A GAME-BASED INTERVENTION FOR ADOLESCENT DATING VIOLENCE

- A focus group investigation of ‘Green Acres High’

PS2502 MASTER ’S THESIS IN PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

Adolescents dating violence has become an international public health problem. The majority of the adolescents in Europe and North America have experienced some sort of dating relationship and even if many of these relationships are healthy ones there is an increase of destructive and violent relationships. Previous research indicates varied as well as limited results from already existing prevention and intervention efforts addressing adolescent dating violence. Dating violence prevalence is increasing and effective prevention and intervention methods are needed in order to reduce and prevent its existence. The purpose of this study was to evaluate a game-based intervention called ‘Green Acres High’, created by the CAVA-project group. Swedish adolescents that recently had played the game were interviewed with the means of focus groups in order to examine their subjective experience of this new type of intervention. Results indicate that the use of a game as an intervention method for this socially sensitive topic was perceived as positive by the adolescents, seeing it as a new, engaging and interesting method. The findings from the study indicate that dating violence is a topic in need of further discussion and that this game has potential to affect its players, both attitudinal and knowledge wise.

Keywords: dating violence, adolescents, intervention, prevention, focus groups

Våld i nära relationer bland ungdomar har kommit att bli ett internationellt folkhälso problem. En majoritet av Europas och Nordamerikas ungdomar har erfart någon form av datingförhållande och även om många utav dessa förhållanden är positiva och hälsosamma ökar antalet destruktiva och våldsamma förhållanden. Tidigare forskning visar varierade samt begränsade resultat från redan existerande preventions-, och interventionsinsatser. Förekomsten av våld i nära relationer ökar ständigt och effektiva preventions-, och interventionsmetoder behövs för att kunna reducera och förhindra existensen av denna typ av våld. Syftet med föreliggande studie var att utvärdera den spelbaserade interventionen 'Green Acres High', skapat av projektet CAVA. Svenska ungdomar som spelat spelet intervjuades genom fokusgrupper i syfte att undersöka deras subjektiva erfarenhet av denna nya interventionstyp. Resultatet visar att ungdomarna ställer sig positiva till interventionen då de upplevde den som en ny, engagerande och intressant metod för att bemöta det socialt känsliga ämnet våld i nära relationer. Resultatet från studien indikerar att våld i nära relationer är ett ämne som behöver diskuteras i större utsträckning samt att detta spel har potentiell möjlighet att påverka dess spelare, både attitydmässigt och kunskapsmässigt.

Nyckelord: våld i nära relationer, ungdomar, prevention, intervention, fokusgrupper
The disclosure of aggression in partnerships and relationships has been confusing for many people due to the romantic and idealistic image that most of us associate with courtship (Lavoie, Robitaille, Hébert, 2000). There is evidence from international research that the majority of the adolescents in North America and Europe have experienced some sort of dating relationship by the time they have reached their mid-adolescence (Barter, McCurry, Berridge & Evans, 2009). Many of these relationships will be positive but there is a prevalence of abusive dynamics within teenagers' relationships that is alarming (Antle, Sullivan, Dryden, Karam & Barbee, 2011). Research has been conducted with regards to violence between adults in a relationship, but less research has been conducted about violence amongst adolescents that are dating or in a relationship (Foshee, 1996). The issue of aggression in teen dating relationship has increased in interest in the social research during the latest decades and more studies have been conducted as a result of this. Research from longitudinal and retrospective studies indicates that violence during the early years of dating may affect future relationships and the use of violence. Therefore it is important to understand the patterns of abuse in teen relationships (Lavoie et al., 2000) to be able to create intervention methods with the ability to decrease the use of adolescent dating violence. Since intimate partner violence has a negative impact on public health there is a growing consensus of the importance of the development of effective prevention and early intervention programs, programs that can change knowledge and attitudes about violence and aggression as well as change behaviours (Edelen, McCaffrey, Marshall & Jaycox, 2009). The last decade has offered a range of different interventions in order to address the issue of dating violence in adolescents and new techniques are appearing as well. In order to create a valid intervention method with high quality and with the ability to affect adolescents in this matter, information needs to be gathered through research and empirical studies. It is also important to gather information directly from the adolescents since it can give useful insights into their world, their thoughts and beliefs with regards to the topic. Qualitative studies are a good way to examine the ideas of the adolescents and can offer better means to better understand their context and way of thinking (Lavoie et al., 2000).

Previous research has tried to explain abusive behaviour amongst adults but not as much amongst adolescents. There are some theoretical models, developed for adults that have been adapted for young adults and adolescents such as White and Koss and Nagayama Hall and Hirschman, theories that all suggest the influence of several factors. Some of the studies conducted to test these models associated social representations, such as attitudes towards violence or attitudes towards women, with the abuse in dating relationships (as cited in Lavoie et al., 2000). During recent years, international literature has established the prevalence of violence within adolescents dating contexts. Until recently, the evaluation literature in the area of teen dating violence has been dominated by American and Canadian studies but the topic is now emerging across Europe as well (Bowen, Holdsworth, Leen, Sorbring, Helsing, Jaans & Awouters, in press). But there is still limited European research on adolescent dating violence in general and due to this it is difficult to say whether European intervention orientation should be the same as the attitudinal focus in North America and Canada (Bowen et al., in press). Previous research has showed that gender role normative beliefs are, cross-culturally, negatively associated with rates of victimisation in adult intimate relationships, specially the emancipation of women (Archer, 2006).
Dating and dating violence amongst adolescents

With the purpose to define teen dating, a citation from Leen Sorbring, Mawer, Holdsworth, Helsing & Bowen (2013) is being used: “Teenage romantic relationships emerge from mixed-sex peer group activities in early adolescence and develop into exclusive dyadic activities. These later dyadic relationships are usually referred to as ‘dating’” (p. 160). For a teenager, dating is a very important step in life and it can provide companionship, intimacy, support and status with same-sex peers (Kuffel & Katz, 2002). The numbers displayed below indicates what an important part of life dating is for most western countries adolescents. Teenagers usually start to date when they are between the age of 13 and 15 years and 72% of all 8th and 9th graders in the USA have experienced dating or are in fact dating, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In the United Kingdom the percentage of teens 15 years or older that reported some sort of dating relationship was 88% and in Germany 47% of adolescents 15 years or older reported that they were in a relationship at the time of the study done by Seiffke-Krenke in 2003 (as cited in Leen et al., 2013). In Germany, 75% of all teenagers 15 years or older reported having some form of sexual experience (Leen et al., 2013).

Although dating is an important part of peoples’ life, it can also cause a lot of pain (both physical and psychological) and many people are experiencing dating violence. For a teenager it can be difficult to separate a healthy relationship from a destructive one, especially since many adolescents consider acts of dating aggression as “ordinary” behaviours (Kuffel & Katz, 2002). A report by the World Health Organisation revealed that between 10-60% of the women in the United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, Albania and Tajikistan reported experiencing violence (since the age of 16) by an intimate partner at some point in their life (Sethi, Racioppi, Baumgarten & Vida, 2006). According to Ellis, Ching-Hall and Dumas (2012) did 25% to over 55% of dating adolescents report having experienced some form of psychological or physical abuse in a relationship context. Reports from the International Dating Violence Study showed that between 17-33% of the female students and 17-37% of the male students at six universities in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Portugal had during the previous 12 months used violence against a dating partner (CAVA-project group, 2010). In Britain, a survey with 1377 people between the age of 13 and 16 years showed that 25% of the girls reported receiving and instigating violence in a dating relationship in contrast to 18 and 8% of boys respectively. Girls were also more likely to report the negative impact of the physical violence and as a result of that were also more likely to seek help in comparison to the boys (Barter, McCarry, Berridge and Evans, 2009). Since little research has been conducted in Europe it is difficult to be precise with regards to numbers and percentage of violence. Despite this there is evidence for dating violence in adolescents as well as it has been established that there is a greater likelihood for violence to occur the younger the couple is (CAVA-project group, 2010). It is important to remember that dating violence can differ in frequency; it can range from one blow that may or may not impact the victim, to more long-lasting, aggravated battery.

Different types of violence

A range of terms is being used to describe violence in adolescents’ romantic
relationships and they may differ from different authors and researchers. It is agreed that this type of violence reflects different types of behaviours and is due to this categorized into physical, sexual and psychological violence by Barter et al. (2009). Saltzman, Fanslow, McMahon and Shelley (2002) use a definition with four types of violence in order to describe the forms of dating violence; physical violence, sexual violence, psychological/emotional violence and threats of physical or sexual violence. It is common to focus on the three first mentioned forms; physical, sexual and psychological, including threats of violence into the psychological category.

Physical violence is according to Saltzman et al. (2002) “the intentional use of physical force with potential for causing death, disability, injury or harm” (p. 35). To push, slap or throw something at someone are common types of physical dating aggression (Kuffel & Katz, 2002).

Sexual violence can be divided into three different categories: 1) the use of physical violence in order to force someone to a sexual activity against his or her will even if the act is completed or not; 2) attempt to, or the completion of a sexual act with a person that cannot understand the nature or the condition of the act, that cannot due to illness, the influence of alcohol or drugs, disability or pressure or intimidation refuse participation or convey his or hers unwillingness to participate in the sexual act; 3) abusive sexual contact (Saltzman et al., 2002). Sexual coercion can be seen as one form of sexual aggression and includes behaviours ranging from kissing, to touching/petting and intercourse (Kuffel & Katz, 2002).

Psychological/emotional violence means traumatizing the victim by acts, threats of acts or coercive tactics. It includes humiliation, controlling, withholding information, doing things in a deliberate way to embarrass or diminish the victim, isolating the victim from seeing family and friends as well as denying the victim basic resources or money for instance (Saltzman et al., 2002). Stalking is one other example of psychological/emotional violence according to Tjaden and Thoennes (1998). Yelling, insulting and calling names are examples of psychological abuse in dating relationships (Kuffel & Katz, 2002). Psychological abuse is, according to Foshee (1996), often associated with physical violence and can according to adult battered women be just as bad, or even worse, than physical violence. Due to limited prior research, Foshee do not comment whether or not this is also true for adolescent women.

Threats of physical or sexual violence means using words, gestures or weapons to communicate the intention to cause death, physical harm, injury or disability (Saltzman et al., 2002). According to Kuffel and Katz (2002) are there indications from case descriptions of aggressive dating violence that physical, psychological and sexual aggression often co-occur and that dating aggression takes multiple forms.

Until now there has been little qualitative research about the matter of the use and experience of dating violence in adolescents (Bowen et al., in press).

Risk factors for dating violence

Previous research has examined several risk factors for dating violence, both for perpetration and victimization. According to Antle et al. (2011) it can include age (adolescents), gender (females) as well as experience of traumatic events or stressors in life. Shorey, Zucosky, Brasfield, Febres, Cornelius, Sage and Stuart (2012) mentions substance use (especially alcohol use), poor anger management and difficulties in regulating emotions, borderline personality traits, childhood abuse as
well as having accepting attitudes about violence as risk factors that can increase a
person's risk of becoming a perpetrator of psychological, sexual and physical violence.
Antle et al. (2011) do also mention inter-parental violence as a direct predictor of teen
dating violence. Leen et al. (2013) have done a review of twelve different
investigations conducted in Europe, United Kingdom and the United States in order to
identify common risk factors. Their review resulted in four dynamic risk factors (with
subcategories) for adolescents dating violence; peer influence, substance use, psychological adjustment and personal competencies and attitudes towards violence
(see Table 1).

