

TITLE

Effectiveness of a Social Change Approach to Sexual Assault Prevention

ABSTRACT

The author examined the impact of a sexual assault prevention program using a social change approach. The interactive multi-media program focused on engaging men on sexual assault prevention, accurately defining rape for college men and women, identifying aspects of the rape culture in society and on-campus, and empowering college students to confront the rape culture in an effort to end rape. Results of the study indicate that the program positively influenced participants' acceptance of rape myths and understanding of rape definitions in both the immediate posttest and 14-week follow-up.

In a study of 6,519 college students on 32 different campuses, one in four college women reported being the victim of rape or attempted rape since age 14 (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). Of these women, 84% were assaulted by a man they knew. A more recent study by the U.S. Department of Justice found that, during a typical woman's college career, the rates of sexual assault "might climb to between one-fifth and one-quarter" (Fischer, Cullen, & Turner, 2000, p 10).

To address this pervasive issue, colleges and universities have sought effective educational programs to address rape and sexual assault on campus. These educational programs have generally been organized into two categories, reactive risk-reduction approaches and proactive rape prevention approaches (Brecklin & Forde, 2001).

Risk-reduction programs, the most common form of sexual assault education on campuses (O'Donohue, Yeater, & Fanetti, 2003), encourage women to employ strategies that help them avoid situations with a high risk of sexual assault or increase their chances of escape from the assault (Yeater & O'Donohue, 1999). These risk-reduction interventions have remained common, despite significant critiques. Lonsway (1996) explained, "rape deterrence strategies can therefore only protect *individual women* (albeit with no guarantees), but can never reduce the vulnerability of *women as a group*" (Italics in original, p. 232). When they are the only sexual assault education programs on campus, risk reduction approaches can send a message that places the responsibility of preventing rape on potential victims rather than the perpetrator and can be damaging to survivors (Yeater & O'Donohue, 1999).

A proactive prevention approach to sexual assault education focuses on reaching potential perpetrators and the environmental factors supporting sexual assault and rape (Berkowitz, 2004). Over the past 10-15 years, a number of prevention programs emerged aimed directly at engaging men on issues of sexual violence (Berkowitz, 1994; Davis, 2000; Foubert & Marriott, 1996; Funk, 1993; Katz, 1995; Kilmartin, 2001; Kivel, 1992; Men Can Stop Rape, 2002). Common approaches of proactive prevention include encouraging empathy for victims, individual change, bystander interventions, re-socialization experiences, and social norms marketing (Berkowitz, 2004).

Despite the increase in the number of proactive prevention approaches to sexual assault prevention on college campuses, few of these programs have demonstrated an ability to have a long-term impact on the participants (Schewe, 2002). The most common measure of sexual assault prevention effectiveness is rape myth acceptance, particularly

Burt's Rape Myth Acceptance (BRMA) scale (Gidycz et al., 2001). Burt (1980) defines rape myths as "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists" (p. 217). Prevention programs have been observed to change rape myth acceptance attitudes in the short term but evidence of long-term impact has been elusive (Brecklin & Forde, 2001; Breitenbecher, 2000; Lonsway, 1996; Schewe & Bennett, 2002). The research has generally supported approaches to prevention that are interactive, presented to small all-male groups, and lead by male peer-educators (Berkowitz, 2004). However, a recent meta-analysis of 69 published and un-published studies with 102 different interventions and over 18,172 college student participants drew contradictory conclusions, finding professional presenters more effective than peers and no difference between all-male and mixed gendered audiences (Anderson & Whiston, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the immediate and long-term effectiveness of a proactive rape prevention intervention using a social change approach for mixed-gender audiences. The intervention in this study, *She Fears You: Men Ending Rape* (Edwards & Headrick, in press), sought to (1) encourage men to be active in sexual assault prevention by identifying how men too are hurt by violence against women and the cultural messages that support this violence, (2) accurately define sexual assault for college men and women, (3) illustrate how to deconstruct the rape culture in society and on campus, and (4) give students concrete ways to confront these messages in society at large, on their own campuses, and in their own personal lives. Using an interactive lecture format with a multi-media presentation including prominent examples from popular culture and everyday campus events, the intervention sought to engage students

in dialogue and offered them a chance to hear how their peers, both male and female, are influenced by the rape culture.

