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**SOCIAL NORMS AND COLLEGE DATING VIOLENCE
AMONG
GAY BISEXUAL TRANSGENDER AND QUEER
(GBTQ) STUDENTS**

by

LA'SHAWN RIVERA
B.S. Bethune Cookman University, 2003

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Applied Sociology
in the College of Sciences
at the University of Central Florida
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ABSTRACT

There is minimal research on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (GBTQ) dating violence on college campuses. This qualitative study was facilitated using focus groups that included students that identified as being GBTQ at the University of Central Florida (UCF). The focus group questions were open ended in a discussion format. Participants were recruited from student organizations like the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Student Union (GLBSU) and Knight Allies on campus. There were a total of 10 students that participated in 2 different focus group sessions. Student's attitudes, thoughts and opinions about dating violence on college campuses in GBTQ relationships were collected. Additionally, participants provided their own definitions of the term dating violence. The students were most comfortable discussing dating violence among heterosexual couples, but did provide their thoughts about this issue in the GBTQ community. The results show that students had differing ideas on what constitutes a dating relationship, and behaviors that are positive and acceptable in GBTQ relationships, but are not considered socially acceptable. One example of this was public displays of affection. In addition, students identified negative behaviors in violent relationships that seem to follow some of the common themes that were found in the current literature. Participants were not aware of current efforts at UCF to address college campus dating violence from a prevention standpoint, but were familiar with intervention services offered on campus. They provided ideas on social messages that would be effective on campus to raise awareness about dating violence in the GBTQ community.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a prevalent issue that affects approximately 1.3 million women and 835,000 male victims every year in the United States (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In 2003, thirty percent of female homicides were perpetrated by male intimate partners (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2003). Furthermore, 76% of women reporting rape or physical assault were victimized by an intimate partner (US Department of Justice, 1998). College age adults are also at risk for victimization at the hands of their intimate partner. For instance, Straus's (2004) study found that nearly one third of respondents had physically assaulted a dating partner in the last year. During that same time frame, a different study reported that out of 648 undergraduate college students, 637 of them disclosed perpetrating dating violence (Kaura & Allen, 2004). That is to say, only 11 respondents in that study did not report perpetrating dating violence.

Same gender couples are also not exempt from this issue. There are reports that suggest that Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (GBTQ) individuals are also experiencing significant rates of intimate partner violence. For example researchers have estimated that there are approximately 500,000 gay men and 50,000 to 100,000 lesbian women that are abused every year (Murphy, 1995). In 1998, the American Bar Association reported that 25-33% ofGBTQ relationships are abusive.

One specific area of IPV that has been receiving more attention recently is dating violence as it has been identified as a common issue on college campuses (Foshee, 1996). Thirty-two percent of college students have experienced dating violence by previous partners (Sellers & Bromley, 1996). Some of the consequences of IPV include physical health problems, unhealthy behaviors (i.e. drug and alcohol use/abuse), economic (i.e. medical, lost productivity),

psychological, and/or social problems (Coker, Smith, Bethea, King, & McKeown, 2000; Campbell et al., 2002; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002). Although researchers are beginning to understand more of the complexities of dating violence, there has been relatively little work examining dating violence among same gender couples particularly with regard to violence prevention.

Given the high prevalence of dating violence and violence among college age adults, prevention programming has been proposed as one way to address IPV and or dating violence. The literature suggests that prevention programs may be effective through education and by changing attitudes, beliefs and behaviors (Wasserman, 2004; National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2008; Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2008; Men Can Stop Rape, 2007). However, most programs have taken a “one size fits all” approach, assuming dating violence is heterosexual and involves male perpetrators and female victims. Consequently they have not considered whether different groups of students require different types of prevention programming.

The purpose of this study is to identify the social norms in dating relationships among LGBTQ students at the University of Central Florida to determine whether existing prevention programming addresses these norms and consequently could be effective in preventing violence in same gender relationships.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Prevalence of Dating Violence among College Students

The previous introduction acknowledges the significance of dating violence among college students, and briefly touches on the prevalence of this problem. To further illustrate the prevalence of this issue existing work will briefly be summarized. In a classic study, Makepeace (1981) reports that 61.5% of college students knew someone that had experienced dating violence, and 21.2% had at least one direct experience with dating violence. This study reveals the difficult reality of violence of which some college dating relationships are comprised.

Existing research on the prevalence of verbal and physical abuse among college students provides further insight into this issue. For example, one study on dating violence among college students evaluated specifically verbally and physically abusive behaviors. Out of the 572 respondents, the results indicated that 82% reported being verbally abusive with a partner in the last year, and 21% reported physically aggressive behaviors towards a partner within the same time frame (Shook, Gerrity, Jurich & Segrist, 2000). Furthermore, an earlier study by Gryl, Stith and Bird (1991) assessed prevalence rates of physical dating violence among college students, by comparing violent relationships to non-violent ones. In reference to initiating violence respondents reported that 51% of the time their partners initiated violence, 41% reported they initiated and 8% reported both individuals were equally responsible (i.e. pushed, slapped, hit with object, kicked, use of lethal weapon, etc.). Finally, DeKeseredy and Kelly (1993) found 62.4% of males and 65.1% of females in their study of 3,142 Canadian college students experienced insults or swearing from partners; and 15.8% of males and 31.3% of females experienced being pushed, shoved or grabbed by a partner. Overall, these studies illustrate that

violent behaviors within college dating relationships are all too common and include physical, verbal and emotional abuse, which seems to be the tragic norm in college dating relationships.

Prevalence of Dating Violence in theGBTQ Community

The proposed study targetsGBTQ relationships so it is significant to review research that specifically identifies this population. Literature onGBTQ dating violence is not as extensive as that for heterosexual relationships. More specifically, the literature that does addressGBTQ relationships tends to focus on adolescents or middle-aged adults. Consequently there are some gaps in the literature in the area ofGBTQ dating violence among college aged adults.

Research that was more specific to dating or intimate partner violence amongGBTQ relationships indicates the prevalence rates are similar to that of heterosexual relationships. For instance, in a study that examined the connection between IPV and HIV/STD inGLBT relationships, 41% of respondents disclosed being forced to have sex with their abusive partners (Heintz & Melendez, 2006). The results of this study also indicated that 21% experienced physical and 32% experienced verbal abuse as a direct result of negotiating safer sex with their partners. In addition to sexual violence and coercion, researchers have also examined physical violence. For example, Halpern, Young, Waller, Martin, and Kupper (2004) found that 1 in 10 adolescents (ages 12-21) in same gender relationships reported physical violence. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) reported in 2006 that there were 3,534 incidents of domestic violence within theGLBT community. This report reflects statistics that were collected from 33 different locations throughout the United States. They also reported that 5-10% of the incidents reported, were from Transgender people. Additionally, Freedner, Freed, Yang, and Austin (2002) conducted a study comparingGLB (Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual) and heterosexual adolescents. They focused their study on five types of dating violence: control,

emotional abuse, being scared for their safety, physical, and sexual abuse. Fifty-percent of bisexual men in this study reported experiencing abuse by both male and female partners. Twenty-seven percent of bisexual females and 19% of lesbians disclosed abuse by male partners or dates in the same study. Participants in this study were also asked whether they knew of resources in their communities that could provide support or assistance, 84% identified at least one resource. This information is valuable, because there may be communities that either lack the resources or might lack the awareness and education on LGBTQ intimate partner violence.

Issues in Dating Violence Research

One of the most common controversies found in the literature as it relates to dating violence research, or more generally IPV is the issue of definition (Jackson, 1999; Gordon, 2000; DeKeseredy, 2000; Brownridge & Halli, 1999; Kilpatrick, 2004; Schwartz, 2000; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1997). The terms, “dating” and “violence” can have various meanings and may seem unclear unless the researcher plainly provides an operational definition (Jackson, 1999). For instance, Jackson (1999) describes how some definitions of the term “dating” only include heterosexual couples but may also be used to refer to courtship. In reference to the term “violence” she illustrates how various researchers have defined this by only including certain types of behaviors (i.e. physical/sexual assault) that may exclude others that are just as important (i.e. emotional/verbal abuse). Therefore, one of the more common recommendations in the literature is for researchers to develop broader and more inclusive definitions (DeKeseredy, 2000; Gordon, 2000; Jackson, 1999; Schwartz, 2000). However, all too often researchers are developing the definition for the research study and assuming that this only applies to heterosexual relationships. Consequently, instead of asking respondents how they would define dating violence a definition is provided to them. This may be particularly problematic for efforts

to develop prevention programming. In order to fill this gap, I facilitated focus groups and asked participants to provide their own definition of what they think dating violence is, and what behaviors they would identify as a part of this definition. Additionally, focus group participants were asked their perspectives of what effective programming would work best.