Table 1. Dynamic risk factors with subcategories after Leen et al. (2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk / factor</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends who perpetrate dating violence</td>
<td>Barter et al. (2009), Foshee, Linder, McDougal and Bangdiwa (2001), McDonell, Ott and Mitchell (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends who use aggression in general</td>
<td>Brengden, Vitare, Trembley and Wanner (2002), Miller, German-Smith, Sullivan, Orpinas and Simon (2009)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends who are victims of dating violence</td>
<td>Foshee et al. (2001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Substance use</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chase, Trebouk and O'Teary (2002), Foshee et al. (2001)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>McDonell et al. (2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological adjustment and personal competencies</td>
<td>Internalization and externalization</td>
<td>Chase et al. (2002)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Depressed affect, destructive responses to anger</td>
<td>Foshee et al. (2001)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>McCloskey and Lichter (2003)</td>
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<td>Self efficacy</td>
<td>Wolfe et al. (2004)</td>
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<td>Attitudes towards violence</td>
<td>Belief that violence is justified</td>
<td>McDonell et al. (2010)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Acceptance of violence</td>
<td>Foshee et al. (2001), McDonell et al. (2010), Sears, Byers and Pric (2007)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Acceptance of rape myths</td>
<td>Maxwell, Robinson and Post (2002)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tolerance of the use of violence</td>
<td>Josephson and Proulx (2008)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Attitudes justifying the use of violence</td>
<td>Wolfe et al. (2004)</td>
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*Peer influence* includes the subcategories friends with experience of dating
violence and friends' perpetration of dating violence. Research indicates that peer
influence can take over as the primary influence on beliefs and expectations about
dating from parental relationships. A study by Arriaga and Foshee in 2004
demonstrated that both dating violence between friends and parents can be associated
with violence perpetration, but that it is only friend dating violence that predicts
the onset of perpetration. It seems as if peers have a greater influence than parents on the
tendency towards dating violence in adolescents (as cited in Leen et al., 2013).
Friends' perpetration of dating violence is a risk factor since it can have different
effects on the peer group. McDonell et al. found in their study from 2010 that girls,
and only girls, with male friends that are perpetrators of dating violence is at higher
risk of becoming perpetrators themselves, but it do not predict female victimization
(as cited in Leen et al.). According to the same study do females that report
themselves as perpetrators might be victims as well, an important finding
demonstrating that it can be dangerous to presume that girls are more common to be
the victims of dating violence. Behavioural norms that are socially accepted amongst peers can be powerful and can influence behaviours in dating situations. Both girls and boys are being influenced by peers, the influence can differ but having friends that are generally deviant has been found to be a predictor of dating violence for both girls and boys, according to a study by Millet et al. in 2009 (as cited in Leen et al.). General aggression in the peer group can also influence the dating behaviour for both sexes (Leen et al.).

Substance use does also have an influence on dating violence. Findings from research have shown that marijuana use and an early onset of other drugs can predict dating violence in boys, but not girls. For girls, but not boys, alcohol use was found to be a longitudinal predictor of dating violence in a study by Foshee et al. in 2001 (as cited in Leen et al., 2013). There are results indicating that substance use, especially the use of alcohol, can be seen as a predictor for dating violence in girls (Leen et al.).

The risk factor psychological adjustment and personal competencies account for the influence on dating violence by for example depression, destructive responses to anger, empathy and self-efficacy. Research demonstrates that depression can predict the use of dating violence amongst both boys and girls, especially for girls around the age of 14. There is also research displaying the association between low scores in empathy and aggression. Adolescents that have a low score of empathy are therefore more inclined to dating violence (Leen et al., 2013).

It is argued by Leen et al. that attitudes will predict behaviour even if they are not always consistent. Attitudes towards violence are the fourth dynamic risk factor discussed by Leen et al. Attitudes such as the belief that violence is justified, the acceptance of violence, tolerance of the use of violence, the acceptance of rape myths and attitudes justifying the use of violence influence the perpetration of dating violence. Acceptance of dating violence has been found to be a predictor of the perpetration of dating violence. There seems to be an association between attitudes justifying dating violence and dating violence in both boys and girls, according to a study in 2004 by Wolfe et al. (as cited in Leen et al., 2013). This was not a longitudinal predictor and can therefore indicate that attitudes may not be reliable and long-predictors of dating violence. There is a consensus among girls and boys about the motivations for violence. Boys’ being violent is a result of angry outbursts, jealousy and because they want to control their girlfriends, but girls are violent as a response to provocation or as an act of self-defence. There also seems to be gendered attitudes towards the acceptability of violence in relationships. Attitudes that male to female violence is justified predicted males’ use of dating violence. Equally, attitudes that female to male violence is justified as well as male to female violence is not justified, predicted females use of dating violence (Leen et al.). According to Leen et al. (2013) do the results from the studies mentioned in their review “indicate that attitudes are often gender biased and self-permissive in the use of dating violence” (p.167).

Gender differences in dating violence

A common view is the one that women normally are victims and men perpetrators in dating violence situations. The findings from different studies are inconsistent with some of them reporting that women are less likely to use violence than men, some saying that women are as likely as men in the use of partner violence
and others claim that women are more likely to be the perpetrator of partner violence. As well as there are limited research on adolescents dating violence are there little research with regards to dating violence and gender differences, even though partner violence appears to begin during adolescence and the experiences during the adolescence will impact people’s lives (Foshee, 1996). Studies have shown that the majority of the adolescent females reported being a victim of dating violence also reported using violence against their partner themselves (Gray & Foshee, 1997; Henton, 1983). Archer (2000) and Hickman, Jaycox and Aronoff (2004) shows further evidence of girls and boys being equally likely to report using violence in a relationship. The results from Cauffman, Feldman, Jensen and Arnett’s study in 2000 with 261 college students (18-23 years of age) suggests that gender may moderate the acceptance of violence and its relation to violent behaviour. Other studies report that if a girl has experienced violence in a relationship, it is a good predictor for her using violence against a partner herself (O’Keefe, 1997). O’Keefe (1997) also suggests that the primary motivation for girls to be using violence against her partner is self-defence. One explanation for the high rate of girls being the perpetrator is according to Foshee (1996) because it is a matter of self-defence or that girls simply are as violent aggressive as boys are. He also comments the way different studies have been conducted, saying that when asking participants whether or not they have been a victim or a perpetrator of violence can be misleading since the participants normally do not see themselves as a perpetrator if the violent behaviour was an act of self-defence. Sears, Byers, Whelan and Saint-Pierre conducted in 2006 a qualitative study with 26 focus groups (divided into gender) where they discussed physical and psychological abuse. The results indicated that behaviours was perceived to be gendered in terms of boys being more likely to use physical violence and girls were more likely to use psychological abuse. A girl’s use of psychological violence was explained as a reaction to the different messages coming from society, forcing girls to be independent. There was also a difference in the view of girls and boys as perpetrators where girls’ being the perpetrator was more accepted and were perceived as less abusive than if a boy was to be the perpetrator (Sears et al., 2006). Edelen et al. (2009) do also discuss dating violence and gender differences and says; “In particular, assessment of attitudes about cross-gender interactions is difficult because it requires specifying the gender of the perpetrator and the victim, and it is likely that respondents will tend to identify with the same-gender actor” (p.1244). This means that if you for instance want to measure attitudes about dating violence and are asking the participants about whether or not boys sometimes deserves to be hit by the girl they date, will a girl probably approach the item with the mind-set of the perpetrator and a boy will self-identify with the victim. A difference in identification due to gender, which can result in differences in interpretation that also can affect the response (Edelen et al., 2009) and is something that needs to be taken into account when working to prevent dating violence.

Consequences of dating violence

There is little research conducted with regards to the consequences of dating violence amongst adolescents, most research has focused on adults as with many other areas of this topic. Even though women are as likely as men to report using violence, they seem to be more vulnerable to the negative consequences of more severe forms of violence than men and this apply to adolescents as well (Molidor &
Tolman, 1998). Short term effects of dating violence are for example physical injury and a decrease in self-esteem (Sorbring, 2013). With regards to long-term consequences there are evidence that people that suffer from or engage in dating violence during the adolescence is at higher risk of experiencing relationship violence in adulthood, an effect of victimisation and perpetration (O’Donnell, Stueve, Myint-U, Duran, Agronick & Wilson-Simmons, 2006). Other long term effects are depression, suicide thoughts, substance use, eating disorders and negative effects on academic results (Sorbring, 2013). Research has demonstrated a relation between dating aggression and short-, and long-term consequences for the victims’ health (Muños-Rivas, Gámes-Guadix, Fernández-González & Lozano, 2011). There is a higher risk for victims of dating violence to engage in sexual activity, drug use, suicide attempts, physical fights and binge drinking. A female that has experienced dating violence has a twice as high use of substance abuse than females that never experienced such violence. There is a risk of developing high-risk sexual behaviours which in turn can lead to sexually-transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancies. There is a great risk of transferring patterns of experienced dating violence into future relationships and victims of this type of violence may carry complications of the abuse into their role as a parent which can affect their parenting style (Antle et al., 2011). This is evidence of the vulnerability of possible negative outcomes in later life. It is not only the persons that are directly exposed to dating violence, either as a victim or as a perpetrator, that are at risk but also peers that become aware of their friends intimate relationship violence (Molidor & Tolman, 1998). Therefore it is very important to address both the ones directly exposed to this type of violence, as well as the ones indirectly exposed in order to prevent this type of violence to spread.

**Attitudes, aggression and dating violence**

As a result of experience, formal learning and interaction attitudes start to form in early childhood. They continue to change, develop and assume new priorities through out life (Smith, 1979). There are several definitions of attitudes to be found in the literature. Cacioppo defines an attitude as “a general and enduring positive or negative feeling about some person, object or issue”. Eagly and Shaiken defines an attitude as “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour” and Fazio defines it as “an association in memory between a given object and a given summary evaluation of the object” (as cited in Maio & Haddock, 2009, p.4). Even if the definitions somehow vary, they all do focus on the concept that an attitude expresses an evaluative judgement about an object; we like or dislike, favour or disfavour an object, person or issue. Maio and Haddock (2009) define an attitude as “an overall evaluation of an object that is based on cognitive, affective and behavioural information” (p. 4). Attitudes can also vary in ways; they can differ in valence or direction as well as in strength (Maio & Haddock).