A SOCIAL CHANGE PEDOGOGICAL APPROACH TO SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION

The pedagogical approach of the program in this study is supported by theoretical, conceptual, and empirical literature. Sexual assault prevention work with college men can be viewed through a socio-cultural framework (Davis & Liddell, 2002). College men's sex role socialization encourages compliance with a traditional definition of masculinity that is accepting of sexually coercive behavior. "It is the experience of masculinity itself - how men think of themselves as men - that creates the psychological and cultural environment that leads men to rape" (Berkowitz, Burkhart, & Bourg, 1994, p. 7). The cultural factors encouraging, condoning, and teaching rape contribute to a rape culture (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1993). The rape culture is primarily fostered through messages objectifying women (Kimmel, 2004; Plummer, 1999); subordinating women's intelligence, capability, and humanity (Johnson, 1997); associating masculinity with sexual conquest (Brod, 1987; Capraro, 1994; Kivel, 1992; Marx, 2003; Plummer, 1999); and intersecting sexism with other forms of oppression such as racism, heterosexism, and classism (Connell, 1987).

One result of men's socialization in a rape culture is that many college men who rape, do so without knowing the differences between rape and sex (Berkowitz, 2002). Of the 1 in 13 college men who admitted that they had engaged in behaviors that met the legal definition of rape, 84% did not define their behavior as rape (Koss et al.). Even men who have committed sexual assault do not see themselves as potential rapists. For victims

and survivors of sexual assault rape is not at all about sex but is instead a crime of power and control (Brownmiller, 1976). However, for many college men who are the perpetrators of rape, their intentions are most often not to overpower or control, but instead to have sex and “hook-up” the way they have been taught by the culture. These men have been “mis-educated” by the culture about what is rape and what is sex. By accurately defining rape, sexual assault educational programs can accurately inform college men about definitions of sexual consent so that they can avoid becoming unknowing perpetrators.

In addition to striving to change individual men’s behaviors, these programs may also seek to encourage and train individuals to intervene as bystanders to confront the behavior of their male peers related to sexual assault (Katz, 1995). Research findings indicate that most men are already “uncomfortable with the sexism and inappropriate behavior of other men” (Berkowitz, 2004, p. 3). There is evidence that men can effectively influence other men (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997), but sexual assault prevention should not ignore the influence women have over the behavior of their male peers as well. In order to effectively intervene, potential bystanders:

need to have an awareness of the problem and its negative impact on the victim. They will be more likely to help if they are asked to make a commitment to help and see themselves as partially responsible for solving the problem. They also need to view victims as not the cause of their own problems. Finally, bystanders need to feel that they possess the skills to intervene and have the opportunity to view individuals who model such behaviors. (Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2004, p. 69)

Men with knowledge and training can be empowered to join with women to address not only individual behaviors, but also the social-cultural roots of these behaviors in a rape culture (Berkowitz, 2004). College students can be encouraged to not only intervene on an individual level but to also challenge community norms and standards to prevent sexual violence (Banyard et al., 2004). A social change approach to sexual assault prevention seeks to not only change the attitudes and behaviors of the program participants, but to train them to work to change their peers and the culture at the root of rape supportive attitudes.

METHOD

Participants

The participants in this study were 117 newly hired resident assistants (RAs) at a mid-sized mid-Atlantic institution. These participants were selected because their positional leadership role on campus put them in a prime position to influence their peers and affect the rape culture on campus. These participants were also available for a follow-up assessment 14 weeks after the initial intervention in a required course for newly hired RAs. Demographic information was collected asking students to identify with regard to gender, race, sexual orientation, and year in college. Forty-one percent of the students identified as male, 59% female, and none as transgender. Three students identified as bi-sexual and one as gay. Sixty-six percent of the students were White, 14% African American/Black, 11% Hispanic/Latino, 6% multi-racial or multi-ethnic, 3% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 0% American Indian or Alaskan Native. Fifty-one percent of the students were juniors, 33% sophomores, 13% seniors, and 3% graduate students).

