to "act like a lady". Write "Act like a lady" on top of the second box. Ask, "What does it mean to "act like a lady" – what are the expectations (which may not be the reality).

Participants can be invited to come to the board and fill in the boxes or you can do it as a brainstorm. Participants can also do the handout as individuals or in pairs/small groups first. Remember that this exercise seeks to look at stereotypes, not at individual behavior.

How are women supposed to be different from men? - Nicer, weaker, more gossip
 What feelings is a "real woman" supposed to have? - Fear, sadness, low self-esteem
 How do "real women" express their feelings? - Crying, screaming, hysteria
 How are "real women" supposed to act sexually? - Follow the man, don't sleep around.

2. What are names applied to persons outside the box? (Write these outside the box and around the box)

Dyke, tomboy, slut, ho, whore, lesbian

Note: These words are important to say and to write down, but ask participants to answer this question calmly and respectfully as possible.

3. What things happen physically to people outside the box? (Write these outside the box and around the box)

Harassed, abused, ignored, raped, bad reputation

Reflection Questions: Homophobia/Heterosexism

(You could also use some of the questions in the next section)

- What do you notice about the influence of male and female stereotypes on sexism, heterosexism, and transphobia? (You may want to break this into three separate questions.)
- How do the stereotypes listed from the boxes relate to stereotypes for straight and queer people?

Reflection Questions: Sexism and Domestic and Sexual Violence

- What is the implication of the names that men get called?
- How many men here are in the box all of the time?
- How many of the women here are inside this box all of the time?
- What should a "man" do if he gets called these names? Would that put him back inside the box?
- If a man stays inside the box does he generally avoid getting called names and harassed etc.?
- If a woman stays inside the box does she stay safe? Are women inside the box ever raped or abused by their partners? (Yes) What does that say about the suggestion that women stay inside the box? Does it really bring them safety or power?
- Which box has more power?

- How do these boxes contribute to the existence of domestic and sexual violence?
- How do we change these societal expectations?

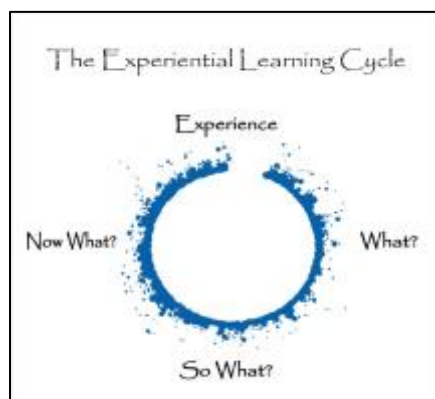
Key Points

- These are expectations by society and are not realistic.
- Men that stay inside the box are generally (though not always) safe from the harassment that occurs outside the box.
- Men who leave the box are accused of being “women” or “gay”
- Men who are accused of being outside the box could retaliate in an aggressive fashion and then put themselves back into the box.
- Women who stay inside the box are not “safe” as promised but are raped or abused as often as women outside the box. The only benefit being that they may be believed by society more often than women outside the box.

"Act Like a Man" Box			
Verbal Abuse:			Physical Abuse:
wimp	tough	have money	hit/beat up
girl	aggressive	never ask for help	teased
sissy	competitive	angry	isolated
mama's boy	in control	anger isolation sadness	rejected
nerd	no feelings	love confusion connection	forced to play sports
fag	don't cry	low self-worth curiosity resentment	sexual assault
bitch	take charge	responsible	
mark	don't make mistakes	take it	
punk	have sex with women	don't back down succeed	