Literature with adult and adolescent samples has presented an association between attitudes and dating violence (as mentioned above with attitudes towards violence being one dynamic risk factor for adolescent dating violence). Despite this it is not evidence enough to prove a causal link between attitudes and behaviour as it is equivocal due to the reliance on cross-sectional analyses as Bowen et al. (in press) explains. Pro-violence attitudes have despite this remained the central focus of tertiary intervention for adult domestic violence as well as for primary interventions for
dating violence. There is evidence from primary prevention literature that interventions like that have a positive impact on pro-dating violence attitudes, although the impact on behaviour from such interventions seems equivocal (Bowen et al., in press). In the assessment of attitudes about intimate partner violence it is important to not ignore the aspect of interpretation and how several factors can control the interpretation of items about cross-gender interactions. According to the social learning theory by Bandura are attitudes and behaviours developed both by influence of family, peers and cultural norms as well as by personal experiences. Therefore it is interesting to consider whether a more accepting attitude about violence with boys in comparison with girls has to do with actual differences in attitudes or with different interpretation due to gender (as cited by Edelen et al., 2009).

The association between dating violence and attitudes has shown to be modest but significant. It is more likely for adults and adolescents that are supportive of or condone dating aggression to also report that they have perpetrated acts of aggression in their own relationships, than adults and adolescents that do not support or condone this behaviour. Several studies have, by using a variety of attitude measures, demonstrated the link between attitude and behaviour, both for males and females from the 7th grade through college e.g. Bookwalla et al., 1992; Foo and Margolin, 1996; O’Keefe, 1997, Price and Byers, 1999; Riggs and O’Leary, 1996; Slep, Cascardi, Avery-Leaf and O’Leary, 2001 (as cited in Schumacher & Slep, 2004). The link between a certain type of behaviour and aggression can be found in other areas as well; a similar association can be found in perpetrators of sexually coercive behaviour, rape-supportive attitudes amongst college men, in attitudes about aggression and marriage and husbands being physically aggressive towards their partner (Schumacher & Slep). Other research that examined attitudes towards dating violence has though identified a fundamental contradiction: aggressive behaviours in a relationship or a dating situation is not accepted, but somehow justified in certain contexts. Studies have shown (e.g. Price et al., 1999) that female psychological, physical and sexual violence is more accepted than male violence as well as a greater prevalence of pro-violence attitudes with men than with women. This study had a sample of 823 students between the age of 11 and 20 years.

Researchers have since a long time back accredited the distinctive contribution of peer groups to the behaviour during adolescence. Aggressive peers with positive attitudes towards violent behaviour has been found to work as an antecedent of aggressive behaviour and poor relationship quality in adolescent dating relationships (Ellis et al. 2012). Findings about aggression and dating violence are reflected in intervention programs used to inform young people about different types of dating aggression and possible negative outcomes related to them. Intervention programs use messages that explicitly discard dating aggression towards a partner with the purpose to influence participants to adopt the attitude that aggression is never justified and as a result of that become less aggressive and less involved in aggressive behaviour in a dating situation (Schumacher & Slep, 2004). Schumacher and Slep cite Avery-Leaf et al. (1997) about this matter: “Justification of violence clearly appears to be an important attitude to target for change [in prevention programs], as evidenced by the strong association between justification of dating violence and enactment of dating aggression” (p.232). Attitudes justifying aggression and dating aggression is clearly related, but that they do not move in step with one another. Previous research by Bookwalla et al. (1992), Cascardi et al. (1999), Riggs and O’Leary (1996) and Slep et
al. (2001) has shown that the association between attitudes and partner aggression is typically small to medium (e.g. effect sizes of $r = .11-.31$) (as cited in Schumacher & Slep, 2004). Findings by Muños-Rivas et al. in 2011 did also show a moderate but significant relation between attitudes and aggressive behaviour. These results suggest that people that in fact are aggressive in their dating situation also report attitudes that dating violence is not accepted. It can also mean that people, whom think that dating aggression can be justified in certain situations, may deny the use of aggression against their partner. Schumacher and Slep (2004) mean that this imperfect relationship between attitudes about dating aggression and dating aggressive behaviour is being reflected in evaluations of intervention programs aiming at a behaviour change through an attitude change. There is a difficulty in changing attitudes and creating a behaviour change as well. Prevention programs can result in a change of attitudes, but that does not always translate into a lasting change of dating aggression behaviour.

Prevention and intervention efforts

Prevention methods are needed in the aim of helping adolescents adjust their attitudes about dating aggression as well as their use of aggressive behaviours (Kuffel & Katz, 2002). As described above has many prevention and intervention methods/programs been created with the purpose to change the attitudes and behaviour in adolescents about dating violence and aggression. Some of them have been successful while others have proved being less successful and several concerns have emerged about some intervention programs. One highly evaluated program is called the ‘Safe Dates project’ and was created by Foshee et al. in 1996 and compared students (8th and 9th graders) getting a 10-session curriculum in school with students only receiving community services. It also consisted of a theatre production performed by peers and a poster contest. The Safe Dates project is quite unique since it offers a long-term follow up with the participants in order to examine effects on attitudes as well as behaviour. The test group had less psychological abuse, less physical violence and less sexual perpetration than the comparison group one month after the project (Foshee, Bauman, Arriaga, Helms, Koch and Linder, 1998). Another follow up was conducted one year after the program displaying a continuum in different attitudes but no difference in actual behaviour. The short-term behavioural effects had disappeared but maintained was the effects on mediating norms such as dating violence norms, awareness of community services for dating violence and conflict management skills (Foshee, Bauman, Green, Koch, Linder & MacDougall, 2000). At the third follow up a booster was used for half of the treatment group and was in the form of a newsletter and a telephone call from a health educator. Results indicated that the booster did not improve the effectiveness of the Safe Dates program. The last follow-up was done after four years with results indicating significantly less physical violence, serious physical violence and sexual dating violence perpetration and victimization with the treatment group than with the comparison group (Foshee, Bauman, Ennett, Linder, Benefield & Suchindran, 2004). Results from the Safe Dates project indicated a change on actual physical and sexual aggression in contrast to other programs that have demonstrated a positive short-term effect on knowledge and attitude change (Antle et al., 2011).

The different intervention programs until today have displayed various results and proved to have a different impact on different areas of knowledge as well as on
attitudes. Few interventions have had a real and long-lasting impact on behaviour and in the reduction of dating violence, except for the Safe Dates project which demonstrated an ability of reducing some aggression across time, and that is the main concern for the development of intervention programs today (Antle et al., 2011; Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007; Shorey et al., 2012). There is also a discussion with regards to the length of prevention programs and how effective short and long prevention programs are. This is an important matter since most prevention programs are offered through school systems and schools around the world is battling with budget and logistical constraints. Lavoie, Vézina, Piche and Boivin did in their study from 1995 a comparison of effectiveness in long and short prevention programs. The aim of the program was to address attitudes and knowledge related to dating violence in traditional school students. Results indicated that both the long and the short program were equally effective to produce positive attitudes, whereas the short program brought forth greater knowledge gains.

According to Shorey et al. (2012) has “the field of IPV (intimate partner violence) prevention research, including dating violence prevention research, been plagued by methodological limitations including a lack of long-term follow ups, varying definitions of constructs, measurement issues and validity issues” (p.290). They are referring to a review of nine IPV prevention programs by Murray and Graybeal in 2007, which included six high school adolescent dating violence programs. This review did not find any study with randomly assigned participants to groups as well as the fact that only four of them had been doing a follow-up (as cited in Shorey et al., 2012) and once again is the importance of follow-ups pinpointed out. The problem with prevention programs only focusing on modifying attitudinal variables that is thought to be associated with the perpetration of aggression has resulted in programs often being able to adjust attitudes about aggression but not as much changing or reducing the actual aggressive behaviour. A change in attitude or knowledge does not automatically result in a change of behaviour.

Interventions reported in literature have until now mostly been group-based programs conducted during several months (e.g. Adler-Baeder, Kerpelman, Schramm, Higginbotham & Paulk, 2007; Gardner, Giese & Parrott, 2004). Interventions like these are practicable in countries where sex and relationship education is included in the curricula such as Finland (Kontula, 2010) and Sweden (Sherlock, 2012), but can be difficult to achieve in countries where this topic is not a focus in the school curriculum, for example the United Kingdom. Therefore it is difficult to find an intervention applicable to different countries since the provision of sex and relationship education is diverse across Northern Europe (Lewis & Knijn, 2003). There has also been intervention programs conducted outside school settings (e.g. Wolfe, Wekerle, Scott, Straatman, Grasley & Reitzel-Jaffe, 2003), but there is a risk with interventions like these as there is a possibility of excluding students that do not take part in for instance after-school activities, therefore is the school setting a better environment for interventions to take part.

E-learning and serious games

E-learning is becoming a more usual and important method for learning in our society. This is much due to the technological development that has been taking place during the last decades and that is still ongoing. E-learning can be defined as a learning process using electronic and digital media for presentation and distribution of
teaching aids and as a communication support for learning (Leen, 2011). The concept e-learning originates from both the development of information technology as well as from distance learning (Eriksson et al., 2000). That e-learning in general can be an effective and good way of learning was demonstrated in the meta-study by Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia and Jones in 2010, which indicated that students generally learned better when e-learning was used in the education in comparison with the use of traditional teaching (as cited in Leen, 2011). A prominent advantage of e-learning is its flexibility with regards to time and place as well as that the user can focus on a certain specific subject that he or she would like to learn more about and can skip parts that he or she already considers masters. E-learning is thereby enabling repetition of difficult parts which the player feel like having to repeat and therefore promotes individual learning by own capabilities. This is an important part of games being the central tool in an intervention program; it enables the players to repeat difficult parts and can therefore enable more thorough acquisition of learning. Eriksson et al. (2000) mean that in order to create flexible education environments, there has to be an “interaction between three key environments; the individuals own studies and reflections, group discussions for interpretation and assessment as well as the use of information technology that focuses on the interactive possibilities between the people involved in the education (Eriksson et al., 2000, p.12). This is important information to consider when creating intervention programs to be used in school settings since the purpose of interventions often is to bring about knowledge. E-learning differ from traditional teaching since it has IT as pillars for the delivery of course content and allows for a deeper understanding in the form of a developed learning process (Eriksson et al.).

Why use a game for intervention?