Domestic and Dating Violence Beliefs and Attitudes

One of the important factors when evaluating dating violence among college students is the underlying topic of belief systems that may support this type of behavior (Nabors, Dietz & Jasinski, 2006). If the research can identify beliefs and attitudes towards dating and/or domestic violence, this can contribute to a better understanding of what the acceptable norms are in college dating relationships. This information can then be used to develop more effective prevention programming. Additionally, identifying where people place blame in incidents of dating or domestic violence reflects the overall culture around this issue. For instance, if a group of people accepted that victims are to blame for intimate partner violence, then the prevention work would need to challenge this culture in order to get participants to really identify how their attitudes or beliefs supports that type of violence. Several researchers have examined belief systems as they relate to intimate partner violence. For example, Bryant and Spencer (2003) found that male university students were more likely to place blame on the victim of domestic violence than female students. Additionally, Carlson (1999) conducted a vignette analysis that examined student beliefs of what constitutes domestic and or dating violence. She found that both the context of the behavior and the student's demographic characteristics influenced abusiveness ratings. In contrast, Carlson and Worden's (2005) study of New York residents found that very few blamed the victim for the abuse and further, they did not think that the cause of violence was due to social or cultural factors (more so individual, relationship, etc.). In

addition, respondents believed that domestic violence was a common issue in their communities and that it affected a significant amount of minority couples (Carlson & Worden, 2005). Results from Nabors et al.'s (2006) college student replication of this study were consistent; however, students in their study were more likely to support victim-blaming statements and statements about the predictability of violence, than respondents in the previous research. Although research investigating attitudes and beliefs about intimate partner violence is certainly important, existing studies remain limited in their ability to provide useful information for prevention programming. In fact, the primary limitation is that the researchers defined dating or domestic violence for their participants rather than allow the participants to provide the definition. Although researcher provided definitions increase the reliability of the work, they are not necessarily a valid tool for the development of prevention programs. Further, these studies begin from the assumption that violence is primarily a function of heterosexual couples. The current study will use a different approach to defining dating or domestic violence (participants will provide definition) and will include Gay, Bisexual, Trans-gendered, and Queer (GBTQ) individuals. By allowing individuals to define the problem in their own words and including individuals from marginalized populations, this study contributes two new pieces of information that can be used in the development of prevention programs for one particular university campus.

Beliefs about the Causes

Investigating the beliefs about the causes of dating violence is imperative because in order to educate a community to prevent the behavior knowing how that community processes why these things are happening in the first place is key. Several researchers have considered differences in beliefs about domestic and dating violence. One study found that the number one believed cause of domestic violence among Latinos was a previous history of violence in the

family during childhood, and the second was jealousy (Klevens et al., 2007). However, Nabors et al. (2006) found that 85% of college students surveyed believed the cause to be alcohol and drugs, or psychological or personality problems among males that are violent towards family. Other researchers have identified that students with a prior history of violence were more likely to place blame on societal views (Bryant & Spencer, 2003). These participants believed that society foster's views that increase domestic violence. Nabors et al. (2006) suggest that it is vital for future research to replicate existing studies on the attitudes and beliefs among college students toward dating and/or domestic violence in order better understand such attitudes and beliefs. By understanding these attitudes or beliefs, this provides the framework necessary to prevent dating violence on college campuses.

Social Norms Approach

The previously reviewed literature provides a framework on the factors that need to be considered when preparing an effective prevention approach. One of those prevention methods that evaluate people's perceptions, opinions, etc. is social norms. Currently, various funding is coming from federal, state and local level non-profit organizations to further social norms research studies (Thombs & Hamilton, 2002; Berkowitz, 2004). In his summary about the social norms model, Berkowitz (2004) states:

“The social norms approach provides a theory of human behavior that has important implications for health promotion and prevention. It states that our behavior is influenced by incorrect perceptions of how other members of our social groups think and act. For example, an individual may overestimate the permissiveness of peer attitudes and/or behaviors with respect to alcohol, smoking or other drug use, or underestimate the extent to which peers engage in healthy behavior. The theory predicts that overestimations of problem behaviors will increase these problem behaviors while underestimations of healthy behaviors will discourage individuals from engaging in them. Thus, correcting misperceptions of group norms is likely to result in decreased problem behavior or increased prevalence of healthy behaviors. These assumptions have been validated by extensive research on teenage and young-adult drinking and cigarette smoking and by interventions to promote safe drinking, tobacco cessation, and safe driving on college campuses and in middle and high schools. Other social norms interventions have been

developed to prevent sexual assault, improve academic climate, and reduce prejudicial behavior (p. 5).”

Part of this theoretical framework, therefore involves understanding first what the social norms are. Elster (2002) describes social norms as a way to rationalize self-interest. An example that he uses to illustrate this concept is how there is the social norm of, “equal pay for equal work.” He argues that when an employee or worker is making less money than another that is in the same position doing the same work he or she will appeal to this norm. If this same person were making more money than their colleague they would not appeal to the norm. Crandall, Eshleman and O’Brien (2002) found in their study that social norms are influential in predicting attitudes and behaviors. Many social scientists support the idea of social norms, because they believe that human behavior is motivated by “social” factors (i.e. prestige, esteem, popularity, or acceptance) (Bernheim, 1994).

One way that some researchers are using the social norms model is to address prevention and even more specifically, violence prevention. Social norms are defined by Perkins (2003) as:

“... a revelation of accurate information about the environmental context in the form of group or population norms to reduce individual problem behavior and enhance protective behavior” (p. 6).

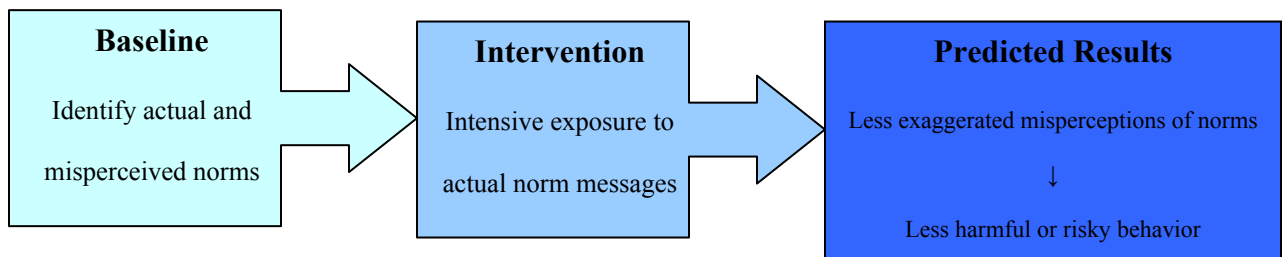


Figure 1: Perkins (2003) Model of Social Norms Approach to Prevention

Using this approach, Berkowitz (2002) argues that there are men and boys who do not agree with violence against women, but are generally silent bystanders or passive observers of violent men’s behaviors; which is misinterpreted as their approval of that type of behavior. Based on the social

norms approach a number of prevention programs have been developed. For example, the Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancement and Leadership Through Alliances (DELTA) Program is a campaign that addresses knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs that contribute to intimate partner violence (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2008). The state of Florida receives funding from the Family Violence Prevention Services Act (FVPSA) for the DELTA Program, where the social norms approach to prevention has been adopted (Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2008). As part of Orange County's coordinated community response (CCR) a program called, "Coaching Boys Into Men" (CBIM) was developed. This program has identified the baseline, which are the harmful messages boys get outside of the home (i.e. media, friends, neighborhood, etc.) (Family Violence Prevention Fund, 2008). This information is then used in the intervention model. An example of the intervention level of the model is how CBIM targets boys from the ages of 11 to 14 years of age in Orange County communities, and promotes healthy non-violent relationships through support workshops, mentoring and various group activities like basketball tournaments, camping trips, night caps, and much more. Finally, the predicted results are that the boys will learn what the actual norms are, and are less likely to participate in violent or harmful behavior.

In addition, another program that illustrates the social norms model is Men Can Stop Rape, which is a non-profit organization that empowers young men to discover and use their strength for fostering a culture free from violence more specifically men's violence against women (Men Can Stop Rape, 2007). Men Can Stop Rape describes the baseline as the misperceived norms messages as men being "the problem." Their intervention approach consists of providing education, options, resources, and media campaigns to expose young men to healthier, safer and more positive messages towards violence against women. Their predicted

results are for their target audience, young men to make healthier choices and prevent violence (i.e. sexual, dating, etc.) in their relationships and their communities (Men Can Stop Rape, 2007).

Another example of the social norms approach to prevention is a national campaign on domestic violence called, “There’s No Excuse for Domestic Violence” (Klein, Campbell, Soler, & Ghez, 1997). The goal of this campaign was to “reduce and prevent” domestic violence nationwide. Based on findings from previously conducted focus groups, the first phase of this campaign was advertising the violent behavior through radio, print, and television public service announcements. They found that among respondents who were heavily exposed to these messages, the percentage of respondents that reported taking action against domestic violence went from 12% to 26% between July 1994 and November 1995 (Klein et al., 1997). This example demonstrates how effective focus groups can be in strategically planning campaign messages in order to “reduce and prevent” domestic violence on a national level. Although each of the aforementioned programs show promise and are founded on the social norms model, the messages they deliver deal with heterosexual violence and a great deal of their material covers attitudes regarding violence against women. The current study will use the approach of the social norms model but expand it to include violence in LGBTQ relationships.

Social Norms Intervention

What would be the effects of this type of research on college campuses? Research on social norms that address other topics and or issues (i.e. binge drinking, violence prevention, etc.) has evaluated the effects of social norming on college campuses. Social norms interventions can be described as approaches that use peer pressure to attain a favorable result by praising the healthy majority (Social Norms Research in Europe, 2008). From a research

perspective this requires data to be collected on the real and perceived norms. Then the actual norms are reported to the target population with the confidence that this data will then validate that group in knowing that they are not alone (Berkowitz, 2001).

Do Social Norms Interventions Work?

Although there are a number of violence prevention programs based on the social norms model, empirical studies evaluating their effectiveness for violence prevention are lacking. Instead, the literature discusses this type of intervention approach for the effects of alcohol on violent behavior. For example, Werch et al. (2000) examined a social norm intervention that addressed binge drinking among 634 college freshmen. They found that there were no differences in binge drinking behaviors after the social norm intervention. In a similar study, Thombs and Hamilton (2002) found that there was no reduction in alcohol usage by division one athletes in college after a social norms intervention. This can also be described as the boomerang effect, where normative messages are used to promote a positive or healthy behavior but result in an undesirable response and or reaction from the targeted group (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2007).