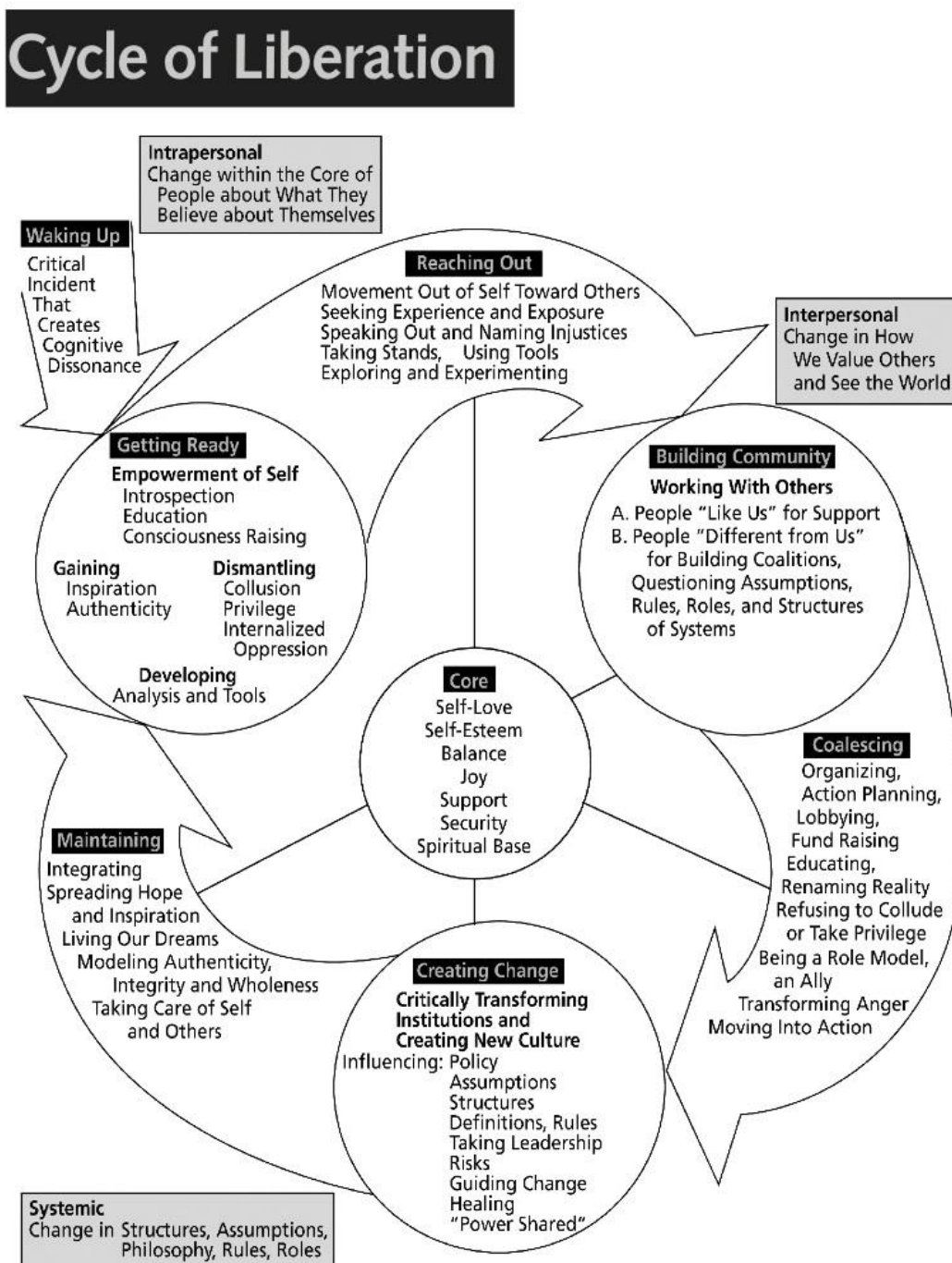
Appendix V: Experiential Learning Cycle

The model pictured below is the simple version of the experiential learning cycle that was used in the design and implementation of Backpacking Brothers. It offers a resource for processing experiences in many different types of educational settings.



What?	So what?	Now what?
Comfort zone, learning zone, panic zone (a great activity to determine where students feel individually comfortable in certain physical and emotional spaces)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding where each person lies on spectrum of comfort about both physical/emotional vulnerability (i.e. how easy is it for you to talk about intimate relationships) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use throughout course as teachable moments (i.e. I remember you being in the panic zone about seeing spiders on the trail...) • More self-reflection about attitudes about sex, sexual violence, relationships etc.
First sexual violence discussion (SV 101, rape myths, victim blaming, very brief intro to rape culture)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What things do you already know about sexual violence? • Why is this conversation important? • What are rape myths? • What is rape culture? How am I involved in it? • Spectrum of sexual violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do I know now? • How do I see my actions impacting other people? Is my perception of my impact different than when I began learning about his? • What rape myths do I believe? Are those accurate beliefs? How can I change those? • How can I be more aware of my involvement in rape culture?