Games have power; the power to educate, to train, to teach (Michael, 2006). But games are also controversial and there are stakeholders (e.g. teachers and parents) that are doubtful of the usability of games. Research has been conducted and books have been written about learning as a result of gaming. Games created for being used in school settings, so called serious games (learning games), are designed to reach clearly stated learning objectives and has not the same purpose as games created only for fun and pleasure. Since they include all aspects of education; teaching, training and informing, these games are more than just ‘edutainment’ (Michael). Educators and researchers have long suggested that video-, and computer games have the potential to improve learning. It is mentioned that games like this have the ability to increase motivation and may thus create the necessary motivation level needed to maintain the players’ involvement and thereby improve the chances to reach the expected learning objectives. Games have the ability to teach skills which may otherwise be difficult to teach or that is not prioritized (Wastiau, Kearney & Van den Berghe, 2009). A game is therefore especially useful for interventions about socially sensitive topics such as dating violence. In recent times the use of technology in teaching and psychosocial interventions has increased, much due to the movement of ‘Serious Games’ (as mentioned above) (de Freitas, 2006). This movement aims to use new gaming techniques for educational purposes (Felicia, 2009). It can be defined as computer based activities developed in adherence to pedagogical principles to support learning or training objectives (CAVA-project group, 2010). The reason for this
movement is to respond to the new generation of people and students that has come to be called digital natives (Prensky, 2001). Being born after the 1970s and growing up with digital technology is characteristics of the people called digital natives. Students in the schools today belong to the digital natives’ generation and because of this they also play a lot of digital games as well as involving in social networks. Due to the strong connection between this generation and the digital world, it might be difficult to get these students engaged and active when teaching with traditional methods since it might not meet their needs, expectations and frames of reference. As a part of this problem, new methods of teaching have been needed in teaching contexts in order to reach this generation (Felicia, 2009). Although this is a matter for school systems, education and curriculums, it is also an important matter to take notice of when creating new intervention programs to address certain problems in our society. In order to create and achieve effective knowledge acquisition it is important to use effective and up-to-date tools that can attract the specific target group. In the United Kingdom 100% of 6-10 years olds consider themselves to be gamers and similar trends can be seen in the rest of Europe (de Freitas, 2006). This demonstrates the increased use of video games as well as the effectiveness and popularity when using it as a learning tool.

‘Green Acres High’ – a game-based intervention

As a result of the above-mentioned concerns, a game-based approach called ‘Green Acres High’ has been created, designed and developed by a project called CAVA (Changing Attitudes to Violence in Adolescents) with the purpose to address adolescent dating violence. The CAVA-project is an EU-financed (Daphne European Commission) research project that constitutes of researchers from four different countries in Europe; the United Kingdom, Sweden, Belgium and Germany. Digital games like this can be played individually by the students and will require less time and attention from the teacher. This type of attitudinal and behaviour intervention will reduce the risk of negative group effects since it offers individual engagement (Dishion, McCord & Poulin, 1999). There are also different types of implementing possibilities for this game, it can either be played at school, as a part of the curricula, or be played as homework as part of a subject in school and later be discussed during lessons connected to this subject.

‘Green Acres High’ is an immersive and engaging video game with the purpose to address the issue of adolescent dating violence. Findings from previous research has emphasized on the need of a digital game that both can inform and effect attitudinal change for adolescents in abusive relationships as well as enabling peers to support others through raising their awareness and encourage help-seeking. Its purpose is to be used as an (primary) intervention program in contrast to the already existing methods for intervention. This game aims at motivating its players by not consisting of too much text as well as by having a motivating and interesting design. A digital game can enable its players to explore environments and situations that in reality might not be possible. This is useful when creating interventions for a sensitive topic like dating violence. A game like this offers a safe environment for individuals to develop a repertoire of skills since they know that their responses will not have negative outcomes (CAVA-project group, 2010). Another positive aspect is that it gives the players the possibility of adopting the persona of others, for example their
own boyfriend or girlfriend or a friend that is experiencing dating violence. This feature enhances empathy and perspective taking as well as different view-points. The game includes different types of tests, tasks, links and videos in order to capture as many aspects of e-learning as possible. After completing tests and tasks the player is given feedback with the purpose to motivate him or her as well as to guaranty that the player is learning as much as possible when playing the game. Feedback allows for reflection on one’s own answer as well as it enables knowledge acquisition. The game includes scenarios of different stages of a typical relationship (for the specific age range), simulated role play to incite awareness about dating violence issues as well as modelled scenarios where the player is the male/female or the friend of the player in the game (CAVA-project group, 2010). The purpose of the game is to be used in school, both by teachers and by students. Various stakeholders have been taken into consideration during the development of the game in order to guarantee high, qualitative education.

Adolescents dating violence is a serious problem that until recently has gained little attention. During recent years the attention has though increased and research has been conducted to investigate this specific area. Most research has previously been conducted in the North America, but today more research is being conducted in Europe as well. This is important to better understand the situation among adolescents in the European context. Previous research has indicated that adolescents not always take the matter of dating violence in a serious way, but instead see it as a natural part of relationships (e.g. Kuffel & Katz, 2002). Research has also indicated that dating violence is not specified by gender; many believe that the man or boy often is the perpetrator and the women or girl the victim, which is not always the truth in adolescents dating violence (e.g. Barter et al., 2009; Leen et al., 2013, Hickman et al., 2004; Archer, 2000). Previous research demonstrates that women/girls often also are perpetrators, but many times is their violence in the form of self-defence (e.g. O’Keefe, 1997) and is therefore not looked upon as seriously as when men/boys are the perpetrator (Leen et al., 2013). Dating violence is here referred to the four different categories presented by Saltzman et al. (2002); physical violence, sexual violence, threats of physical or sexual violence and psychological/emotional violence; forms that all can be severe when exposed to.

The seriousness of dating violence has been discovered and as a result of this many prevention and intervention programs has been created with the purpose to change adolescents’ attitudes and behaviour towards dating violence. There is evidence of these prevention and intervention programs having varied, little or no impact on adolescents’ attitudes and behaviours to dating violence (e.g. Shorey et al., 2012; Leen et al., 2013; Cornelius & Ressuge, 2006). The issue therefore remains on what an effective and affective intervention method consists of in order to have an impact on, and ability to change, adolescent attitudes and behaviours towards dating violence in the long run. Games are not a common method for interventions addressing this socially sensitive topic, until today other types of interventions have been used first and foremost. The game ‘Green Acres High’ will be included in the curriculum and consist of five lessons. For ensuring the quality of the game, teachers and others that is going to use the game in school will be educated about the game, serious games in general as well as dating violence. Materials for this purpose will specifically be developed. This game is not only for adolescents that are in the risk-zone of becoming victims or perpetrators of dating violence, it is a game that should be used by all adolescents since dating violence can affect anyone, no matter of social
class or affiliation. Not said that some adolescents are at greater risk, for example adolescents that have experienced violence or have demonstrated violent behaviour.

The purpose of the present thesis was to examine Swedish adolescents’ attitudes towards the game-based intervention for dating violence in adolescents called ‘Green Acres High’. The aim with the conducted focus groups interviews was to evaluate this game-based intervention and to get an insight of the participating adolescents’ thoughts and ideas with regards to the topic as well as the usefulness of the game. What are the important as well as less important features of a game like this? What is important to think about when creating (new) intervention programs like this one in order to reach best possible effect and impact on the players? The aim of the present study was also to examine and describe the respondents’ subjective experience of the game as well as its impact on them as individuals and their attitudes and knowledge in relation to the subject of dating violence. The target group of this study was high school students from class 1 to 3 in the Swedish educational program (16 to 18 years of age).

The present study aimed at answering the following questions:

• What are the participating adolescents’ subjective and over all experience of ‘Green Acres High’, the game-based intervention for addressing dating violence in adolescents?

• Do they believe the game can affect attitudes to and knowledge about dating violence and what changes can they themselves perceive as a result of playing the game?

• What factors do the adolescents consider important for an intervention of this type? What are their thoughts of the usage of the game as well as its advantages and disadvantages?

Methods

Participants

The present study is part of the ongoing CAVA-project which aims to create a new type of intervention for changing adolescents’ attitudes and behaviours to dating violence. Three groups of a total of 12 participants were recruited from trial-sessions of the game-based intervention called ‘Green Acres High’ conducted by the CAVA-project during the fall of 2012. Pre-, and post-tests was conducted with the participants during these trials and at the time of the post-test were the participants offered to voluntarily and anonymously sign up for a focus group interview. The participants were all students at upper secondary school and between the ages of 16 and 18 years old. The recruitment took place one to two months in advance of the focus groups interviews. All participants that had expressed an interest in participating in the focus groups were later called up for their status of interest at the time, with the aim to recruit the ones still interested in participating in an evaluating focus group interview. Twelve participants out of 33 were still interested in participating and were divided into three different focus groups. These three different groups were created naturally since the participants came from different schools and were grouped up together through school affiliation. The first focus group consisted of 3 persons; 2 women and 1 man, the second focus group consisted of 5 persons, all
of them were women and the third focus group consisted of 4 persons; 2 women and 2 men. There were a total of 3 men and 9 women among the twelve participants. A total of 3 persons were 18 years old (2 women, 1 man), 3 persons were 17 years old (2 men, 1 woman) and 6 persons were 16 years old (all women). The participating adolescents represented 3 different schools and 3 different educational programs (secondary apprenticeship program, vocational education and the ‘regular’ theoretical secondary school) in two different cities in the county of Västra Götaland, Sweden. Eleven out of 12 participants were born in Sweden. One participant had parents that were not born in Sweden, 1 had not specified whether the parents were born in Sweden or outside Sweden leaving 10 participants with parents born in Sweden. Eight participants were living with both their parents, 2 had parents that were separated, 1 had parents that were in a relationship but were living apart and 1 participant was living alone. Five participants were in a relationship at the time of the focus group interview and the remaining 7 were not in a relationship. Out of the 7 participants not in a relationship at the time were there 2 persons that never had been in a relationship earlier and 5 that previously had been in a relationship. No emphasis was held in creating gender equal focus groups. See Table 2 for participant information.

Table 2. Participant information (displayed in no specific order).

| Sex   | Age | Family situation and living | Previous experience of any relationship | In a relationship at the moment |
|-------|-----|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------
| Female| 16  | With both parents           | Yes                                    | No                             |
| Female| 16  | With both parents           | No                                     | Yes                            |
| Female| 17  | Parents separated           | No                                     | No                             |
| Female| 16  | Parents in a relationship but living separately | Yes | No                    |
| Female| 16  | Living self                 | No                                     | Yes                            |
| Female| 17  | With both parents           | No                                     | No                             |
| Female| 18  | With both parents           | No                                     | Yes                            |
| Female| 18  | With both parents           | Yes                                    | Yes                            |
| Female| 16  | With both parents           | No                                     | Yes                            |
| Male  | 16  | Parents separated           | No                                     | Yes                            |
| Male  | 18  | With both parents           | Yes                                    | Yes                            |
| Male  | 17  | With both parents           | Yes                                    | Yes                            |

Data collection

Focus groups interviews were used as the method of collecting data for the present study. Focus groups are the means of collecting data through group interaction. The goal is that the participants should discuss the topic freely with each other and the moderator is therefore not a traditional interviewer. The word focus
indicates that the discussion will be about a on beforehand given topic. Focus groups are a good method for examining how people together discuss and create meaning about the specific topic (Wibeck, 2010). The interviews were semi-structured with a set of questions defined in advance (see Appendix B). The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that main- and key themes can be determined in advance but can later vary in word choice as well as in terms of order. This way of interviewing allows the participants to express own thoughts and experiences during the interview, which can enrich the material, as well as that the moderator can control the topics and content being discussed (Kvale, 1997). The focus group interview guide was created in consultation with Emma Sorbring, Associate Professor at University West, in order to ensure the quality of the questions. This cooperation was enhancing the possibility of finding possible difficulties in the understanding of the interview guide.