Other researchers have found evidence that social norm interventions do work. For example, following one social norms alcohol intervention campaign an 18% reduction in perceived binge drinking and a 16% reduction in actual binge drinking was observed among a 716-college student sample. This same study also evaluated participants from a violence prevention approach and found that there was a 5% reduction in self alcohol-related injuries, and a 33% reduction in alcohol-related injuries to others (Haines, 1996).

In order to evaluate whether social norms really work, other factors that may influence the effectiveness of this type of intervention approach should be considered. For instance,

Perkins (2002) identified student peer norms as having greatest influence on other students drinking behavior. Perkins' findings were supported in a study that compared heavy drinking among students in Greek organizations to those that were Non-Greek (Sher, Bartholow & Nanda, 2001). During years 2-4 Greek men drank heavier than Non-Greek men supporting the importance of the influence of student peers (Sher, Bartholow & Nanda, 2001). That particular study illustrates how in Greek organizations their student peers are other Greeks, influencing the individual's behavior and or attitude towards heavy drinking.

A major gap in the literature is in social norms interventions as they apply to college dating violence. The more common research studies are looking at alcohol and other drugs, sexual violence prevention, and or violence prevention in general as it relates to drinking behaviors (Schultz et al., 2007; Perkins, 2002; Sher et al., 2001; Berkowitz, 2001; Haines, 1996; and Werch et al., 2000). The next challenge in this field of study therefore is evaluating whether social norms interventions can work with different behaviors (i.e. dating/domestic violence) and or groups. There are studies that have tried this approach with topics like exercise, gambling, sexual health, and recycling (Social Norms Research in Europe, 2008). For instance, Berkowitz (2001) identifies that sexual violence prevention studies that utilize social norm interventions primarily target boys in middle and high schools. So not only is there a need for an approach that addresses dating violence, but to also include young adults and or college students in future research.

Primary Prevention Approach to Violence

Primary prevention is identified as a necessary approach to address the social norms of violent behaviors like dating or domestic violence, sexual violence, and or any other violent behaviors that affect our communities (Gundersen, 2002). Gundersen (2002) argues for the

importance of effective primary prevention programs that address intimate partner violence (IPV) and focus on public education and a zero-tolerance policy. Many prevention programs are in fact reactive, so intervention is taking place after the problem and harm has occurred. Primary prevention reduces the chances of the violent behavior occurring before it happens (Wolfe & Jaffe, 1999). Primary prevention is an approach that more schools are taking to work with students at an earlier stage in their lives (i.e. elementary, middle and high school level) and provide violence prevention education to those students that do not have serious problem behaviors (Walker & Shinn, 2002).

The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2007) uses a framework called the social-ecological model as a guide and goal for the development of primary prevention strategies to address violence prevention.

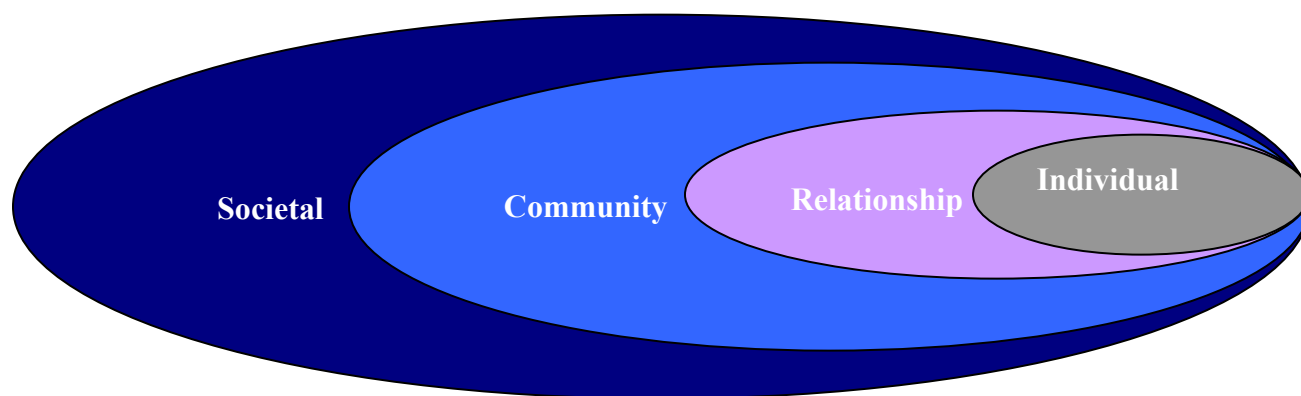


Figure 2: The Social-Ecological Model Framework for Prevention

The individual level recognizes personal history factors that might increase risk of being a victim or perpetrator of violence. A recent study conducted by Gamez-Guadix and Straus (2008) provided a good example of the individual level of this model by evaluating childhood and adolescent sexual victimization and how it later impacted university students. The results illustrated that for both male and female university students that forms of previous victimizations studied, were directly associated with an increased probability of antisocial behavior; which also

correlated with an increased probability of verbally coercing and or physically forcing sex on others. The relationship level identifies influences a person may get from their family, friends and or intimate partners. For example, researchers have identified that boys who witnessed their mothers being beaten are likely to abuse their intimate partner, and for girls who witness this behavior are likely to be victims of abuse in their intimate relationships (Ellsberg, Pena, Herrera, Liljestrand, & Winkvist, 1999; Abrahams, Jewkes & Laubscher, 1999; Kolbo, Blakely & Engleman, 1996; Carlson, 2000). The community looks at the environment like schools, neighborhoods, workplace in which social relationships take place. For instance, Bourgois (1996) describes the negative impact living in New York slums have on Puerto Rican males. Bourgois (1996) illustrates how masculinity in that type of community is generally shown through having power and control over women, or by substance use. There are few models of successful masculinity due to unemployment and a variety of other circumstances that make this inaccessible. The final level identifies the broad societal factors that might create a climate that encourages violence, which include social and cultural norms. Other factors that are included in the societal level are health, education, and social policies (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2007). Jewkes (2002) points out that there are two common factors in the societal level that are necessary to change in order to impact IPV; inequality of women in their relationships and the normative use of violence to address conflict (i.e. war, crime, etc).

Integrated Discipline Ecological Framework

Using a similar social ecological model as illustrated in figure 2, Heise (1998) took a slightly different approach to theorize possible causes of intimate partner violence. Heise (1998) integrated disciplines from anthropology, psychology and sociology that resulted in the framework shown in figure 3 below:

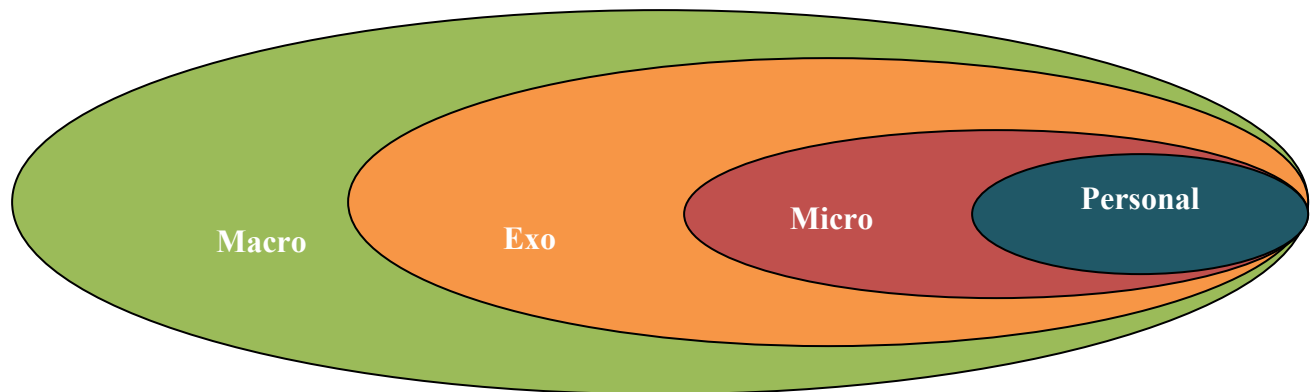


Figure 3: Heise (1998) Model

The macrosystem level of this model would be the influential societal factors such as: male superiority, distinct gender roles and hierarchy, low social value and power of women, and ideas of manhood linked to controlling women (Jewkes, 2002). For example, in a poll evaluating the communication gap between men and women, 59% of participants strongly agreed that men want to be in control (Klein et al., 1997). The exosystem level includes factors like isolation, relationships and socioeconomic status. For instance, MacMillan and Gartner (1999) conducted a study on the correlation between employment, gender roles and/or identity and the risk for intimate partner violence. They found that an employed female had a 68% increased chance of being victimized when her husband is unemployed, but these odds decreased by 51% if her husband is employed. The microsystem includes factors like substance use, relationship conflict and male dominance (Jewkes, 2002). One existing study included the microsystem factor, the use of alcohol in analyzing intimate partner violence. Caetano, Schafer and Cunradi (2001) found that 30 to 40 percent of men and 27 to 34 percent of women reported that they perpetrated violence against their intimate partner while under the influence alcohol at the time. The personal history level identifies an individual's first hand experience with intimate partner violence, whether it be witnessing or being the direct victim of the abuse (Heise, 1998). A study conducted by Carlson (2000) exemplifies the personal history level. Carlson (2000) reported an

estimated prevalence rate of 10 to 20 percent each year of children that are exposed to intimate partner violence. Carlson (2000) argues that these children experience negative effects such as lowered self-esteem and depression.

