

# COLLEGE STUDENTS' BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE AND BOUNDARY CROSSING IN A COMMUNITY-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROJECT

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## COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAM DESCRIPTION TAKE BACK THE HALLS

Take Back the Halls: Ending Violence in Relationships and Schools (TBTH) is a teen dating violence prevention and community activism program designed to prevent relationship violence among teens. TBTH gives teens the opportunity to examine issues such as domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment and sexual abuse, generate ways to raise public awareness, speak out against violence, and advocate for change in their schools and communities. Weekly group meetings are facilitated by specially trained staff from a local women's advocacy organization and DePaul University student interns taking a community-based service learning class that includes their participation in delivering the program throughout the academic year.



## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTION

▲ **FEMINIST AND CRITICAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**  
► Focus on structures of inequality and their relationship to interpersonal violence

- Examining the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and other identity dimensions that shape social relations of privilege and oppression
- Encouraging student reflection on different subject positions
- Asset-based theoretical model that emphasizes youth agency
- Developing understandings around social justice
- Developing personal responsibility and commitment to social change

▲ **RESEARCH QUESTION**  
► How do college students negotiate different roles and relationships that present for them in the context of delivering a violence prevention program for urban youth?



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

▲ **DATA COLLECTION**

- Qualitative interpretive study
- In-depth semi-structured interviews with 13 undergraduate students (all of the student participants in TBTH during the 2009-10 academic year)
- Interviews were conducted at two points in time – at the beginning and near the end of the TBTH program
- Participant observations of TBTH group planning meetings, TBTH sessions in the high schools, and the university community-based service learning course

▲ **DATA ANALYSIS**

- All interviews were tape recorded, and along with participant observation field notes, were transcribed verbatim
- Transcribed data were coded and assigned themes using the qualitative data analysis program NVivo

## PRIMARY FINDINGS: KEY THEMES

### ▲ ROLE NEGOTIATION

#### ► Negotiating Multiple Subject Positions (eg., Student; Teacher; Facilitator; Mentor; Friend)

- "I think there were days where we would go in as teachers. And there were days when we went in and really had a more discussion based session. (...) I do think that probably in contrast to a lot of traditional classroom settings, like I think it was definitely very, very different and kind of challenged that notion. (...) They always seemed to perceive us as like, maybe not teachers quite, but like definitely some sort of authority within the discussion."
- "So I don't want to tell kids what to think or tell them what to do or tell them what's right or wrong. I want to be able to maybe just be like, oh well, this idea is out there, think about it."
- "Who am I to be teaching them about this? And especially with certain topics they might have experienced in their lives more than I have, and so they would definitely be more knowledgeable about these types of things than I am."

### ▲ RELATIONSHIPS

#### ► Challenging Assumptions about "the Other"

- "So I guess I learn more now every day how they have many of the same, you know, goals and struggles as any other teen. And for some reason, in our society, we seem to fear them. But I don't think that that's necessarily a fear that should be had."
- "But you know, I think that when you actually sit down with the youth, you know, you talk to them and you get to know them, and you realize that the majority of these youth aren't looking for violence or ways to act out. A lot of them truly, you know, want peace, and they want to change the environment. A lot of times, they just don't have the resources or people who believe in them to help them make that change."

#### ► Racial Boundaries/White Privilege

- "Our presence as mostly white will always be problematic. Regardless of where we're from, being people that (high school) students don't identify with and speaking to them about violence (that affects them personally very differently than us). There will constantly be a conflict in my mind: is what we're bringing in positive enough? Our presence will never be neutral."

#### ► Encouraging Voice and Creating Safe Space

- "Like these students are learning from us just as much as we're learning from them, but we are in a position of authority whether or not we like to think of it that way. What we say is different. Like we can't – it's not as safe a space for us as it is for them, and it shouldn't be. So sometimes I worry about the language that we use. And then also remembering to go back to what I think is like the core purpose of the program which is providing a safe creative space where students feel like someone is listening to them. So it's like this balance between the content and what I think is the bigger point, which is critical thought in a comfortable space."

### ▲ DEVELOPING AS A CHANGE AGENT

- "I'm much more comfortable speaking in public. Like I said, bringing those issues up, you know, at home or with friends. I guess overall, one of the biggest things we've talked about how like little change can kind of produce a global action. And I think that's what counts. Just kind of, I guess, seeing yourself as that activist who stands up for what they believe in, and you know, talking about rights and just doing a little, but doing a lot in a way."

Blouin, D.D. & E. M. Perry. (2009). "Whom Does Service Learning Really Serve? Community-based Organization Perspectives on Service Learning." *Teaching Sociology* 37 (2): 120 – 135.

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King, J. (2004). Service-Learning as a Site for Critical Pedagogy: A Case of Collaboration, Caring, and Defamiliarization Across Borders. *Journal of Experiential Education* 26, 3, 121 – 137.

Skilton-Sylvester, E., & Erwin, E. (2000). Creating reciprocal learning relationships across socially-constructed borders. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, Fall 2000, 65-75.

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## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

▲ Data illustrates that college students actively struggle with the limits of their authority and expertise in delivering an effective violence prevention program

▲ As the university students work with high school students whose positionality and lived experiences are often radically different from their own, they are challenged to find ways to cross borders (Giroux, 1992; King, 2004; Skilton-Sylvester & Erwin, 2000), connect across difference, and view themselves as change agents invested with personal responsibility to work for social change

▲ This research has the potential to contribute to the growing body of community-based service learning literature, much of which has focused on the benefits of service learning courses for students in both cognitive and affective domains (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Stukas, Clary & Snyder, 1999). With this study, we intend to build upon an emerging literature that explores students' experiences and critical and transformational learning processes (Kiely, 2005) and outcomes in the context of service learning in higher education