Procedure

The present author was the moderator of all three focus group interviews. The participants had all signed a consent form at the time of the post-tests when first expressing their interest in taking part in a focus group interview. All interviews took place at the participating students’ school, therefore at three different schools in the county of Västra Götaland, Sweden. Data were collected in November and December 2012. The length of the interviews varied from 29 to 44 minutes. All interviews were recorded digitally with the help of a Dictaphone. Prior to the interviews, the participants were informed about the aim of using the interviews for an evaluation of the game-based intervention, ‘Green Acres High’. In connection with the interviews they were informed about the purpose of the study and about the use of the material. They were also informed about their voluntariness of participation and that they could stop, or leave, the interview whenever they wanted. The moderator asked the participants to answer the questions asked during the interview, in an honest and individual way. The participants were asked to comment or ask the moderator whenever or if, they did not understand a specific question or simply did not want to or were not able to answer. At the end of each focus group interview the participants were given some time to make comments or ask questions with regards to the content of the interview, about the CAVA-project or about the game. The participants were compensated for their participation in the interviews. They were not told about this in advance but instead given the compensation after the focus group interview were ended. The compensation was in the form of one cinema ticket.

The digital game ‘Green Acres High’ was designed as a secondary school setting (an English High School with associated attributes) where the player assumes the role of a student that has been given the task of raising awareness of dating violence amongst its peers. In the game there is a character called “The Messenger” whose task is to inform the players about different tasks and simulations as well as providing them with information and knowledge about dating violence. The game constitutes of five different chapters with dating violence related content. These chapters are; ‘Healthy relationships’, ‘Abuse and warning signs’, ‘Risk factors’, ‘Achieving healthy relationships’ and ‘Safely seeking help’. Each chapter was created to have duration of about 50 minutes and to be played during one classroom session. The content in each chapter was divided into tasks and more situational role play. The abstract tasks were designed to have an impact on knowledge on the conceptual level about different characteristics of relationships as well as categories of abusive behaviour. For
example the player might be asked to identify characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships. The situational role play was created with the purpose of enabling students to apply their conceptual understanding to possible scenarios. The scenarios were animated videos where for example the player and a character in the role play is having a dialogue about some dating violence related topic, or where the player for example is advising a friend about some matter. The players were given feedback, both in text and audio, after completing the tasks/role play, feedback that contains advice and possible alternative approaches that can be successful with regards to the matter. The game has been created in both English and German language, with the English one being used in Sweden, Belgium and the United Kingdom and the German one being used in Germany. For images from the game ‘Green Acres High’, see Appendix A.

Analysis

The focus group interviews were recorded with a Dictaphone and then transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were coded by an inductive thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006). A ‘down to bottom’, ‘data driven’ method was used where the material itself is generating concepts and themes. The analysis was first and foremost inductive, where the data itself gradually led to themes. The meaning of an inductive approach is to establish conclusions based on empirical data and the present study is therefore empirical-data driven (Langemar, 2005). Thematic analysis is a flexible tool to analyze data with. It is a method that can offer a detailed, rich and complex description of data. It is also a good method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns and themes within the current data (Braun & Clarke).

The first step of the thematic analysis is to get to know the data, to familiarize with it. This was done when transcribing, reading and re-reading the data. The second step was to generate initial codes which mean a systematic coding of interesting features of the data and the collecting of data relevant to each code. Since this was a data-driven analysis the data was approached with specific questions in mind in order to code around this questions. The different codes were later organized into potential themes, i.e. all data relevant to the theme was gathered in the search of themes. The themes created needed to be reviewed in order to see whether they work in relation to the coded extracts as well as the complete data set. After this an on-going process of defining and naming the themes were taking place, an analysis in order to refine the specifics of each theme and what the themes communicates about the data (Braun & Clarke). The thematic analysis process resulted in four themes, two of them with subthemes. The emerged themes are supposed to encapsulate the content of the dataset. Excerpts from the data were selected from the transcripts in order to highlight thoughts and expressions from the participants with regards to the specific theme. For a description of the thematic analysis after Braun and Clarke (2006), see Table 3.
Table 3. Thematic analysis after Braun and Clarke (2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Familiarizing yourself with your data</th>
<th>Generating initial codes</th>
<th>Searching for themes</th>
<th>Reviewing themes</th>
<th>Defining and naming themes</th>
<th>Producing the report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transcribing data, reading and re-reading data, taking down ideas.</td>
<td>Coding interesting features of the data across the entire data set, collecting data relevant to each code.</td>
<td>Compile codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each theme.</td>
<td>Checking if the themes work with the coded extracts as well as the whole data set. Creating a thematic map.</td>
<td>Analysis to refine each theme and the story the analyst tells. Generating definitions and names for the themes.</td>
<td>The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of extracts, analyzing the extracts, relating back to the research question and producing a report of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations have been taken into account in connection with the present study in accordance with the research ethics from Vetenskapsrådet (2013). Prior to the interviews the participants were informed about the purpose of this study as well as their voluntary participation and that they could stop the interview whenever they desired. The participants had prior to the interviews signed a written consent. They were informed about their anonymity in connection with the study as well as in connection with the results and that their names never will be mentioned in this thesis or in other contexts mentioning the findings of this study. The recorded interviews are kept safely and will not be distributed to third parties. It should though be mentioned that some of the participants’ teachers were aware of their students’ participation in this study and that their participation therefore is not completely anonymous.

**Results**

The main purpose of the qualitative analysis of the collected data was to get a deeper and more detailed understanding of the adolescents’ thoughts and ideas of a digital game as an intervention for reducing dating violence and effecting adolescents’ attitudes and knowledge about dating violence. The inductive thematic analysis resulted in four different themes with two of them having subthemes. The different themes will hereby be described in detail. The results show that the respondents perceived ‘Green Acres High’ as a very good idea, but not really as a game since a true game feeling was missing and as it did not contain very much “gaming”. They believed that using a game for an intervention about dating violence was a new and interesting method that could enhance changes in attitudes and knowledge compared to more traditional methods. Since ‘Green Acres High’ is the product of an international research project it also has English setting and English language. The
results indicate that this was not something that the respondents experienced as aggravating features of the game, although some words were difficult to understand. The English language felt natural since there was an English setting as well as it was a feature that made the game more interesting. The respondents agreed that adolescent dating violence is something that needs to be further addressed and discussed to a higher extent since it is as important as other sensitive topics being discussed such as for instance bullying or alcohol. They also believed that the game had good possibilities as well as the features for being able to affect its players, both attitudinal and knowledge wise. They agreed that the game had had an impact on themselves as individuals and that it had increased their awareness and knowledge about dating violence.

Appropriate excerpts have been chosen to further describe the main content of the theme. Some of the excerpts have been shortened in order to make the reading easier. A pause from the respondent is marked with …. Text that has been excluded is marked with / /. When referring to the respondents the appellation “Woman/group 1, Man/group 1, Woman/group 2, Man/group 3, Woman/group 3”, “the respondents” or “they” will be used.

Theme 1. A good idea but not really a game

This theme highlights the respondents’ thoughts of the game as a very good idea for addressing dating violence but that they did not really perceived it as an actual game.

All respondents agreed that the game in general was a good idea and something that should be promoted and used in schools in both Sweden and other countries. Although they found it to be a good idea, several of them commented that they did not experienced it as a game but more as a tool for sharing information and knowledge. The reason that they did not perceived it as a game, like other digital games, was because it did not contain any actual gaming. According to the respondents where the players’ task more of clicking here and there, going from one place to another and clicking your way through the game. They meant that since you as a player were not able to act so much own your own, no true gaming experienced was perceived. If you as a player were allowed to act more on your own, the game would have been more interesting and interactive according to one of the respondents. The game was perceived as interesting but there was no “wow” effect as another respondent expressed. According to Man/Group 3 was the game a little bit simple as well as it also looked simple which made it somewhat uninteresting, even if the content was good and interesting. He thought that the game would be more interesting if it was made more conspicuous. The instructions in the game were although perceived as good and according to the respondents was it easy to understand what you were supposed to do, where to go, what tasks to accomplish and so forth. The character “The messenger” was perceived as useful and provided good information and guidelines during the game. Some of the respondents found it useful that the information was shared both through text and sound, while others found it little bit annoying and distracting. Some of the dialogues from the messenger were though considered a little bit too long, containing too much information and that it would have been better if the information was divided into several, smaller dialogue boxes. Overall they considered ‘The messenger’ as a useful and helpful tool of the game. Some of the respondents commented that it sometimes was difficult to complete tasks
and simulations as a result of lack of knowledge about the topic. Because of this they all expressed a wish for a function with which they could go back in the game, go back to tasks and simulations already done since they afterwards realized that they could have answered in a different way. This was something that they all expressed were missing in the game. Some of the respondents did also commented that they wished the game would have contained some video-clips, real ones and not animated, since it would have made the game more serious and more easy to relate to their own reality as the game as it was now only consisted of animated materials. They meant that the animation took some of the seriousness away from the game, something that from time to time got the players to perceive it as only a game and the topic not as something that exists in reality and that people can be exposed to. They all agreed that using a game is a better concept than regular classes when it comes to a socially sensitive topic like this.

Subtheme 1.1. The use of feedback

This theme reflects the respondents’ thoughts on the feedback given during the game.

The game Green Acres High has focused much on feedback and feedback giving to the players since it allows for greater knowledge acquisition and reflection about the content. The respondents were positive to the feedback given when playing the game and that it facilitated the understanding of what was right and what was wrong as well as why different answers where right and others were not. The respondents expressed that the feedback enabled further knowledge and information gaining and the usefulness of for instance knowing why a certain answer was right and why another one was not. Woman/group 2 comment: “Yes, otherwise you would have been sitting there, clicking your way through the game and not really been able to understand, and if you clicked the wrong one then you wouldn’t have known why it was wrong”. They thought that the feedback would lead to reflection among the players; to know why something is wrong or right, not just that it in fact is wrong for example. They meant that to get feedback on the way of answering a question or acting in a certain situation of the game does also make the player more attentive for the next task or simulation since he or she will think it through more thorough. A few of the respondents commented the incentive system with rewards in terms of points when for example answering correctly to a question. They perceived it as a positive aspect of the game since you could see how well you have been doing since you started playing. Not all of the respondents had though noticed the incentive system.

Theme 2. A game-based intervention – a new and appreciated method

This theme reflects the respondents’ thoughts on the use of a game as an intervention method for dating violence.