Integrating the Social Ecological Model and Primary Prevention

An integration of both the social ecological model and the primary prevention approach may be a solution to address and/or prevent violence in college dating relationships (National Center for Injury Prevention Center, 2008). This is an approach that the CDC developed as part of the coordinated community response to domestic and dating violence (local level). Based on the existing research, college students in dating relationships could be identified as an at risk group and/or priority population. Using a tool developed by CDC appendix A illustrates what an integration of the social ecological model and primary prevention might look like if college students were the target audience. For example, the community level strategy could include an on campus awareness event. One event that the University of Central Florida's Victim Services Program hosts is a domestic violence awareness event. This event includes both on and off campus resources that support dating violence issues on college campuses (i.e. Victim Advocate agencies, Counselors, Law Enforcement, Housing officials, Student Judicial officials, etc.) who set-up information tables in the center of campus where there is a lot of traffic. During the event participants (students, faculty, staff, etc.) can participate in educational interactive games and activities (i.e. dating game, raffle, fact/crap, clothesline project, red flags, etc.) that teaches them about dating violence. Participants receive information on where to get help if needed, and how to prevent violence in their intimate relationships, along with materials to keep that provide referrals to these resources (i.e. pens, whistles, dry erase boards, etc.). The philosophy behind this approach is both primary prevention and risk reduction. There is a gender neutral tone to the

program (i.e. gender neutral examples of relationships), but it is likely that most attribute this to heterosexual relationships. The goal is to help students understand their own behaviors and or attitudes that contribute to a violent culture (i.e. victim blaming, negative attitudes towards women, etc.). In addition, there is a small part that discusses various options on how to reduce their risk of certain types of violence (rape). This is just one example, of one of the many activities that would apply to the community level. This type of programming predefines dating violence and also may predominately send messages about heterosexual dating violence.

Effectiveness of Primary Prevention Programming

Is primary prevention programming effective? Researchers have evaluated the effectiveness of primary prevention programming and found that it does work. For example, Jaffe, Sudermann, Reitzel, and Killip (1992) did just that and found in their posttest positive attitudes, increased both awareness and behavioral intention changes in high school students towards dating violence. In addition, Foshee et al. (1998) facilitated a follow-up evaluation to a primary prevention program on dating violence among adolescents and found a 28% decrease in psychological abuse. They identify psychological abuse, as a behavior that often occurs before physical violence, so by preventing the psychological abuse this might be the first step toward preventing physical violence before it happened. This study provides a link between the social norms and the prevention. They were successful in identifying that within these relationships, the trend was psychological abuse preceding the physical abuse. If the goal of a prevention effort was to prevent physical violence from happening or stop the escalation within unhealthy relationships this would be a good example of that. This is one of many reasons why social norms research can be helpful part of prevention work. In order to gain a better understanding of this, I have reviewed literature that is specific to research on social norms.

Social Norms Research

Social norms research has become widely utilized to address issues like abuse of alcohol and drugs, sexual violence, recycling, and a variety of other topics (Social Norms Research in Europe, 2008; Berkowitz, 2001). There are two different sides to whether social norms interventions work. Some researchers argue that social norms interventions do not work with all groups (Sher et al., 2001; Schultz, Nolan et al., 2007; Thombs & Hamilton, 2002; Werch et al., 2000; Haines, 1996; Perkins, 2002; & Berkowitz, 2001). However, what did seem effective in the literature was addressing social norms from a primary prevention approach or perspective (Berkowitz, 2001; Social Norms Research in Europe, 2008; Foshee et al., 1998; Sudermann et al., 1992). In other words, the primary prevention approach suggests the need to intervene early with college students that have not experienced or perpetrated dating violent behaviors with an intimate partner (Foshee et al., 1998; Sudermann et al., 1992).

At the same time, however, a major limitation in the literature was that the majority of social norms studies address alcohol and other substance abuse behaviors, which in many cases do not directly relate to dating violence. On the other hand, studies that did address violent behaviors commonly focused on sexual violence among adolescents (Berkowitz, 2001). The presented gap is using a social norms focus to address college dating violence. Existing research on topics like social norms or college dating violence has utilized a more quantitative approach with surveys, where the researcher defines the parameters of the behaviors. This study gave the participants an opportunity to define the behaviors and topics and to elaborate on what they thought the norms were in reference to dating violence. In addition, one of the limitations in the literature previously mentioned is the lack of identifying or including diverse dating relationships

like LGBTQ populations (Jackson, 1999; Gordon, 2000; DeKeseredy, 2000; Brownridge & Halli, 1999; Kilpatrick, 2004; Schwartz, 2000; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1997).

In conclusion, the literature illustrates how the majority of the current studies on dating violence researchers have used their own definitions of the terms in order to facilitate their research rather than ask participants to define violence. Additionally, we know that dating violence in both the college and LGBTQ communities are significant issues and need to be addressed effectively. However, there is limited research about college dating violence among LGBTQ individuals. Lastly, although the literature provides a framework of a few types of prevention methods: social norms, primary prevention and the social ecological approach there are no clear and or direct examples of the effectiveness of any of those methods on college dating violence, and more specifically college dating violence among LGBTQ individuals. The current study adds to this literature first by allowing research participants to self define dating violence. Second, the current study targets LGBTQ students, a previously understudied population, which expands the literature around LGBTQ and dating violence. Finally, it asks college students what they think would be effective dating violence prevention work for all communities in a collegiate environment.

Based on the literature that has been reviewed in this paper, the current study targeted college students in same gender dating relationships in order to identify the social norms in college dating relationships. In order to develop effective prevention programs for dating violence on college campuses, we need to know first what the norms actually are so that prevention messages can be appropriately developed. Findings from the current study could set the foundation for future social norms campaigns on college campuses that address violence prevention and reduction.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The current study addressed the following research questions: What are the social norms in college dating relationships? How can we use the social norms approach to address college dating violence? How can we integrate the social ecological model and primary prevention to address and/or prevent college dating violence? And finally, what would be the best social message or campaign to influence social change towards dating violence on college campuses?

This was a qualitative research study, approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) where information was collected from participants through focus groups. This is a research technique where approximately 5-8 people were brought together in a room to discuss dating violence among college students (Klein et al., 1997). Questions were open-ended in order to give the participants an opportunity to share their ideas, views and opinions on this topic. My plan was to facilitate 3 different focus groups with 5-8 people in each. The populations targeted for this study were selected based on their underrepresentation among individuals seeking assistance and or support from the on-campus Victim Services Program. The criteria to participate in the study were the following: must be a current University of Central Florida (UCF) student, 18 years of age or older, identify as GBTQ, and consent to being audio recorded and for notes to be taken by a research assistant during the discussion.

In order to recruit participants from the targeted group fliers and palm cards were created and were posted on bulleting boards and handed out to students on campus. In addition, student organization meetings were attended where students were notified about the study in order to develop trust and inform them that their participation would be voluntary. Focus groups were facilitated at the Victim Services office in Research Park. Recruitment started during the fall

2008 semester, and the focus groups began during the spring 2009 term and were completed by the start of summer 2009. This was a course of 8 months. Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, a Victim Advocate (UCF Victim Services) was available at this location if any participants needed intervention at any time during the discussion. This allowed me, the facilitator an opportunity to continue the dialogue if anyone left during the focus group discussion. Group members were provided an orientation of the location (i.e. restrooms), introduced to the available crisis responder, and informed that if they decided to leave during the session the Victim Advocate would check with them to address any potential needs for support. Also, each focus group member was provided an informed consent form to read and sign. The sessions took place during the evening hours between 6:00 PM and 9:00 PM, so dinner was provided to the focus group members (i.e. pizza/wings). The focus group sessions took 1 ½ to 2 hours per group. Only I, the note taker and a digital voice recorder were in the room with the participants during the focus group discussions.

At the end of every focus group, members were provided with information, resources and referrals to on and off campus agencies. Each member received a Victim Services bag stuffed with information packets (dating violence, stalking, sexual violence, etc.), educational give-a-ways (i.e. Victim Services pens, high lighters, whistles, etc.), publications of other campus and community resources (i.e. Counseling Center, Alcohol and Other Drugs, Wellness, Harbor House, SafeHouse, etc.), and safety tips and information materials to either prevent or reduce their risk for victimization.

Measuring Tool

There are two specific studies that the questions for the focus groups were modeled after. First, Sears, Byers, Whelan, and Saint-Pierre (2006) developed a tool of open-ended questions to

identify abusive behavior in dating relationships among adolescents in Canada. Some of the questions have been modified for the purposes of this research study in order to appeal to potential issues related to college dating relationships, and to ensure questions only address social norms. An example of this is the following question, which states “what kinds of behaviors come to mind when I use the term dating violence?” The goal of this study was to identify the norms in college dating relationships, not whether participants have had previous experience with abusive relationships (i.e. victims or perpetrators). Question #4, which states “within the relationships that you have identified, describe to me what are positive behaviors that you think are socially acceptable?” Second, Mendez (2008) developed a modified version of the Sears et al. (2006) measure in order to identify attitudes, beliefs and experiences in intimate relationships. Mendez (2008) targeted Costa Rican adolescents in her study. Questions were also developed using the College Relationship Violence Power and Control Wheel in order to identify norms (Harrington, 2008).

Focus Group Questions

Previously, I provided several examples of questions that were included in this focus group study. Here, the themes of the questions and a brief explanation of the purpose behind each one are provided.

The theme for the first group of questions was, “definition.” The purpose here was to identify how students defined the terms. So, the first question stated, “to begin, tell me how you would define dating relationships?” This question gave the participants an opportunity to describe and/or define dating relationships to me. Before getting into a dialogue about dating violence, I needed to know first what constitutes dating in the LGBTQ community at UCF. The second question asked students “what kinds of behaviors come to mind when I use the term

dating violence?” The purpose was to get an idea of the specific types of acts and or behaviors that the students see as defining dating violence. This is one of the key factors in this study, because the students are developing their own definition and more specifically how dating violence is defined within theGBTQ community on campus.