Appendix VII: The Cycle of Liberation



Source: Developed by Bobbie Harro

Appendix VIII: Five Finger Contract

This is an activity to set group norms. Each finger of the hand represents a way that we can all take responsibility for the safety and inclusiveness for the group. This is an example of the meaning you can give to each finger. You can also have the students name what they want each finger to represent.



Thumb: Celebrate everyone and the effort of each group member.

Index finger: Take responsibility for personal actions and attitudes.

Middle finger: No put downs.

Ring finger: Active participation.

Pinky: Only use "I" statements and speak from personal experience.

Appendix IX: Evaluation indicators using the social-ecological model

Level of social ecology	Evaluation	Indicators
Natural world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants understand and practice Leave No Trace. • Participants understand the history and importance of Pisgah National Forest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge increase around these factors. • Schools including environmental education into curriculum.
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video games less violent. • Sexual violence is not tolerated in the community. • Police and justice system are victim-centered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media literacy initiatives and trainings. • Public service announcements and social norms campaigns. • Police and criminal justice personnel are trained in trauma informed response.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual and domestic violence task force understands primary prevention. • Local school systems (via Our VOICE) implement sexual violence prevention programming. • Local school systems have more trained counselors and Title IX coordinators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SV/DV task force trainings. • Agreements with school systems to get all students prevention education. • Trainings led by Our VOICE to train service providers in the school system.
Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents of participants actively engaged. • Co-created group norms followed throughout program. • Participants understand the elements of healthy relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and frequency of communications and meetings with parents. • Participants' perceptions of group norms. • Knowledge of components of a healthy relationship.
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants understand rape myths. • Participants understand consent, its complexities and have communication skills to practice it. • Participants have an understanding of all of the different forms of violence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open conversations about sex and sexual violence. • Knowledge increase of the falsehoods of rape myths. • Clear articulation of meaning of consent. • Clear articulation of rape culture.

Appendix X: Partner organizations to connect with for program improvement

Organization	Type
Journeymen	Young men's mentorship group. Their main purpose is promoting authentic masculinity.
My Daddy Taught Me That	Young men's group for kids living in low-income housing. Mostly African American and Latinx.
Buncombe County and Asheville City Schools	The two county school systems. I worked closely with many different folks within these two systems.
Pisgah Field School	Nature interpretation NGO
Asheville School	Loaned all of the gear free of charge (tents, sleeping bags, water bottles, flashlights etc.)
Possible organizations for the future	Type
Green Life grocer	Local grocery store, that would be a possible food donor
REI	Outdoor cooperative that has a stewardship program for local programming and grant-giving
Michael Ismerio	Local educator, craftsman and advocate that wants to partner with the program. Part of a for-profit organization called Forest Floor Wilderness Educators.
Camplify	Non-profit organization that has adventure education programming for at-risk youth in neighboring Henderson County
Juvenile Justice	The Juvenile Justice system was interested in finding ways to partner this year in order to recruit participants. Next year the program will be better equipped to partner.
In real life (IRL)	An after-school empowerment program run by the Asheville City School Foundation.
Asheville Parks and Recreation	Active parks department, as well as six community centers that are in traditionally black neighborhoods throughout the city.
University of North Carolina at Asheville	Many opportunities for collaboration. For example: Outdoor programs, Women and Gender Studies, Title IX office etc.
Outward Bound	Outward Bound's North Carolina headquarters is in Asheville. I did not contact them, but they could be an excellent potential partner.

Appendix XI: Our VOICE moving forward and lessons and questions for social justice educators and peacebuilders

Our VOICE is currently undergoing unprecedented growth, and subsequently enormous cultural changes. The organization has moved from an old, stand-alone house with bright windows, artwork, plants and comfy couches to a county-funded government building with cubicles and counseling offices without any windows. We share the building with other public and private organizations, including the domestic violence agency, child protective services, foster care, adult protective services, the police department's special victims unit, a legal aid service and the sexual assault nurse examiner program from the hospital. The Family Justice Center is intended to support survivors of violence with comprehensive services in one centralized location with a streamlined process for assessing needs and accessing services.