The increasing use of computers in life is something that the respondents were well aware of. Man/group 1 comment: “the concept [of a game-based intervention] feels right since the use of computers is more in time now than ever, today it is natural to do everything on the computer”. He continues by saying that there is a risk of using computers for interventions like this since it can affect the learning outcome as computers are still perceived as something fun and entertaining and can have an impact on how serious the players are when playing it. The idea of using a game as a
tool for raising knowledge and changing attitudes about a certain topic is according to several of the respondents fantastic but they highlight the importance of the game being good and with high quality as well as engaging. Otherwise it will probably affect the players’ attention and interest of the game. A game with poor quality will not attract the players’ and it can therefore affect the possible knowledge acquisition. Woman/group 2 comment about games: “the game has to be fun, but still educational, and with that you have succeeded” (refers to Green Acres High). They also commented on the length of a game like this and that it is important that it is not too long since it can affect the interest and attention. Another comment which all of the respondents highlighted was age span. They considered it important that the game is used by the age span it was created for. If using a game not created for that actual age span will probably have a negative effect since it either will be too difficult or too easy to play as well as its content might not be adequate for certain age spans. “Otherwise it might not be a useful tool for learning and change” as Woman/group 1 commented. The respondents agreed that the suitable age span for ‘Green Acres High’ is 16-18 years. The respondents felt that using a game for learning more about a specific question or problem is a more fun way of learning than for example sitting and listening to someone talking. They meant further that when using a game it allows for the student, the player, to act more on her/his own. The players get to do things themselves, think by themselves and learn new things during the process. Woman/group 2 comments: “This allows for the individual to take in information in a different way compared to traditional lessons”. Information was conveyed to the players both via text and sound, something that some respondents commented as positive since it enhanced learning and taking in information in a different way. According to a the respondents has a digital game a better chance of making people aware of a problem comparing to more usual methods such as talking about it, traditional teaching or through lectures since it is a new and different way of addressing serious matters. Some of them believed that a more persistent knowledge could be created with the means of a game since you remember where the knowledge came from and that it therefore becomes more tangible and lasting. Woman/group 1 comments: “Yes, you remember ‘when we played that specific game’ and that game was about this and that… I think you learn and remember better with any type of game, the game might make it easier to understand the context”. One respondent mentioned that you might learn more through a game than with other, more traditional methods, but perhaps you are not aware of it.

As already mentioned was there a wish for real video-clips expressed by the respondents since it could ease the understanding of the seriousness of dating violence. Real video-clips would have been a useful tool for making the game more authentic and lifelike which according to the respondents would have made its content easier to relate to their own lives. Due to the way the game looks now, with its animated graphics, it is easy to look back on it as just a game and not as something that people can get exposed to or that the respondents themselves can get exposed to or experience. Woman/group 2 comment:

“Something I feel about this game is that it was sort of, I mean it didn’t felt like they were taking it so serious, or how should I say, it felt like it was only a game, it doesn’t happen in reality, even if you know after playing the game that it does actually happen in reality, but right there and then it didn’t feel like that, it felt like it was only a game…”
Another woman in group 2 comments about the usefulness of video-clips: “…maybe we weren’t thinking about it when playing the game because it was more like ‘it is only a game’, therefore it would have been good with some clips, I think it would have been useful”.

When discussing possible difficulties with game-based interventions the respondents did not have a lot of negative aspects to think of. Many of them were though commenting on the fact that students might go on-line for surfing the web instead of actually playing the game and that this might be a problem when using game-based education. This potential risk is another reason for the need of creating interesting and engaging games for interventions in order to keep the players focused and motivated on the purpose and tasks of the game and avoid them doing other things on the computer.

**Subtheme 2.1. Gains and losses with the use of English**

This theme reflects the advantages and disadvantages of this game-based intervention using an English setting as well as the English language.

Since the context of the game was an English High School (Green Acres High – a fictive school setting) and thus the language English, was it interesting to ask the respondents about their experience of this, somewhat different context as a part of the overall experience of the intervention. It became clear that none of them had any major problems with the English context. They meant that they already are so used to English and American contexts through TV, movies and music that they were not bothered by the divergent context. Some of the respondents expressed positivism about the different environment saying that it would not be inspiring or attractive having to play a game played out on for instance their own school and that new environments’ on the contrary are inspiring. A few of the respondents commented that they had not taken notice of the different context with associated school uniforms, the school’s appearance and structure nor the language. No culture clashes in connection with playing the game were reported by the respondents.

None of the respondents reported any major problems with the game being in the English language, although some of them commented that it consisted of some words that were difficult to understand and that they needed help translating them. However, they did agree that a game with the own mother language would have the best possibility of mediating all of the games content, something that a game with another language might have difficulties in doing. The English language could therefore limit the students in taking in all content according to the participating respondents. Some of the respondents were of the opinion that the game became less realistic when its characters were speaking English and that it due to this was perceived as a TV-series or a movie. Two women in group 2 comments: “It almost felt like it was a movie or something...”; “Yes it did, like a movie with questions”. They believed that they might had taken the game more serious if it was in the Swedish language as it would have given them a more deep and different understanding of the game and its topic. It seems as there was some ambivalence in regards to the issue of language since some others of the respondents expressed that they found it more realistic that the English language was being used since it was an English school setting and context. They meant that if the content was being translated into Swedish, but the setting was the same, it would have felt strange and the English language was therefore better suited for the setting in this game.
They further discussed whether the English language might take the focus from the core issue of the game, adolescents dating violence, since the use of English resulted in two major things to focus on. This might affect the knowledge acquisition and they reasoned about whether or not they would have learned more if the game was in Swedish. A question they do not know the answer to. Despite the concerns about the English language most of the respondents’ expressed that they would prefer the game in English before Swedish since it made the game more exciting and interesting. Man/group 3 comments the language: “Maybe it gets more interesting because it gets a little bit different when having it in English instead of Swedish”. Another Man/group 3 continues: “Maybe you focus more when it is in English. Perhaps you are reading more thoroughly”.

Subtheme 2.2. A game to be used in school

This theme describes the discussion with regards to playing the game at school or at home, as homework for example.

The respondents all agreed that it is a better idea to play the game during school hours than being asked to play it at home, as homework. They thought that if they, or other students, were asked to play the game at home it would probably not be taken as serious as when playing it during school hours. They thought that the commitment and interest of the game would decrease if you were to play it at home since there are so many other things you want to and need to do at home and the game would therefore not be prioritized. They also thought that the attention to the game and its topic probably would decrease in comparison to when playing it at school and you would probably play it in the fastest way possible, clicking your way through the game without paying very much attention to the content. Woman/group 2 comment about playing the game at home: “No, I don’t think you would have taken it in a serious way. You would probably just bee clicking your way through the game to be done with it”. At school, during the lessons, there is not much else to do and the engagement to the game would therefore probably be different. The respondents also thought that the discussions connected to each lesson would not be very useful and giving since the students would not remember the content in the same way as if they played the game at school and discussed it directly afterwards. They also presumed that many students would ignore playing the game if it was given as homework, something that also would affect the subsequent discussions. They believed that the game would be taken more seriously if played at school, that you would feel compelled to play it and that the students would be more focused. Another positive aspect of playing it at school is because you can get the help and supported needed from for instance teachers and peers as well as that there always is someone to talk to.

Theme 3. A topic in need of discussion

This theme highlights the respondents’ thoughts of dating violence as something that needs to be discussed to a higher extent, for example in their schools.

According to the respondents is dating violence just as important as other sensitive topics such as alcohol and bullying and needs therefore to be discussed to the same extent as serious issues like these ones. Despite its seriousness it seems as dating violence is not a topic discussed to any further extent, at least not at the
respondents’ respective schools. According to some of the respondents has it been discussed to a small extent in their school while other respondents claims it have never been discussed in their school. It appeared to be more common to discuss it among friends than in school, although the discussions among friends did not seem to occur on a regular basis. Woman/group 2 about whether they are discussing dating violence with friends: “Yes… or maybe not so much violence, well yes violence in one way, I mean violence is not only to hit someone, there are different kinds”. According to the respondents it is more usual that issues like bullying is the target for discussions, theme days and so forth and the respondents in group 1 believe that it might be due to the perception of dating violence as more leisure-related and therefore not a question that is being raised by stakeholders in school. Due to the above mentioned reasons, the respondents found it positive that the game Green Acres High was dedicated to dating violence and that this sort of intervention can raise awareness of the problem so that it can come to be discussed to a higher extent. The respondents highlighted the need of discussions about the issue of dating violence, and the need of discussions in connection with the use of the game. They believed that an important part of using the game, and to achieve best possible result from it, is the use of discussions. To discuss the content of the game gives the students the possibility of venting thoughts and questions that has arisen when playing the game according to the respondents. Some of the respondents’ commented the need of having interactive discussions when addressing a serious issue such as dating violence, but that the game can function as a preparatory tool for later discussions. Man/group 3 expresses: “It is better to use the game than not using it at all” meaning that the game could be the starting point of a broader and more widespread discussion about the topic. They thought that a way of doing this could for example be to connect each lesson of the game with a classroom or group based discussion so that the students, together with the teacher, could discuss the content further. It is important to not use traditional methods where the teacher is talking in front of the class about the content of the lesson, but that all students get involved, together. They also believed that by first playing the game in order to learn more about dating violence and together discuss it afterwards is a good way to reach positive results in terms of knowledge and attitudes according to the respondents. The respondents believed that discussions also can promote a more active engagement from the students while actually playing the game since they know that the content will be discussed later on and therefore needs to pay attention to the game. They further thought that the students otherwise might only click their way through the game without any interest of its content and therefore not learn as much about dating violence as possible. The respondents did also highlight the need for each school to continue the discussions about dating violence from now on in order to keep the gained knowledge and insights alive. To do this they can continue to address the issue with e.g. discussions, exercises, group-projects and Q & A sessions.

A majority of the respondents expressed a wish for more discussions about dating violence at school. They experienced an absence of discussions about this matter and believed that it would be good if more attention was given to the matter of dating violence.

Theme 4. The games’ impact
This theme highlights the respondents’ thoughts on the game's impact with regards to their view, knowledge about and attitudes to dating violence.

When discussing the impact of this game-based intervention for adolescent dating violence on themselves as individuals, all of the respondents agreed that the game at least have opened their eyes to the issue. They also agreed that it has raised their awareness and understanding about what dating violence is as well as different signs and risk factors of it but that they could not define or concretize more specifically what they had learnt. “You knew that it existed, dating violence, but not like that” as Woman/group 2 comments. Some of the respondents expressed that even though they already did know that dating violence existed, had respect for it and sometimes thought about it they still did not consider it to be a serious matter; a view that the game, however, did change. Woman/group 1 does also comment the outcomes of the game:

“I don’t really know whether I learned something. I don’t know... It... Maybe you will notice when you are in a situation like that and that you back off a little bit/.../But definitely that you have become more aware and maybe, well maybe it isn’t something that you think of everyday but now you know more about it than before. So... I don’t know whether I learned anything tangible trough the game...”

Man/group 1 reply: “But just the fact that it is eye-opening and gets you to think about it is erudition in itself... that’s enough I believe”. The respondents meant that even if they do not think about it every day, they did learn something from the game and they know more now than what they did before. They believed that you perhaps think about it more after playing the game since you in fact know more about it, but unconsciously. If you get into a bad relationship you will probably remember the game and its content so that you can act differently than what you would have if you had never played the game. They expressed a feeling of now being able to recognize dating violence in a different way than what they were able to previous to the game as well as that dating violence is a serious matter and something that you never should accept, no matter what type of violence that is perpetrated. Some of them also believed that it might be easier to take the topic seriously if you self, or someone you know, have experienced dating violence.