The next group of questions was themed, “issues in college dating relationships.” Here I wanted to hear from the students what they think the overall issues are in dating relationships. So question #3 stated, “so now that you have given me your definition of dating relationships, tell me a little about what you think the challenges and or barriers are in these types of relationships?” With this question I was trying to get an idea of the issues that they thought were key inGBTQ relationships that they previously described. So for example, one comment made by a focus group participant was that in someGBTQ relationships there are different levels of emotional maturity. He went on to describe that depending on where each person is in the relationship with their understanding of themselves, sexuality, etc. this can present a challenge in the relationship if both parties are not on the same level or phase.

The next phase of questions had the following theme: how extensive is the problem. The overall concept here was to find out from students the social norms in both healthy and unhealthy relationships. Question #4 stated, “within the relationships that you have identified, describe to me what are positive behaviors that you think are socially acceptable?” With this question I wanted to gather information about what behaviors they thought were positive within the relationship, and were also socially acceptable. This question was to provide some insight into some of the social norms inGBTQ relationships that are considered positive by the group. Following that, I then asked question #5 which asked them to describe the negative behaviors that occur withinGBTQ relationships, which are also socially acceptable. Again, the purpose of

this question was to identify those negative behaviors that may not be considered negative socially. Question #6 stated, “with the thoughts that were just shared, at what point do you think that a person that is dealing with the negative behaviors should take action?” Here I wanted to gauge what the students see as the breaking point or the point that someone should do something about the negative behaviors. By taking action, this could be simply ending the relationship, or confiding in a friend, getting professional help, etc.

The final group of questions used the theme, “suggestions.” The purpose here was to hear ideas and opinions from students about prevention as it relates to college dating violence. Questions 7 through 9 were about the different prevention approaches and their thoughts on the potential effectiveness of these approaches on the UCF campus in addressing dating violence. Next, question #10 asked students to tell me what they would think would be a good social message to promote healthy, non-violent relationships on campus. This question was designed to hear from the students their ideas on how dating violence could be talked about or prevented. Finally, I ended the discussions asking the focus group members whether there was anything further they wanted to add. This provided the opportunity for participants to make any further statements, comments or even ask questions. Additionally, if there was anything that the students felt were left out that they wanted to discuss I thought this question would initiate that type of dialogue.

Summary

In summary, the overall plan was to utilize the information collected from the focus groups to identify social norm behavior in reference to college dating relationships. As previously mentioned, UCF students from the LGBTQ community comprised the different focus groups in this study. This research study was designed to extend previous work, but it is unique

in that college students in diverse dating relationships will be targeted. In addition, this study used the focus group research technique, a technique which is not commonly used to study college dating relationships. The focus groups were facilitated at Victim Services in order to create a safe space for participants to discuss the issues. There was comfort food provided, immediate crisis intervention assistance was available at the site, and information and resources were provided at the end of each focus group session. The purpose of this research was to identify what the current social norms are in college dating relationships, how the social norms approach could be applied, how to effectively integrate prevention models, and finally a “message” that could influence social change in college dating relationships.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Results

During the fall 2008 and spring 2009 semesters I scheduled 8 focus group sessions, however there were only 2 in which participants attended. The results for this study are based on 2 focus group discussions (with a total of 10 students) that were facilitated at the University of Central Florida. Respondents completed a demographic survey prior to the start of the discussion. No names were provided on this tool, in order to maintain participant confidentiality. The demographic survey tool included all fill in the blank type format except for the gender question and student classification, which provided a list of options that, would either be checked or circled by the participant. The average age of all participants was 20. Only 10% of participants in this study did not identify their current classification at UCF. Between both groups academic classification was 30% freshmen, 10% sophomore, 10% junior, 20% senior, and 20% graduate level students. Focus group participants' average yearly income was \$4,450 and the median household income was \$131,850. There were 5 students who were in dating relationships at the time of the focus group sessions, and 5 were single. Focus group members self-identified their racial background as part of the demographic survey. The results were that 50% of participants identified as White, 10% Native American, 10% Asian, and 30% Biracial. In reference to highest level of education completed by mothers, respondents reported that 30% completed high school, 30% bachelors degree, 10% masters degree, 10% vocational, 10% middle school, and 10% associate's degree. For fathers 40% bachelors degree, 20% some college, 10% masters, 10% doctorate, 10% vocational, and 10% high school. The focus group

sessions were held on Wednesday, February 18th and May 20th, 2009 at 6:00PM inside the conference room located at Victim Services (Orlando campus Research Parkway).

Findings

Based on information retrieved from both focus groups that were facilitated there were some interesting comments made by participants. For the purposes of maintaining confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used to refer to specific participants statements or comments. First, students were split on how they defined dating relationships. Some defined dating as any relationship based on intimacy, which may or may not include physical (i.e. sex) or emotional components? John stated, “for me dating is another way defining a relationship dating is just a different and deeper level that usually involves commitment and understanding.” On the other hand, some described dating as completely separate from relationships. Students felt that the two terms did not go together. So for those participants, they defined dating as the time when people are just getting to know each other and relationships as to when people are on a “...committed emotional level rather than just hanging out together,” Frank explained. When asked to describe behaviors that come to mind when hearing the term, “dating violence” participants from the first group defined this as an abusive, aggressive and or demeaning act, which can be physical or emotional that happens in a dating relationship. Gary reminded everyone of the importance not to place dating violence into a box where they are only thinking of a man beating his wife. The second focus group had similar thoughts when asked the same question, they went even further and described specific behaviors like control, aggressive obsessive behavior, stalking, cyber stalking, and jealousy. Both groups discussed emotional abuse coming to mind, and how in some cases they thought that this leaves a deeper wound.

Some of the challenges that were identified in abusive college dating relationships by both groups are that some people may feel trapped (i.e. financially, emotionally, etc) or isolated. Paul from group 1 described further how these feelings can be a result of the fact that they are in a gay relationship, so they may be ostracized by their family. Participants from the second group discussed the challenges in identifying or defining the relationship as abusive on the part of the victim. James stated, “well that boils down to perspective, clearly if I’m in an abusive relationship it looks different from the outside compared to how it looks on the inside.” John who was a respondent in the same group described another challenge and or barrier:

“I think your geographic location plays a huge role and the culture that surrounds you because in bigger more progressive cities, obviously there are more available resources for people who are in GLBT relationships. Even parts of Central Florida there are people who are afraid for their lives that they are in GLBT relationships or a non heterosexual relationship that need help. Emotional maturity can also be a huge barrier. A lot of times in the Gay community there is a difference between each partners emotional maturity. At least my experience has been that. Usually there is one person that has a better idea of what’s going on, whether that’s the person in control I don’t know (Focus Group 2).”

This statement brought on a brief group discussion about the different phases that gay people might experience as part of being out and comfortable with themselves. John continued to describe how some gay people learn over time how to “navigate the world and navigate their daily lives,” which might be attractive to someone that is not at that phase.

Next, I asked students to provide their thoughts on behaviors that are positive and socially acceptable. Public display of affection (i.e. kissing, holding hands, etc.) was brought up by both groups as a positive behavior, but is not socially acceptable for GBTQ people in certain environments. Sam from focus group 2 described:

“...Where I come from, holding hands with another guy is like a death wish. There is no safety once you get out of Morgan town it is not safe and people will kill you. I don’t mean to sound dramatic, but that is how it is. Maybe here in Orlando it is a little more acceptable. Like for me I was adopted by two gay men when I was 9 years old, so I like have been taught all the do’s and don’ts of gay relationships and PDA is definitely one of them that they stressed (Focus Group 2).”

Paul from focus group 1 also described the dangers of showing positive affection amongst gay couples that the public may view as negative, might cause a violent reaction (i.e. beaten up) towards that couple. Both groups identified that this is not something that heterosexual couples experience. That they can hold hands or kiss in public and no one would react to them violently or think that this was a negative behavior, it would be socially accepted. The environment that a couple is in was also important for group 2. They felt that if a couple is in a gay friendly environment than it is easier to feel comfortable to show affection towards a partner.

Overall, participants shared that behaviors like verbal arguments in public or expectations to pay when dating are socially acceptable negative behaviors in dating relationships. Group 2 also identified that checking out other people or sleeping around on your partner is another socially acceptable negative behavior among LGBTQ relationships. Then both groups were asked at what point did they think a person should take action who is dealing with negative or abusive behaviors. The groups went into different directions around this question. Group 1 discussed the importance of a person who is in an abusive relationship should take action immediately. One of the participants challenged that idea and described how that although may sound good it does not always happen like that. Group 2 agreed that once the relationship is too obsessive and or aggressive that it's time for that person to take action. Both groups described that there should be some leeway in loving relationships to give someone a chance and not just cut it off immediately. Group 2 used the example of someone behaving obsessively who is insecure. That insecurity is not an excuse for being abusive, but that if the person recognizes it and is willing to do something about it, they should be given a chance.

In reference to social norms campaigns all of the participants in group 1 agreed that this would not be an effective approach to address dating violence on college campuses. They

believed that this would not have a direct impact on students as does the alcohol and other drugs social norms approaches. Mark commented that if this approach was utilized it might have an effect on possible victims in dating violent relationships, but not on perpetrators. On the other hand, group 2 thought that the social norms approach could be, “very eye opening” a comment made by John. Frank later stated, “so it would depend on how you were to market it and go about it, if you had statistics of UCF people and how many each day die or are impacted would be a good direction.” Current educational programming that was described to both groups that is happening on campus right now they all agreed was positive. Focus group 2 went further by discussing the importance in making more students aware of these different programs and resources that are available to them on campus.