Instruments

The researcher used a pretest, posttest, and 14 week follow-up posttest as instruments to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. These instruments were developed primarily using a modified version of Burt's (1980) Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (BRMA) scale, with additional items included to assess the specific goals of this intervention.

Burt Rape Myth Acceptance Scale. There is substantial support (Brecklin & Forde, 2001; Burt, 1980; Lonsway, 1996; Shultz, Scherman, & Marshall, 2000) for a relationship between rape myth acceptance and "rape supportive ideology and sexually aggressive behavior," although the evidence currently supports only an associative and not a causal link (Lonsway, 1996, p. 242). The modified BRMA used in this study uses 13 items to which participants responded on a seven point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Participants' responses indicate their level of agreement with such statements such as, "A woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on their first date implies that she is willing to have sex." Burt (1980) found that high scores on the BRMA scale correlate with sexual conservatism ($r=.39$), adversarial sexual beliefs ($r=.40$), and acceptance of interpersonal violence ($r = .50$) and reported a Cronbach's alpha of .88 for the entire scale. Another study found the scale was unconnected to social desirability (Spohn, 1993). In a more recent study, using a 19 question version Foubert and McEwen (1998) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .84. In this study the internal consistency reported a Cronbach's alpha of .72.

Definitions of Rape. Four scenarios were posed in which the participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with identifying the situation as rape on seven point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Examples include, "A woman

has been drugged and under the influence agrees to sex. If intercourse occurs, this is rape;” and “A woman initiates kissing with a man and then sexual intercourse occurs without her saying either “yes” or “no.” This is rape.” The reliability of scores from this measure for the sample revealed a Cronbach’s alpha of .91.

Supporting a Sexual Assault Survivor. In addition to proactively addressing the rape culture, RAs must also be prepared to help support a survivor of sexual assault physically, mentally, and emotionally and connect survivors to community and campus resources and services. To assess the impact of the interventions in this area, participants were asked to respond on a 7 point Likert scale to the question, “Do you feel prepared to support a resident or a friend who has been sexually assaulted?” This question was included in the posttest and the 14 week follow-up.

Demographics. A demographic questionnaire was included in the instrument to gather information about the participants’ self-identified gender, sexual orientation, race, and year in school.

Procedure

The participants in the study, all newly hired RAs, were randomly assigned to one of two sexual assault programs. Fifty-four total participants were assigned to the traditional treatment group, and 63 were assigned to the experimental group. Students in the traditional treatment group experienced an hour and half long intervention focused on supporting survivors of sexual assault presented by professional staff members in the institution’s health and wellness unit. Students in the experimental group experienced an hour and half presentation of *She Fears You: Men Ending Rape* (Edwards & Headrick, in press), presented by the author which focused on framing sexual assault as a men’s issue,

accurately defining rape, and illustrating how college men and women could work together to change the rape culture. The interventions occurred at the end of an approximately 10 day training period just before the beginning of the academic year. There was no true control group receiving no intervention because of ethical and liability considerations of RAs receiving no sexual assault training.

The participants were each given a pretest, which contained the BRMA scale, items on definitions of rape, and demographic questions. In order to help maintain anonymity, participants self-selected a four digit identification number. Immediately following each intervention, the participants completed a posttest including all of the items from the pretest as well as an item about the participants' self-assessment of their preparedness to support a survivor of sexual assault. A follow-up posttest was administered 14 weeks later. This included all of the items from the immediate posttest and an additional item, asking participants if a resident or friend had been a survivor of sexual assault in the past semester.

Of the 117 original participants for whom valid pretest and posttest were available, 106 participants responded to the follow-up posttest 14 weeks later. Sixty-seven of these 106 respondents (57.3% of the original sample) were able to be matched with their earlier, self-selected identification number from the pretest and posttest taken 14 weeks earlier. The demographic make-up of the larger follow-up group of 106 and the matched follow-up participant group of 67 were both demographically similar to the original 117 participants.