The respondents summarized the use of this game-based experience saying that it has been a useful and insight giving experience and they believe it can increase knowledge as well as changing adolescents’ attitudes. The game is an eye-opener in regards to right and wrong about dating violence and provides knowledge about what you as an individual can do and how to prevent its occurrence. The game has resulted in that they are more aware of the existence of dating violence and have made them able to see signs of dating violence in a different way than previous to the game. They although believed that the change and the awareness about the issue of dating violence within them might occur unconsciously. The game has resulted in the respondents according to themselves possessing a different and more conscious view of dating violence, although it might occur unconsciously, both with regards to their own relationships as well as their friend’s relationships.
Discussion

This study aimed at examining adolescents’ subjective experience of a game-based intervention addressing adolescent dating violence. The purpose was to evaluate the game-based intervention ‘Green Acres High’ by using focus group interviews. This method was used in order to find out more about the adolescents subjective thoughts and ideas about this new type of intervention method. Advantages and disadvantages of it as well as their personal perception of the usefulness and the potential outcomes of the game, both attitudinal and knowledge wise.

The results indicate that using a game as an intervention method to affect adolescents about dating violence was by the respondents perceived as a good idea. They thought of it as a new and exciting method to address socially sensitive topics such as adolescent dating violence and that it have better potential of affecting adolescents about this matter than traditional methods such as lectures. They did however not perceive it as a true digital game since they considered it lacking game feeling due to the fact that you as a player were not actually playing a game but instead most clicking your way around the game. The results also show that the respondents perceive dating violence as a serious matter that needs to be discussed to a higher extent than what it is today, both in school settings as well as among peers. They were positive to the game and were certain that it can bring knowledge acquisition as well as changes in attitudes. However, they were not able to explain in detail or more exactly what they have learned from the game but where at the same time certain that they in fact had learned new things and facts about dating violence as well as it had changed their way of looking at it and thinking of it and their attitudes towards it. They all mentioned that the game probably affected them in many ways, but that it might be an effect taking place more unconsciously.

According to Barter et al. (2009) have a majority of the European and North American adolescents’ experienced some sort of dating relationship when they are in their mid-adolescence. This was also in accordance with the experiences of the participating adolescents since 9 out of 11 respondents previously had experienced some form of dating relationship. In order to create valid intervention methods it is important to address the correct target group and further investigate their thoughts and ideas about the matter and according to Lavoie et al. (2000) is qualitative studies a useful tool to get this insight which this study has proven to be correct. The focus group methodology has resulted in important insight in the respondents’ thoughts and ideas about this specific intervention method; a digital game. This intervention is useful in order to establish the prevalence of dating violence as well as finding means to prevent it in Europe since little research on dating violence in adolescents previously have been conducted in the European context. Since there is research indicating that younger couples are at higher risk of facing dating violence, in its different shapes (CAVA-project group, 2010), it is important to address adolescents at the suitable age in order to prevent its prevalence to the highest extent. According to Cornelius and Ressegui (2007) are there two different types of preventions: primary and secondary. The primary one aims at circumventing dating violence before it occurs by for instance targeting a whole population, such as a school, in similarities with the game of ‘Green Acres High’. The primary prevention does therefore need to be implemented before the violence has occurred in order to prevent the emergence and spread of it. They continue by saying that high school students are an appropriate age group to target since it allows for possible moulding of attitudes and behaviours.
as this group of people are at the beginning of forming dating relationships (Cornelius & Resseguie). Therefore it is important to adjust the intervention so that it is suitable for the intended age group, which seemed to be the case with the respondents of the present study that considered that the proper age group for this intervention is 16-18, not younger, not older, since the age would affect the effect of the game. Secondary prevention are supposed to address already occurring violence and can therefore be useful for both perpetrators and victims (Cornelius & Resseguie). The possibilities for ‘Green Acres High’ to be used for both primary and secondary prevention are good since it contains tasks and simulations that are meant to change attitudes as well as increasing knowledge about dating violence and can probably work in an alarming and awakening way for adolescents that might not be aware of that they in fact are perpetrators or victims of such violence.

Since age, gender as well as stressors and traumatic experiences in life are considered to be risk factors for dating violence (Antle, 2011), it is important to use intervention and prevention methods to reach out to target groups within these risk factors. According to Foshee (1996) there is no established research on whether males or females are more likely to be the perpetrator of violence and therefore it is a good idea to reach out to both genders in the efforts of preventing dating violence. Adolescents can fit in to several of the above mentioned risk factors and are therefore a target group to consider in the prevention of dating violence occurrence. Especially since people experiencing dating violence during adulthood easily can transfer patterns and behaviours to later relationships (O’Donnell et al., 2006). Other risk factors mentioned within the research of adolescent dating violence are peer influence, substance use, psychological adjustment and personal competencies and attitudes towards violence (Leen et al. 2013). These risk factors are also evidence for the need of targeting adolescents in the work of preventing dating violence since adolescents can belong to several numbers of these risk groups. For instance, a young person at the age of 16 or 17 can represent both the risk factor of peer influence as well as the risk factor substance use, if for example he or she has a positive attitude towards dating violence and is doing drugs. So when addressing primary or secondary prevention to adolescents, many ‘groups’ of adolescents (groups of people that perhaps belong to potential risk factor/factors) can be covered and result in a positive effect of preventing this type of violence. In the current study the respondents could have fitted in to several ‘risk factor groups’, for instance peers or individuals that influence the use of violent behaviour in relationship contexts, peers or individuals that have been the victim of violent behaviour in relationship contexts, peers or individuals under the use of some kind of substance and so forth.

By creating interventions to be used in school, addressing several groups of individuals with different background and experience, it might be possible to address the topic of dating violence in an effective way and in fact create a change. By turning to everyone, not only victims or perpetrators, knowledge can be spread and shared and one can reach people that previously have not reflected significantly on the subject. This way, the knowledge can be made common sense instead of something that is barely discussed and that a lot of people, both adolescents and adults, are afraid of sharing and seeking help for. By lifting the problem up for discussion the perception of it and the attitudes to it can change and as a result of that dating violence can decrease. Attitudes towards violence is another risk factor for dating violence (Leen et al., 2013), and affecting people’s attitudes towards violence might perhaps play a huge part in the prevalence of this type of violence. Many people
might not consider psychological violence or threats of physical or sexual violence as severe as for instance physical violence. Spreading knowledge about these forms of violence might affect people and making them realize that different forms of violence exist and that none of them are to be accepted. Since severe consequences of dating violence are occurring is the prevention of this type of violence of outmost importance. Victims, perpetrators and peers with friends somehow being involved in dating violence are all at risk of severe short- and long-term consequences (Molidor & Tolman, 1998) which is further evidence for the need of qualified intervention programs.

The already existing prevention and intervention programs for adolescent dating violence have proven to show varied results. This has raised some concerns about the interventions addressing dating violence and is proving that an effective and attitude- as well as behaviour-changing intervention is needed in order to decrease this type of violence. There is a need for an intervention displaying long-term effects on behaviour and in the reduction of dating violence (Antle et al., 2011; Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007; Shorey et al., 2012). There are different aspects to take into consideration when creating a good intervention. It is important to not create an either too long or too short intervention since it can affect the possible outcomes. The respondents in the present study found it useful to divide the content into different chapters, connecting it with an after-following discussion so that there was not too much information to take in at one time when playing it. This, and the fact that the different chapters allows for a longer intervention (for instance during a couple of weeks) can be seen as positive characteristics of the game as it can provide an opportunity for longer lasting knowledge as the topic is being repeated and rehearsed during several lessons and discussions. Another important feature of interventions for dating violence is long-term follow-ups (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007; Shorey et al., 2012). Without follow-ups it can be problematic to define the actual effects of the intervention since the impact of the game can change during time. Follow-up data on attitudes, knowledge, help seeking behaviour and utilization of new skills is limited in prior studies (Cornelius & Resseguie). New interventions need to focus on including follow-up measures and outcome evaluations in order to examine the effects on attitudes, knowledge and behaviour. It is important to in the future examine longitudinal attitude- and behavioural-change within the participants of this current intervention in order to evaluate possible outcomes. The present study has however somewhat tried to capture the respondents’ thoughts on the effects of the game on their own attitudes and knowledge, when discussing whether they see dating violence differently as a result of the game. There is also a lack of outcome evaluation of the several prevention programs initiated since the 1980s (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007). It seems, however, that this should be of great importance when creating and introducing a prevention/intervention program since it otherwise is problematic to talk about the effects. The lack of follow-ups in the present study is considered to be a weakness since the results cannot demonstrate the more long-lasting effects on the respondents (if there are any long-lasting effects). The respondents played the game in October and claimed to have been effected by the game when interviewing them in November and December, whether this impact is still accurate can although not be commented. A follow-up interview or questionnaire would therefore have been interesting and useful in terms of determining the possible long-term effects of this specific intervention.

Another positive aspect of the current game-based intervention is the players’
ability to personally choose a suitable character to represent the player in the game. This is an advantage since previous research has showed that respondents tend to identify with the own gender (Edelen et al., 2009) and this intervention can therefore minimize issues connected to preconceived gender roles such as the male being the perpetrator. The possibility of choosing your own character in the game do also have the potential of making the game more personal and interesting since the players might identify with it in a different way than if it always was the same pre-chosen character. Since this intervention is created by the CAVA-project which is an international project, the game is also in the English language. However, the respondents did not express any greater problems with the game being in English, although they admitted that some of the words were a little bit difficult to understand.

It was interesting to investigate the impact of the game not being in the mother language (since the present study includes Swedish respondents), seeing that it did not have any greater negative impact nor creating any greater difficulties for the players according to the respondents. This is important knowledge since it can allow for international cooperation’s in the work of creating good interventions that also can be spread among several countries and not only being used in the country of origin.

Since the youths of today belongs to the digital generation, different methods needs to be used in order to attract their attention and making learning possible in an interesting and interactive way. New and modern techniques has influenced many areas in the society and proven to be useful for teaching and learning different skills and knowledge. A new type of games have emerged, games with the purpose of teaching and training and that has clearly stated learning objectives, games also called serious games (Michael, 2006). These types of games have a different ability of teaching students skills that can be difficult to teach through other methods such as traditional lessons. Games can increase the motivation of its players and by using games learning can be improved as a result of increased involvement and engagement from the students (Wastiau, Kearney & Van den Berghe, 2009). The idea of digital games improving learning and teaching skills that otherwise may be difficult to teach was supported by the respondents. They meant that the use of a game for this intervention, instead of traditional teaching, was a very good idea since it increased their motivation and interest in taking part of the intervention. They also meant that computers are such a big part of people’s lives today that it felt natural to use a digital game for teaching students about dating violence. They also mentioned the need for the game to be interesting and fun in order to achieve the learning objectives set out on beforehand, otherwise it might have the opposite effect on the players since they probably will not play it in a thorough manner and embrace the content. Some of the positive aspects the respondents mentioned with regards to the game were that it allows for the student to act on his or her own and therefore gets involved in the learning process in a different way. They believed that when you are given more responsibility with regards to your own learning process you will also learn more and that this type of learning allows for the student to take in the content differently. They all perceived it as a new and exciting teaching method that they considered being better than traditional teaching, comments in accordance with those of Felicia (2009).