The students from group 1 had interesting ideas on various social messages or ways to promote healthy non-violent relationships. They all described the impact that photographs have had on them in order to increase their awareness. One example that was discussed was a poster where a person with a black eye was on the front and there were phone numbers to call for help. Terms and or phrases that are straight to the point like, “you deserve better” or “get out of it” were used as examples by participants. It was suggested that the message should be inclusive of all types of abuse (i.e. physical, verbal, emotional, etc.) and to focus on victims rather than perpetrators. Group 2 did not suggest any social messages in reference to promoting healthy relationships. Instead they discussed some of the community needs like having aGBTQ resource center on campus, or providing further education for law enforcement in how they respond to these situations to decrease victim’s fear of reporting. Finally, students’ additional thoughts were to stress the importance of getting the message out there on who Victim Services

is and what they do. David from group 1 stated, “stress that it’s confidential” when referring to Victim Services and thought that this was helpful information to get out to students.

Discussion

Each focus group had a different group dynamic that could have been influenced by various factors. So for group one, as students came into the conference room the note taker was already seated in the far right corner. Once students had made their plates of food and were settled into their seats, I then took an available seat on the left end of the table next to Mark. While people were eating, students seemed to be a little quiet. Mark and Gary had come to the focus group together, so they were speaking amongst themselves while they were waiting for us to get started. Joseph was a very open and talkative person. While everyone was eating, he was working on a sketch for class and talking to everyone about it. Brian, David and Paul were all very quiet in the beginning and they all seemed a little uncomfortable. Right before we got started, Joseph was having a conversation with Mark and Gary and asked if they were a couple. Mark responded and said that they were only friends. At this point Joseph asked Mark if he could have his number, which appeared to really embarrass Mark. Mark declined giving his number to Joseph. Some of the participants laughed at this incident, including Joseph. This definitely impacted both Mark and Gary’s comfort level during the group discussion.

The second focus group was a smaller sized group of 4. It was previously mentioned in the methodology that there would be a note taker present. The first focus group had a note taker present, but group two did not. Frank, John, Sam, and James were all students that were involved with the Knight Allies student organization. So they all knew one another, and were very talkative before during and after the focus group discussion. I took my seat last, after everyone had gotten their food and took their seats. Sam and James were a couple, and before

the discussion started they were sharing a story with the group about gifts that they had recently exchanged with one another. Overall, this group gave the impression that they were comfortable with one another and being in the Victim Services conference room.

The goal was to create a safe, secure and comfortable setting for participants. I don't know if this was achieved for the participants. All the students seemed to enjoy the food that was provided during the focus groups, which was pizza, wings and soda. Although, this type of food some may not consider comfort at all the student meetings I attended this was what was served. So I made the assumption that this type of food was casual and comfortable to the student population based on my observations. The second group appeared to be comfortable with the location, but the first group was not comfortable. Participants from the second group were familiar with the location and had been there different times for meetings, etc. I don't think that this was true for any of the participants from the first focus group.

Overall, the students' thoughts and opinions that were shared during the focus group sessions were valuable. One of the key factors in this study was identifying how students would define dating and dating violence. The definitions to these terms that were provided were not that different than what is commonly utilized in current research and literature. I did not screen for this as part of my study, but the similar definitions could be due to participants' previous exposure to seeing how these terms have been defined. The level of intimacy seemed to be stressed as part of one of the main factors in dating for both groups. Another element that came up in the focus groups was the separation between socially acceptable behaviors in dating relationships among homosexuals and heterosexuals. Concerns about violence or negative reactions from the general public may cause a person in a same gendered relationship not to be as affectionate with their partner in public. So although show affection is positive, it may be

dangerous to individuals in the LGBTQ community. During this part of the discussion, students also brought to my attention the importance of gay friendly environments. For example, Disney was one of the places that was given as an example as a gay friendly place, more specifically the Gay Days event that takes place there. I found this to be a powerful message that UCF students found Disney to be a gay friendly environment, but did not include their own college campus as that type of setting. Overall, participants felt that this is a non-issue for heterosexual relationships.

In both groups participants tended to describe dating among heterosexuals as a way to define the term. When asked about how they defined dating relationships they seemed comfortable using examples from heterosexual relationships that they had observed or been exposed to. When asked to think about the definition in terms of LGBTQ relationships Sam made this comment “the lesbians bring a U-haul after the first date, that’s what my Dad said.” This illustrates how their parents or family life might influence some of their ideas about dating and or relationships. This also might be why most of them felt more comfortable discussing heterosexual relationships. Although this was not a question that was asked as part of the discussion or demographic survey, it was brought up during both groups how everyone except for one student was raised by heterosexual parents.

The discussion around the different phases that a gay person might experience was interesting for me to listen to. It made me think of the different types of power dynamics that occur within abusive relationships and how this idea around the phases or stages that gay people experience might contribute to this. I think that it could actually go either way, for example there might be a couple where the person who is more comfortable with themselves and is “out” may have power over their partner if he or she is not at that stage yet. Also, the person that is not

“out” or at that stage could also have power over their partner by trying to destroy them emotionally, physically, etc. to have control over him or her. Carolyn West (1998) describes how societal homophobia can create such a unique power dynamic among same gendered couples, in which heterosexual couples do not have to deal with. This may be more relevant in the collegiate community since for many college students they are experiencing the different phases of coming into their own at this time in their lives.

Challenges Faced During Recruitment

The goal of this research study was to facilitate three focus groups with 5-8 participants during the fall 2008 semester. Approximately 4-6 weeks were spent recruiting students to participate in the study. Recruitment activities included handing out flyers, word of mouth, and participating in student organization meetings. One student group that I spent a lot of time working with was the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Student Union (GLBSU) where I would attend meetings and make announcements to members about the study. GLBSU was a student organization that had a partnership with the department that I was employed with at the time. So, I was very transparent about the fact that students participation or lack of participation in the study, would not impact their organization’s partnership with Victim Services. Students were informed that confidentiality would be provided from the researcher and note taker. In addition, students were notified that focus group members would be asked to keep the information disclosed confidential, but that this could not be guaranteed. So as a protective measure, students were told that they did not have to use their real names during the focus groups if they were not comfortable. Lastly, participants were informed that they would not be asked any questions about any direct personal experiences with dating violence. All the questions were open ended for the purposes of gathering information on their opinions, ideas or behaviors in college dating

relationships. Focus groups were utilized for this study because I believed it would support identifying the norms. Kitzinger (1995) describes how focus group processes provide an opportunity for participants to explore, clarify and share their views in a forum that is more accessible than one on one interviews. She explains the significance of the group dynamics when participants use their own words, questions, experiences, jokes, etc. through discussion to respond to the researchers open-ended questions or statements. Kitzinger (1995) states,

“Everyday forms of communication may tell us as much, if not more, about what people know or experience. In this sense focus groups reach the parts that other methods cannot reach, revealing dimensions of understanding that often remain untapped by more conventional data collection techniques” (p. 299).

Therefore, in order to capture those concepts and to identify the social norms, which is the purpose of the study; focus groups were the better choice in the research design. Additionally, targeting student clubs and organizations to recruit for participants I hoped would foster a safe and secure environment during the discussions for the students. My thought process was that if the students were already comfortable with one another this would further encourage group members to share their thoughts openly.

I am a trained professional in crisis intervention and victim’s advocacy, with 6 years experience working with victims of crime (i.e. dating/domestic violence, stalking, cyber crimes, harassment, sexual violence, etc.) and facilitating discussions on difficult topics with college students. At the time of the study I was the Assistant Coordinator of the UCF Police Departments Victim Services Unit, which gave me direct access to resources for participants.

Students inquired about the study either during or after the meeting, and some would email or call me to get further information. As students would contact me to reserve their spot for a specific focus group session, I began to realize based on the information that students provided most of them did not meet the criteria. The criteria included students that attended UCF for 2

years or more, 18 years or older, must identify as LGBTQ, must consent to audio recording, and a note taker being present during the group. All three focus groups that were scheduled during this time were canceled due to the lack of participants meeting the study criteria.

I decided to go back to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application and change both the criteria and methods of recruitment. The requested change in criteria was to include all UCF students regardless of how many years they attended the University (i.e. freshmen, transfer, etc.). All other criteria were kept the same. The methods of recruitment that were added included advertising the focus groups on websites, news and announcements, posted flyers on campus, and in class announcements including online courses (i.e. WebCT). The request was approved by the IRB before the start of the spring 2009 semester.

Once my study was more inclusive as far as classification at the University, and I had more ways to advertise the focus groups I expected an increase in participation. All the marketing materials and my attendance to the GLBSU meetings started 6 weeks before the first focus group session. The focus group flyers were advertised on campus websites, Facebook, Myspace, UCF News and Events list, bulletin boards, word of mouth, etc. The week of the first two focus groups The Central Florida Future (a local paper) ran a story on the research study. The story included interviews with the Program Coordinator of Victim Services, various students on campus and myself. More students began contacting me with their information to sign up to participate in the focus groups.

In the first focus group session there were 6 participants and in the second focus group only 2 attended. As a result, I canceled the second group and asked the two individuals to attend the next focus group session. The purpose to inviting them to the next group was to avoid

facilitating a discussion with less than 5 students. The third focus group only 1 person attended, which was a student from the previously canceled focus group.

That week I attended a GLBSU meeting where I spoke to some students about whether they were interested in participating, and if not what were their concerns. Some students disclosed to me that they were uncomfortable with discussing the topic of dating violence. Others shared that they had never been in an intimate relationship before and were concerned that they may not have any opinion or view on the topic as a result. Although I explained to these students that there were no questions about personal experience, this did not change their mind. Based on these responses it made me look into current research on the discomfort of discussing dating or intimate partner violence, and the impact gay friendly communities have onGBTQ people.