RESULTS

Immediate Impact

The data from all completed pretests and posttests for each group assigned to the traditional and experimental interventions was examined using a 2x2 (time and group) repeated measure analysis of variance to determine the impact of the programs using BRMA scale and the definitions scale as measures. This analysis, using an *a priori* significance level of .05, revealed significant positive change in participant scores on both measures for both interventions (Table 1). The participants' mean scores on BRMA scale (upper limit 91) decreased, reflecting lower levels of rape myth acceptance. The participants' mean scores on the definitions measure (upper limit 28) increased, reflecting a more accurate understanding of definitions of rape. The analysis of time by group interaction found no significant difference in the time by group interaction for BRMA ($p=.094$) but did find a significant difference for the definitions scale ($p = .015$). The mean scores for the participants in the experimental group showed a significantly more desirable increase in their scores on the Definitions scale, indicating a greater increase in their understanding of definitions of rape than participants in the traditional group.

[Place TABLE 1 here.]

Follow-up analysis was conducted to explore interaction effects by gender. The analysis of time by gender interaction within each group of participants revealed no significant difference in the impact for men or women for the experimental (BRMA, $p=.820$; Definitions, $p=.692$) or the traditional program (BRMA $p=.996$, Definitions $p=.065$). An independent samples t-test also found no significant difference in how prepared the participants felt to support a survivor between the two interventions ($p=.872$).

Long-Term Impact

A similar 3x2 (time and group) repeated measure analysis of variance was done for each intervention using the data from the 67 participants who could be matched to their pretest, posttest, and 14-week follow-up. Both interventions showed evidence of significant difference in the desirable direction over the 14-week time period on both measures of BRMA and understanding of rape definitions (TABLE 2). The participants' mean scores remain significantly different in a desirable direction from the pre-test mean scores, despite a small rebound between the immediate and 14-week follow-up. Just as in the immediate assessment, the participants' scores on BRMA remained significantly lower, indicating a lower level of rape myth acceptance, in the 14-week follow-up compared to the pre-test. Similarly, the participants reported significantly higher mean scores compared to the pre-test on the 14-week follow-up as they did on the immediate assessment, indicating a greater understanding of definitions of rape was maintained over the semester. The group by time interaction did not show evidence of a significant difference over the 14-week period.

[Place Table 2 here.]

Follow-up analysis was conducted to determine if the interventions differently impacted men and women. The time by gender analysis found no difference in how either the experimental (BRMA, $p = .910$; Definitions, $p = .231$) or traditional (BRMA, $p = .160$; Definitions, $p = .546$) interventions impacted men and women over the 14-week period.

Finally, a 2x2 (time x group) repeated measures analysis of variance was conducted to determine if the intervention participants experienced (experiment versus traditional) had an impact on how prepared participants felt to support a survivor. This

analysis found no difference in the participants assessment of their own preparedness to support a survivor from the posttest to the 14-week follow-up based on which intervention they participated in (Posttest, $M=6.31$, $SD=.77$; Follow-Up, $M=6.07$, $SD=.88$; $p=.409$).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to see if a social change approach to sexual assault prevention, *She Fears You: Men Ending Rape*, could have a long-term impact on participants. The program did show evidence of lowering participants' acceptance of rape myths and increasing their understanding of what constitutes rape and sexual assault in both immediate and long-term assessments over the course of a 14-week academic semester. These results with regard to BRMA are significant because, rape prevention programs that demonstrate long-term impact on rape myth acceptance have a greater chance of influencing behavior and preventing rape. Although rape myth acceptance remains the most common measure of program effectiveness (Gidycz et al., 2001) and evidence of short-term change in rape myth acceptance is relatively common, long-term impact is rarely measured (Berkowitz, 2004; Gidycz et al., 2001; Schewe, 2002) and thus far only one program has been able to claim "clear, long-term change in men" (Foubert, Tatum, & Donahue, 2006, p. 580). The fact that the traditional intervention in this study also evidenced immediate and long-term impact should not diminish support for the experimental intervention, particularly considering that any measure of long-term influence has been so rarely reported in the literature. Instead, these findings may offer support for the approach of the traditional intervention used in this study as well.