According to the respondents does a digital game as an intervention have greater chances of being remembered (and therefore possibly also its content) than an intervention using traditional teaching since you as a player will remember that the specific knowledge came from the game; you will remember that you learned what you know about for instance risk factors for dating violence when you were playing
‘that game’ in school. The use of a game that the students play individually does also decrease the risk for negative peer influence, as mentioned by Dishion et al. (1999). However, interaction and discussions with peers can be considered an important part of reflecting and handling a socially sensitive topic, so by using discussions in combination with each lesson of this game, two useful tools to address the issue is being taken into account. The respondents did agree that discussions related to the different lessons were an important part of learning as much as possible about the topic and to reach long-lasting knowledge about the subject.

Method discussion

As far as the authors’ knowledge has no similar study previously been conducted (about a game-based intervention) and therefore it is difficult to compare the results of the study with previous results. The present study was limited with regards to the number of respondents and used a qualitative method to examine the respondents’ subjective experience of this new type of intervention method. Since no pre- and post-tests were conducted it is difficult to compare actual changes in attitudes and knowledge within the respondents and the result does therefore totally rely on the information shared by the respondents. It can only be speculated in how this intervention might differ from other preventions and interventions already being mentioned in the literature (see e.g. Antle et al., 2011; Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007; Leen et al, 2013; Shorey et al., 2012) and what advantages and disadvantages it possesses compared to these other types of interventions. The present study offers no generalization possibilities since the number of respondents was limited. An advantage would have been a higher number of respondents even if the present data was perceived as conveying a consistency in content from the respondents. A more common method would probably be the use of questionnaires before and after playing the game in order to detect differences among the players regarding e.g. knowledge, attitudes, aggression and so forth. It is although perceived as valuable to collect data explaining adolescents subjective thoughts about the topic and the game more detailed, which is why the method in question (focus group interviews) have been used for this study. However, it would have been a good idea to combine the interviews with for instance pre- and post-questionnaires in order to obtain the best possible oversight of the possible outcomes of this intervention type. This method would allow for both detailed insights about the subjective experience as well as a large number of adolescents describing the outcomes of the game in a more quantitative way. Another possible method would be pre- and post-interviews in order to obtain knowledge about the game’s impact on its players. The present methodology only allows for insights about the overall experience of the game and makes it more difficult to separate ‘before from after’ even if the respondents tried to explain the subjective experience of the outcomes of the game. Something that was obvious when analysing the data since it became clear that the respondents themselves had difficulties in explaining whether or not, as well as what, they have learned through the game. They felt that they had learned something, but they could not exactly point out or describe what they had learned and the use of an alternative method would perhaps have facilitated the understanding of what the respondents have learned more precisely. As a result of the above-mentioned reasons it is difficult to talk about or examine “real” changes in the respondents’ attitudes and knowledge to dating violence since the findings of this study are the result of the respondents’ self-reported
subjective experience of the intervention. Although it is assumed that the respondents were speaking the truth and where honest when discussing the effects of the intervention, the present study would have gained from pre- and post-focus group interviews or other types of pre- and post-measurements in order to evaluate the outcome of the game in a more detailed and exact way.

The work of preparing, conducting and working with the interviews in the present study has been planned carefully and all steps have been done in a precise and serious manner. As a result of the above mentioned reasons is the present study perceived as trustworthy, neutral and reliable. A reflective and critical state of mind has been following the work process in order to obtain good reliability of the study. Since the method in question is qualitative it is difficult to know whether the respondents’ answers would have been the same on the occasion of a recurrence of the study. The current interview guide is although being seen as elaborated and could be used again to measure the experience of the game-based intervention ‘Green Acres High’. However, the interview guide would have to undergo some slight changes since it at the present moment is asking a few questions about some more pedagogical aspects. The interview guide is not perceived as containing leading questions but instead allows the respondents to answer freely and according to their own personal opinion. The topic of the study has from the author’s side been met with an open mind and without preconceptions in order to research it in a correct manner. It although has to be mentioned that the present study would have benefited from having more respondents, even if the existing respondents were doing their best in answering the questions and where doing so in a helpful and interested way. More respondents would perhaps have given the study another depth and richness although the current data is considered to agree. Since it is a qualitative study does the interest lie in examining subtle interactive processes taking place in specific contexts and not so much of being able to generalize, something that is important to remember when discussing the validity of a specific study (Smith, 2008). The present study is perceived as valid since what was intended to be measured in fact have been measured although with some slight changes in form of moving away from a more pedagogical orientation at the beginning of the research to a more psychological one. As mentioned above where there some questions of a more pedagogical nature that was being measured with the current interview guide, however, they are seen as useful since giving extra material and insights that further can help to explain the respondents subjective experience. The respondents were perceived as honest and thoughtful in their way of responding to the questions during the focus groups, something that has provided the data with richness and depth. The respondents were coming from a selected sample group and were considered to have the ability to answer the intended interview questions which they also proved being able of. A limitation of the focus group methodology might be the risk of some of the respondents withholding their thoughts as a result of the impact of the other respondents in the same group. At times it can be difficult for an individual to speak his or her mind as a result of the atmosphere in the group. The use of a thematic analysis for analysing collected data was chosen with the aim to describe the respondents’ subjective experience of this game-based intervention as well as it could generate interesting themes reflecting the content of the data. It would have been advantageous if another researcher had been coding the data in order to compare the coding researchers between; a triangulation between the researchers perspective (Smith, 2008). However this was not possible during the present study and can
possibly be seen as a disadvantage. Another disadvantage that already has been mentioned is the lack of pre- and post-tests. The use of both pre- and post-test would have enabled a more nuanced and precise picture of actual changes in attitudes and knowledge as a result of playing the game.

Conclusions

The present study has contributed with an important insight about the respondents’ experience of this game-based intervention for addressing dating violence. It is clear that the issue of dating violence needs to be further addressed and that the respondents considered this game-based intervention as a useful tool in doing so. It appears as if games have the possibility of affecting its players and that it have the probability of being an effective method for many subjects, especially socially sensitive topics that needs to be addressed in a more delicate way. Since the area of game-based interventions is relatively new, further research has to be conducted with regards to the effectiveness of these types of interventions and with the use of longitudinal studies that can identify any long-lasting changes in attitudes, knowledge and behaviour. Since dating violence in adolescents has proven to be a rising matter it is also important to find useful and effective tools that can affect adolescents and in the long term decrease the prevalence of dating violence. It is important to listen to the adolescents themselves in order to create these tools, attractive and interesting enough for the youths to pay attention to it. This study is a small part of that action. When turning to the users, like in the present study, no matter what area is being addressed, chances are improved of creating successful and useful means for addressing the specific topic. It is important so see the users themselves as a helpful instrument in order to create an intervention that can make a difference. More research needs to be conducted about dating violence prevalence and its spread across countries and continents, especially in Europe since little research has been conducted here. Further research, both national and international, can provide a deeper understanding and a wider knowledge of the area of game-based interventions for dating violence as well as for other sensitive matters. It can also provide insights about the possible and potential outcomes in terms of knowledge acquisition and attitude- and knowledge changes as well as the more longitudinal effects that in the long run optimistically can decrease the prevalence of dating violence.

References


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O’Donnell, L., Stueve, A., Myint-U, A., Duran, R., Agronick, G., & Wilson-


Appendix A.

Image examples from the game-based intervention ‘Green Acres High’.

Image 1. *The different characters of the game*. The image is copied from http://cavaproject.eu/content/game and used with the permission from the CAVA-project group.

Image 2. *Instructions of the game*. The image is copied from http://cavaproject.eu/content/game and used with the permission from the CAVA-project group.
Image 3. *Content of Lesson 2*. The image is copied from [http://cavaproject.eu/content/game](http://cavaproject.eu/content/game) and used with the permission from the CAVA-project group.
Focus groups interview guide

1. Till att börja med, vilka är era allmänna synpunkter på spelet?
   1.a. Vad tyckte ni särskilt mycket om?
   1.b. Vad tyckte ni inte om?

2. Säg något om stilen på spelet – grafiken/ seriestuket?
   2.a. Vad tror ni att era vänner skulle tycka om spelet?
   2.b. Ge exempel någon annan stil på spelet hade varit mer lämpligt för just detta ämne?

3. Vad tänkte ni när ni såg “budbäraren” (The Messenger)?
   Beskriv!
   3.a. Ge exempel på hur vi kan förbättra denna karaktär, (t.ex. kön/ålder/tilltalelse)

4. Vad tyckte ni om instruktionerna i spelet – kände ni er alltid säkra på vad ni skulle göra?
   4.a. På vilket sätt skulle de kunna förbättras?

5. Vad tycke ni om den feedback som gavs i de olika scenarierna – var de bra/lämpliga/användbara?
   5.a. Hur tyckte ni att hjälpsidan fungerade?
   5.b. Finns det några andra egenskaper som ni tycker att dessa datorbaserade lektionerna bör ha?
   5.c. Vilken åldersgrupp tror ni att denna typ av undervisning passar bäst för och varför?
      – Skulle yngre personer kunna spela det? Varför?
      – Skulle personer i t.ex. 20 årsåldern kunna spela det? Varför?

5.e. Kan ni komma på några problem med att använda datorbaserad undervisning i skolan?
5.f. Varför skulle ni rekommendera att spelet bör användas i andra skolor?

6. Blev ni förvånade över att spelet/undervisningen handlade
om våld i nära relationer bland ungdomar?
6.a. Är det något ni har diskuterat tidigare?
6.b. På vilket sätt kan spelet bidra till att detta kommer att diskuteras mer/tas på större allvar bland ungdomar som har spelat spelet?
6.c. Vilka andra sätt som är lämpligare kan man använda i skolan för att diskutera detta område?
6.d. Hur önskar ni att er skola skall fortsätta arbeta med frågan?

8. På vilket sätt tror ni att spel som detta hade kunnat användas i andra utbildningssyften?
8.a. Hur er ni på ”digitaliserad” undervisning i relation till den klassiska undervisningen? Behövs det mer/mindre av någon form i skolan?
8.b. Vilka fördelar/nackdelar har ett spel som undervisningsform? Vilka fördelar/nackdelar har vanlig undervisning?
8.c. Hur tror ni att ett spel (om ett viktigt ämne) kan påverka människor som spelar det?

9.a. Hur påverkades ni i spelandet av den (annorlunda) kontexten?
9.b. Upplevde ni några ”kulturkrockar”? Beskriv.

10. Vad tyckte ni om att spelet var på engelska?
10.a. Hur tror ni detta påverkar lärandet?
10.b. Om spelet var på svenska, tror ni att ni hade upplevt det annorlunda? På vilket sätt?

11. Vad tyckte ni om att det kom personer från Högskolan Väst och genomförde spelet med er, istället för t.ex. en lärare?
11.a. Om en lärare håller i dessa lektioner med sina elever, vad ska hon/han tänka på?

12. Vad hade ni tyckt om att spela spelet på egen hand hemma,
som t.ex. en läxa istället för i skolan?

13. Ser ni annorlunda på våld i nära relationer efter att ha spelat spelet? (kopplat till attitydförändring t.ex.)