Barriers to Recruitment

An observation I made when recruiting face to face at student meetings (i.e. GLBSU) was that there were very few African American students involved in the organization and no heterosexual allies. The average attendance at the GLBSU meetings at which I was present was approximately 80 -100 students. It looked to me like the majority of students were Caucasian. I only saw approximately 1-5 African American students at the meetings on average. On the other hand, this organization seems to be primarily a social club for students that identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning. So there is no place for heterosexual allies within this organization. Currently, there is a new student organization called, “Knight Allies” to fill this gap on the UCF campus. Knight Allies is a student organization that includes heterosexual andGBTQ allies that are working towards, “...the elimination of homophobia and

for the inclusion ofGBTQ students on campus”

(www.counseling.sdes.ucf.edu/allies/AlliesStudentGroup.html, 2009).

As a heterosexual African American woman, I believe that I was a barrier to the recruitment process. Although I am an active member of the campus Allies program for faculty and staff, I think that there was a disconnection. Egharevba (2001) suggests that both commonality and difference can have a significant impact on the relationship between the researcher and research participants in qualitative studies. The relationship that both my race and sexual orientation has to theGBTQ community is significant and there are implications in the research, which support these factors as being barriers. There were 2 focus groups that were facilitated and 10 total participants between both groups.

Lastly, another barrier to recruitment was the political climate on-campus and nationally. During the time that recruitment first started, there were a few incidents between the department I was employed with at the time and theGLBTQ community. These incidents created a climate on-campus thatGLBTQ students did not feel supported and or protected by the campus police. Victim Services is a unit of the Police Department on the UCF campus. Additionally, also taking place during the time of the study was the 2008 Presidential Elections. During the elections Florida Amendment 2 an amendment with a direct impact on theGLBTQ community in the state of Florida was passed. This amendment was made to the Florida Constitution to identify marriage as the union only between a man and women, which excludes same sex marriage or civil unions (Online Sunshine, 2009). This amendment was passed at that time, and I remember during some of the student organization meetings this was one of the key topics of discussion. I sensed feelings of hopelessness, anger, frustration, and oppression among the students when they

spoke of this issue. All of this combined, I'm sure students could have been feeling distrust to participating in a study about dating violence.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The literature indicates that dating violence among college students is prevalent, and is an important issue warranting further research. In order to address the issue of what the social norms are in college dating violence, it was helpful to review the literature on what researchers have found to be attitudes and beliefs of this topic. The implications of the research of attitudes and beliefs are that there is a wide range of understanding and awareness of the issue in reference to dating and domestic violence. At the same time there are important limitations to prior work on attitudes and beliefs about dating and domestic violence. Some of the limitations included using the term “domestic violence,” researchers providing a definition of this term for participants and most of these studies were quantitative research. Based on the existing research the importance and value of the social-ecological model that the CDC developed supports the framework of preventing dating violence among college students. This framework illustrates how the various levels can impact or have influence on an individual’s likelihood of being violent or a victim of violence (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2007).

Based on the findings of the study students conceptualize dating and relationships as two separate activities. The dating phase is when they are getting to know one another, and relationships are more intimate and serious. As a result, the social norms among college students are to participate in both positive healthy behaviors and negative or abusive behaviors. ForGBTQ students this can vary, because what may be considered a positive healthy behavior in their relationships can get a negative or even violent response from the general public. Homophobia seems to play a significant role inGBTQ relationships, which creates unsafe environments (West, 1998). Students identified common behaviors within abusiveGBTQ and heterosexual relationships as controlling or obsessive, stalking, emotional, verbal, and or

physically violent. The attitude towards a victim getting help was that this should happen immediately, but there were arguments that this is not easy to do so it is likely a person might stay in this type of relationship.

In reference to how the social norms approach can be used to address college dating violence, participants were split. Some agreed that it could be effective, while others disagreed. Based on the results there is some value to social norms approach, because it identifies people's perceptions of how they see things or what they might have experienced. Based on the results the social norms approach could not be used independently to truly promote healthy relationships on college campuses, and even more specifically among GBTQ students.

The social ecological model can be integrated with primary prevention to address college dating violence. There were participants that it seemed as though their exposure to the issues were not from their own personal or first hand experiences. If colleges could either survey or find some way to identify students when they first enter the schools that have not been exposed to dating violence this could be one approach. In addition, this approach can be effective by working with students from where they are at (social ecological) and using the different levels to educate them around these issues. Based on some of the responses from participants there is some internalized work that may need to happen in order to mobilize a community of GBTQ students to want educate themselves more about this issue and to influence change in their communities to end dating violence. Insecurity was a common emotion that participants believed both the victim and abuser might experience, so this is one example of where some of the internalized work may start. In addition, attitudes and relationships with women is another. All of the participants in this study were men, and some of their perceptions of women in relationships (lesbian and heterosexual) were based on common myths and or stereotypes. These

attitudes or perceptions can contribute to violence against women in various ways. So overall, this could be an effective approach to prevention of college dating violence.

In reference to social messages or campaigns that could influence social change towards dating violence on college campuses students seemed to focus on various visual aids to illustrate this. Their suggestions seemed to target victims, and would have a combination of photos with short phrases to inform people that abuse was not okay. Using statistics was another strategy that participants felt would have a strong impact in a collegiate environment. Additionally, providing further resources on college campuses that target LGBTQ students (i.e. resource center) was another idea that students believed could influence social change. All of their suggestions were based around intervention (targeting victims) not based around prevention. Some of them did express that their ideas came from other campaigns that they had previously been exposed to that made an impact on them. So maybe what this suggests is that college campuses should focus their attention on campaigns that get students thinking and talking about the issues first, and then follow that up with various educational discussions or programs using the different levels from the social ecological model.

There were some limitations to this study. The lack of participation in the focus groups was a major limitation. This did not offer the researcher an opportunity to compare more than 2 focus groups to one another based on responses. Rather than having a minimum of 15 participants there were 10. Although marketing and recruitment for the focus groups took place in various avenues on and off campus, I targeted the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Student Union (GLBSU) organization as one of the main venues to recruit for participation. So for the first focus group that was facilitated only a few were signed up from GLBSU others heard about the study online and word of mouth and decided to participate. The second focus group consisted of

individuals that heard about the study through another student organization called Knight Allies. For future research I would suggest to target various student organizations on campus in order to increase the opportunities of participants in the sessions. Another recommendation for future research is to maybe target college campuses that have a gay friendly campus climate. These campuses may have GLBT community centers, academic programs, and various student faculty and staff organizations. These types of campuses may offer a safer environment for GBTQ students to participate in studies. Some of the barriers to this study that were previously mentioned were also limitations. It may be helpful for future studies to utilize diverse research assistants that would aid in the recruitment and facilitation of the focus groups. Overall, this study offers some insight into how students view and process the topic of college dating violence. In addition, ideas on how to address this from a prevention perspective were offered that could aid in future research and campus campaigns.

**APPENDIX A:
CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL TABLE**

Social Ecological Level	Risk or Protective Factor Addressed	Activities or Events	Target Group - Audience for your Strategy	Setting or Location of Prevention Strategy	Who is Needed to Make this Happen?
Individual	Isolation or lack of support in collegiate environment	Student orientation that promotes gender equity and conflict resolution	Both male and female college students (ages 18 - 33)	College Campuses	Student Advisors Faculty Staff Leadership from student clubs/organizations
Relationships	Gender role stereotypes	Action groups focused on discussions of masculinity (i.e. Men of Strength Project) "Difficult Discussions" group where students can talk about attitudes, beliefs, choices, and resources	Both male and female college students (ages 18-33) Faculty, Counselors, Victim Advocates, and Campus Safety/Law Enforcement	College Campuses Diverse Student Organizations/Clubs (i.e. athletics, GLBTQ, Greeks, etc.)	Faculty, Counselors, Victim Advocates, Campus Safety/Law Enforcement, Student Advisors Leaders of Student Organizations/Clubs
Community	Cultural norm that accepts violence as a means of getting his/her way	Community events that promote healthy relationships, conflict resolution and ending oppression (i.e. movie nights, DV awareness, etc.)	Both male and female college students Faculty & Staff General/Local Community	College Campuses	on/off campus resources Campus Leaders Faculty & Staff Leadership of Student Organizations/Clubs
Societal	Cultural norm that accepts violence as a means of getting his/her way	Open forum discussions/panel discussions on social messages that offend them	General Public Journalists, Media Professionals, and Business Owners	Student Organization/Club	Community Organizers, Media Professionals, Leadership Student Organizations/Clubs

**APPENDIX B:
HEISE TABLE**

Table 1: Heise (1998) Framework

Macrosystem	Exosystem	Microsystem	Personal History
Male Entitlement/ownership of women	Low socioeconomic status/unemployment	Male dominance in the family	Witnessing marital violence as a child
Masculinity linked to aggression and dominance	Isolation of women and family	Male control of wealth in the family	Being abused oneself as a child
Rigid gender roles	Delinquent peer associations	Use of alcohol	Absent/Rejecting father
Acceptance of interpersonal violence		Marital/Verbal conflict	
Acceptance of physical chastisement			