The results of this study indicate that participants gained a better understanding of rape and sexual assault and that this increased understanding also was sustained over the course of the 14-week semester for both male and female participants in the study. Male participants with a greater understanding of rape are less likely to become unknowing perpetrators (Berkowitz, 2002; Koss et al., 1987). Female participants knowledgeable about definitions of rape who experience sexual assault are less likely to engage in self-blame and more likely seek support and resources as survivors if they experience a sexual assault. An accurate understanding of sexual assault is also important for these participants in their roles as RAs considering the leadership, role modeling, policy enforcement, and support role they are expected fulfill. The participants in the experimental group did show a greater increase in their understanding of rape definitions compared to the traditional group immediately following the intervention.

These results add new information to two common assumptions about sexual assault education programs based on theoretical and empirical literature: (1) single-gender audiences are better than mixed-gender audiences (Berkowitz, 2002; Brecklin & Forde, 2001; Davis, 2000; Earle, 1996; Foubert & Marriott, 1997; Foubert & McEwen, 1998; Yeater & O'Donohue, 1999) and (2) peer education is more effective than professional presenters (Berkowitz, 2004; Earle, 1996; Foubert & Marriott, 1997; Foubert & McEwen, 1998). This study found evidence of long-term change, rare in assessment of sexual assault programs, in two interventions presented to mixed-gender audiences by professional presenters. This study further corroborates the findings of a recent meta-analysis, in which the authors were surprised to find support for professional presenters

and no difference between programs for men only and mixed-gender programs (Anderson & Whiston, 2005).

The results of this study suggest that further research of prevention approaches for mixed gender audiences is warranted. Despite the focus of the experimental program on motivating men to work to end rape, the program positively influenced women as well, as did the traditional intervention. This draws into question the conclusion of previous researchers (Yeater & O'Donohue, 1999) that a two-pronged approach designed separately for men and women is necessary. According to these findings, a preventative approach encouraging participants to clearly define rape and work as change agents can be effective not only for men, but also for women. This is particularly important for community approaches that see prevention as not just addressing men as potential perpetrators but encouraging men and women to engage in challenging the rape culture (Banyard et al., 2004). As Sawyer, Thompson, and Chicorelli (2002) suggest, "there may be less to gain by excluding women from a process that ultimately involves both genders" (p. 23).

Despite the explicit focus of the traditional program on supporting sexual assault survivors, there was no statistical difference between the intervention in how prepared students felt to support a survivor of sexual assault. These findings indicate that by using a social change approach, administrators may not need to choose between a preventative message and a survivor support message. The program assessed in this study was able to take a preventative approach yet still left participants feeling as prepared to support a survivor as those who attended an intervention focused on survivor support.

Sexual assault prevention educators working on college campuses may be encouraged by these findings to implement prevention efforts for men and women. This study offers evidence that an approach encouraging men to not only examine their own socialization and behaviors as potential perpetrators but also as potential allies with women working for social change can be effective in helping generate sustained long-term change. These prevention efforts may also benefit women by clarifying definitions of rape and empowering women as well as men to work towards changing the rape culture on campus (Banyard et al., 2004). This may be a more empowering and proactive approach to women than the traditional risk-reduction approaches (O'Donohue et al., 2003).

Specifically, sexual assault prevention educators and student affairs practitioners working in housing and residence life may be encouraged by the impact that can be made with newly hired RAs. Not only did the participants in this study decrease their level of rape myth acceptance, but they also indicated that they were clearer about definitions of rape. RAs are placed in a position of leadership and have opportunities to influence their peers and the campus culture. The results of this study indicate that prevention messages to capitalize on the leadership aspects of RAs' roles can be accomplished without sacrificing support for survivors.

LIMITATIONS

As newly hired RAs at a single institution, the participants in this study are unique and the findings of this study should be carefully generalized beyond this group. Participants in this study first had to express interest in the RA position and then be selected through a process which involved one-on-one interviews and a half-day group

process activity. The diversity of participants with regard to social group identity is also a limitation in generalizing these findings. The participants in this study were predominantly White, although they did represent a greater structural racial and ethnic diversity than the institution as a whole. Participants who identified other than heterosexual were limited and no participants self-identified a transgender identity.