Two months after physically moving our comfy grassroots operation to this sterile place of fire marshal codes and bare walls, we had an all-staff retreat at a beautiful mountain lake house for two full days. The staff at the time of the retreat represented a mix of several people who had just begun with Our VOICE and had never worked in the old office and others who had worked for years or months at the old office. There was a sincere expression of grief at the collective acknowledgment of our instantly and permanently transformed culture. The cornerstone of the former organizational culture was nurture and support of self-care practices as revolutionary acts.

We have all had to learn how to survive in spaces and systems that were not made for us to survive within, were not made for us to be whole within. As we coalesce our agency with law enforcement, criminal justice, and healthcare, we are closer than ever to the grinding

systems that say that some can survive and others cannot, that some deserve more than others. Thus, we must find ways to take care of ourselves and continue to make this care not selfish, but rebellious and political. One of the ideas for sustaining ourselves and taking care of our nurture-centered culture was to practice daily small acts of rebellion. We have been practicing these by organizing potlucks, hanging artwork, having meetings outside, bringing pets to work and other actions that challenge the sterility and walled-in(ness) of the new space. I am left with many learnings and new knowledge around social justice education and peacebuilding. I am also left with many questions, lessons, limitations, and hopes for future explorations.

Lessons:

- Transformation and liberation require many different theoretical and practical lenses to be applied to a specific problem area.
- Context matters. Geographies matter. Culture matters.
- Personal change is an integral part of social change (and this requires lifelong learning and a commitment to humility).
- Storytelling and personal narrative can be a powerful catalyst for transformation, co-creation of safe space and building empathy.
- Intersectionality is about building connections between identity locations and deepening our understanding of our own experiences and the experiences of others.
- We must believe in the potential for envisioning a violence free world- even if it is not a feasible reality.

- Challenge and pushing ourselves outside of our comfort zones is essential for social change.

Questions:

- In what ways is the men's movement to end violence problematic? How should male privilege best be leveraged? In what ways can the authentic or healthy masculinity movement contribute to ending rape culture?
- How can we as trainers make the practices of peace just as attractive as the practices of violence?
- How can we include/utilize survivor stories?
- Is violence preventable? (a recurring question)
- Is it available to everyone to tap into passion? Or is this a platform of privilege?
- Are we able to heal and prevent from within systems that perpetuate, fund and are immersed in state violence (i.e. the criminal justice system, the prison system, the police, healthcare etc.)?

Limitations:

- The transference of practical skills is limited, because the transference of knowledge of sexual violence, gender and power is an initial step. Practical skills around sex positivity, bystander intervention, and healthy decision making, would be a next step for this type of programming.
- Similar to this limitation, I want to learn to offer students more practical skills around dismantling systems of oppression.

- This program and our Climbing Towards Confidence program perpetuate a harmful paradigm of the gender binary. They do not offer space for trans* and/or gender non-conforming participants. Through a new position, the agency is working on this limitation in all of its programming.
- Adventure and outdoor education experiences have traditionally been created to cater to wealthy, white, able-bodied, and male-identified folks. By not creating critical dialogue around inclusion in the adventure education industry, there is an enormous barrier for a non-profit attempting to work on a social justice issue via this educational medium.
- The program's lack of deep engagement with parents and school systems is an important limitation to consider how to mitigate. Many parents express a desire to learn more about how to talk to their kids about sexual violence and rape culture. They often discuss a lack of time as a barrier for being able to participate more.
- The instructor to student ratio was a limitation. It would have been beneficial to have more instructors to create a safer container. However, I am left with many questions about gender and correct number of instructors.
- This program worked largely at the individual and relationship level. Our prevention programming is moving towards a deeper analysis of all levels of the social-ecology, and considering ways we can put pressure on the power structures in order to change systems. Some of the main systems we hope to change in order to promote prevention and accountability are schools and the criminal justice system.

Future explorations:

- I would love to deepen my knowledge and understanding on the dynamics and meanings of power.
- I also hope to continue learning about gender identity and sexual orientation and using a queer lens to look at social and personal issues. I would also like to study non-western constructs of gender and meaning making. I am intrigued by the anthropology of gender.
- How statistics are made and their role in social change. I have used a lot of statistics of sexual violence in my presentations and have not gained a deeper understanding of how statisticians make them.
- Risk management is another area of education that has really sparked my attention. I have been looking for research around risk management as a tool for social justice and have not found much literature. However, I believe there is a strong connection that could create a powerful conversation about the role of education and training in social change.
- Learning about and promoting self-care as a revolutionary act.