**APPENDIX C:
SEATING CHARTS**

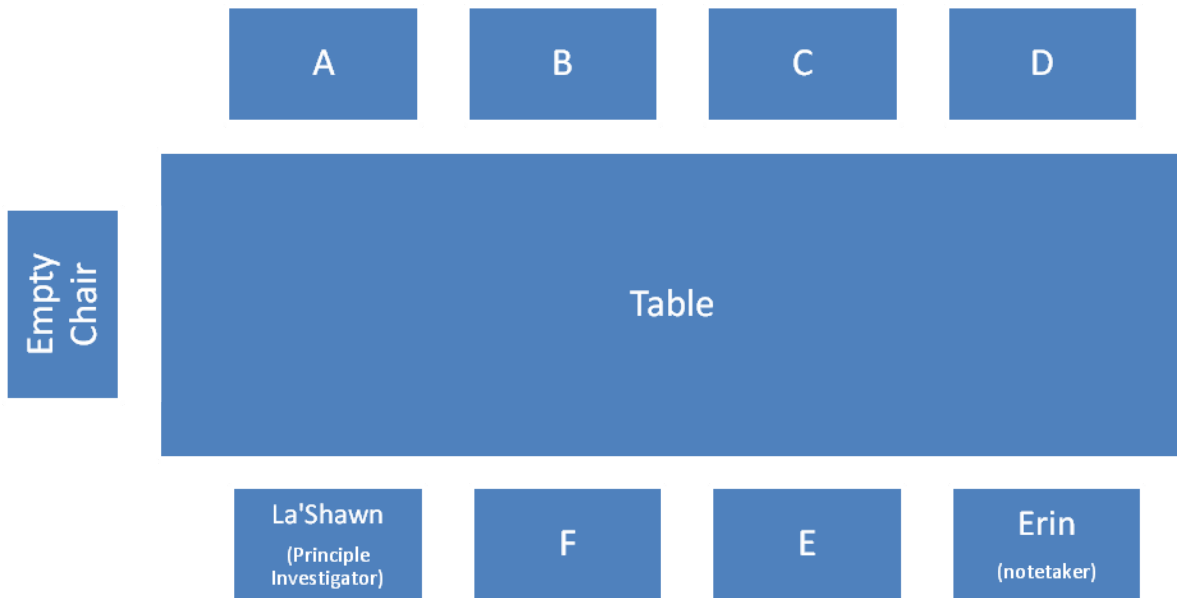


Figure 4: Focus Group 1

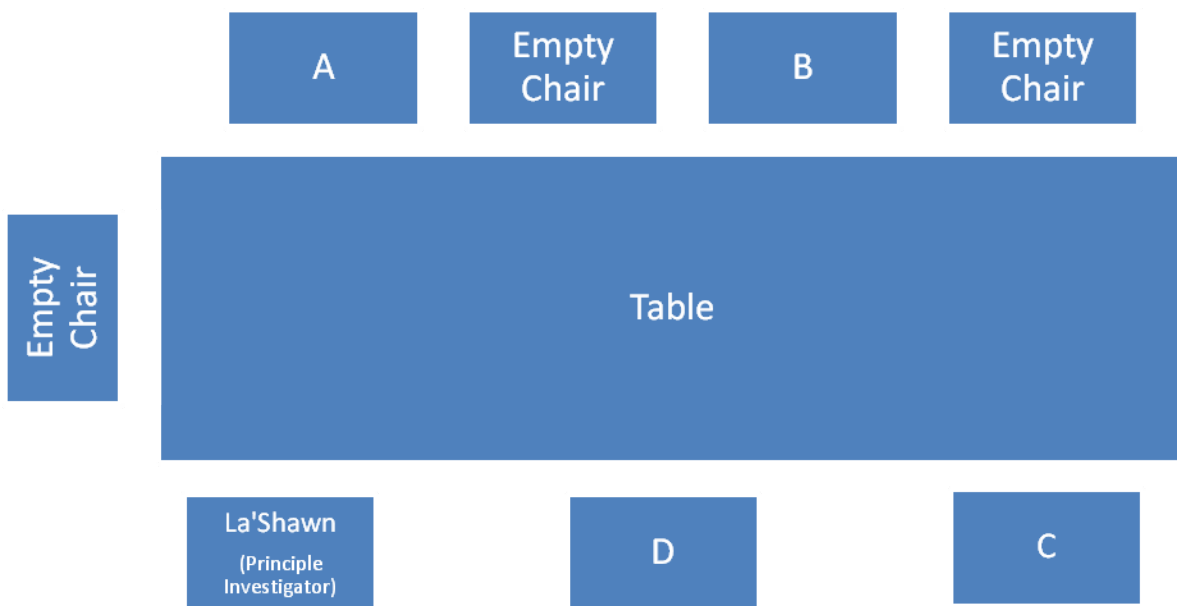


Figure 5: Focus Group 2

**APPENDIX D:
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY**

1. Are you male or female? Please check one below.

- Male Female

2. What is your age? _____

3. What is your classification at UCF? Please circle one below.

Freshmen Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate Student

4. What is your own yearly income? _____

5. What is your total household income, including all earners in your household?

6. What is your current relationship status (i.e. single, dating, etc.)?

7. What is your race? _____

8. What is the highest level of education your mother has completed?

9. What is the highest level of education your father has completed?

**APPENDIX E:
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

We are meeting to discuss your thoughts about college dating relationships. You will not be asked about your personal experience with dating in college, but about your opinions in reference to the behaviors that you think occur in these relationships. At any point during the discussion, you can decline responding to any of the questions. In addition, you may leave the discussion if you feel the need to. There are professionals available (advocate/counselor) to you during and after the discussion for free.

Definition

1. To begin, define dating relationships to me?
2. What kinds of behaviors come to mind when I use the term dating violence?

Issues in College Dating Relationships

3. So now that you have given me your definition of dating (use their terminology) relationships, tell me a little about what you think the challenges and/or barriers are in these types of relationships.

How extensive is the problem

4. Within the relationships you have identified, describe to me what positive behaviors that you think are socially acceptable.
5. Now describe to me what negative behaviors you think are socially acceptable.
6. With the thoughts that were just shared, at what point do you think a person that is dealing with the negative behaviors should take action.

Suggestions

7. Are any of you familiar with the social norms approach? If not, describe to the group the model/approach. Do you think this would be an effective approach to address dating violence on campus?
8. Are any of you familiar with educational programs that are currently offered here at UCF? If not, describe to the group current programs.
9. What do you think about these programs being used to address dating violence on college campuses, more specifically UCF?

10. With everything that we discussed in mind, what would be a “social message” to promote healthy non-violent relationships here at UCF that would get students thinking about this issue?

11. Do you have any other thoughts and/or concerns in reference to the different topics we discussed?

I would like to thank all of you for taking the time to meet with me and participate in this discussion about dating violence in college relationships. Your comments will be kept confidential with me, and at the end of my study and with IRB approval the recording of this discussion will be destroyed. If you would like to speak with the advocate/counselor, please let them know. Thank you.

**APPENDIX F:
IRB APPROVAL LETTER**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901, 407-882-2012 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Notice of Expedited Initial Review and Approval

From : UCF Institutional Review Board
FWA00000351, Exp. 6/24/11, IRB00001138

To : La'Shawn D. Rivera

Date : October 10, 2008

IRB Number: SBE-08-05838

Study Title: Social Norms and College Dating Violence

Dear Researcher:

Your research protocol noted above was approved by **expedited** review by the UCF IRB Vice-chair on 10/9/2008. **The expiration date is 10/8/2009.** Your study was determined to be minimal risk for human subjects and expeditable per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.110. The categories for which this study qualifies as expeditable research are as follows:

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

The IRB has approved a **consent procedure which requires participants to sign consent forms.** Use of the approved, stamped consent document(s) is required. Only approved investigators (or other approved key study personnel) may solicit consent for research participation. Subjects or their representatives must receive a copy of the consent form(s).

All data, which may include signed consent form documents, must be retained in a locked file cabinet for a minimum of three years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained on a password-protected computer if electronic information is used. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

To continue this research beyond the expiration date, a Continuing Review Form must be submitted 2 – 4 weeks prior to the expiration date. Advise the IRB if you receive a subpoena for the release of this information, or if a breach of confidentiality occurs. Also report any unanticipated problems or serious adverse events (within 5 working days). Do not make changes to the protocol methodology or consent form before obtaining IRB approval. Changes can be submitted for IRB review using the Addendum/Modification Request Form. An Addendum/Modification Request Form **cannot** be used to extend the approval period of a study. All forms may be completed and submitted online at <http://iris.research.ucf.edu>.

Failure to provide a continuing review report could lead to study suspension, a loss of funding and/or publication possibilities, or reporting of noncompliance to sponsors or funding agencies. The IRB maintains the authority under 45 CFR 46.110(e) to observe or have a third party observe the consent process and the research.

On behalf of Tracy Dietz, Ph.D., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 10/10/2008 11:09:19 AM EDT

IRB Coordinator

**APPENDIX G:
IRB APPROVAL LETTER FOR MODIFICATIONS**

CORRECTED LETTER



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901, 407-882-2012 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

**Notice of Expedited Review and Approval
of Requested Addendum/Modification Changes**

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board**
FWA00000351, Exp. 10/8/11, IRB00001138

To: **La'Shawn D Rivera**

Date: **December 01, 2008**

IRB Number: **SBE-08-05838**

Study Title: **Social Norms and College Dating Violence**

Dear Researcher:

Your requested addendum/modification changes to your study noted above which were submitted to the IRB on 12/01/2008 were approved by **expedited** review on 12/1/2008.

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.110, the expeditable modifications were determined to be minor changes in previously approved research during the period for which approval was authorized.

Use of the approved, stamped consent document(s) is required. The new form supersedes all previous versions, which are now invalid for further use. Only approved investigators (or other approved key study personnel) may solicit consent for research participation. Subjects or their representatives must receive a copy of the consent form(s).

This addendum approval does NOT extend the IRB approval period or replace the Continuing Review form for renewal of the study.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., IRB Vice-chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Janice Turchin on 12/01/2008 11:54:04 AM EST

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Janice Turchin'.

IRB Coordinator

Internal IRB Submission Reference Number: 004350

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