The study began with 117 initial participants who completed the pretest and immediate posttest. There was minimal attrition over the course of the 14-week semester and 106 participants completed the follow-up posttest. Unfortunately, only 67 of these participants were able to be matched to their earlier responses using their self-selected identification number. Despite this attrition, significant differences were still evident in the statistical analysis used. Moreover, the demographic characteristics of the 67 remaining participants matched the characteristics of the original sample of 117.

Rape myth acceptance is the most common measure of sexual assault education program effectiveness and the BRMA scale specifically has been validated by its use in numerous other studies (Gidycz et al., 2001). It is important to reiterate the connection between rape myth acceptance and sexual assault behavior is associative and not yet shown to be causal (Lonsway, 1996). Further research should seek reliable means to evaluate the impact of these interventions on sexually coercive behavior. The difficulty of effectively documenting and observing sexual assault behavior over a relatively short period of time makes this type of assessment difficult (Schewe & Bennett, 2002). Measures of behavioral intent are difficult to measure accurately, due to the inclusion of unknowing perpetrators who do not identify their behavior as rape (Berkowitz, 2002; Koss et al., 1987). Given that it is unlikely that any rape prevention intervention will be

able to counteract completely, in an hour and a half, the socialization taking place in a rape culture over approximately 20 years (Anderson & Whiston, 2005) and that only one other sexual assault prevention program has been able to demonstrate long-term changes in rape myth acceptance (Foubert et al., 2006), the findings of long-term impact on rape myth acceptance and definitions of rape should not be minimized.

Due to the nature of the participants' RA role on campus, a true control group receiving no sexual assault training could not ethically be administered. Because both interventions demonstrated similar positive impact in immediate and long-term assessment, the long-term impacts seen here may be the result of participants' maturity and involvement over the course of the semester. Participants assigned to both interventions had completed a 10 day training program prior to the interventions in this study. They also participated in on-going training, a one-credit course for RAs, and on the job learning throughout the semester. While sexual assault prevention was not an intentional component of any of this on-going training, the experiences may still influence the participants related to the outcomes assessed in this study.

CONCLUSIONS

This study introduces a rape prevention program which seeks to motivate men to join with women to address the rape culture in society in general and on campus specifically. In this study, college RAs who participated in *She Fears You: Men Ending Rape* (Edwards & Headrick, in press) showed evidence of immediate and long-term impact on lowering participants' acceptance of rape myths and increasing their ability to accurately identify rape in scenarios. The program was equally effective in achieving these outcomes with men and women and showed no significant differences in how

prepared they felt to support a survivor than participants in the traditional program, focused on supporting a sexual assault survivor. The results of this study, particularly the evidence of long-term positive influence on participants, encourage further research on social change approaches to sexual assault prevention.

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TABLE 1: Rape Myth Acceptance and Definitions of Rape for Experimental and Traditional Group Participants at the Pretest and Immediate Posttest

		Pretest	Posttest		
		M (SD)	M (SD)	Sig	η_p^2
Experimental (N=63)	BRMA	25.59 (7.12)	19.48 (6.77)	.000	.663
	Definitions	19.17 (4.11)	22.93 (4.94)	.000	.483
Traditional (N=54)	BRMA	24.74 (6.98)	20.01 (6.94)	.000	.508
	Definitions	18.87 (4.85)	20.98 (4.70)	.000	.361

TABLE 2: Rape Myth Acceptance and Definition of Rape for Experimental and Traditional Group Participants at the Pretest, Immediate Posttest, and 14-Week Follow-up.

		Pretest	Posttest	14 Week		
		M (SD)	M (SD)	Follow-up	Sig	η_p^2
Experimental (N=36)	BRMA	24.80 (6.06)	17.91 (4.97)	19.28 (5.52)	.000	.581
	Definitions	18.81 (4.15)	23.17 (4.89)	22.31 (4.28)	.000	.344
Traditional (N=31)	BRMA	23.59 (7.00)	18.68 (5.41)	18.81 (5.03)	.000	.469
	Definitions	20.16 (4.50)	22.39 (4.33)	22.74 (3.16)	.001	.218