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First-Year Male Students' Perceptions of a Rape Prevention Program 7 Months After Their Participation: Attitude and Behavior Changes

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Seven months after seeing The Men's Program, a commonly used rape prevention program, 248 first-year college men responded to four open-ended questions concerning whether or not the program impacted their attitudes or behavior, particularly regarding alcohol related sexual assault. Two thirds of participants reported either attitude or behavior change during the preceding academic year due to the program's effects or that the program reinforced their current beliefs, with many describing specific incidents of either intervening to prevent a rape, or stopping themselves from engaging in risky behavior.

Multi-campus studies have shown that one in four college women have survived rape or attempted rape at some point in their lives (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2006). Though a minority of men rape, the vast majority of rape is committed by men; therefore, focusing on those who cause the problem seems to have the greatest likelihood of success in addressing the problem. In addition, it makes sense for a second line of defense against rape to include training men in intervention techniques to prepare people for situations that might turn into a rape, in an effort to promote change in the culture in which the behavior occurs (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante, 2007; Katz, 2006).

The theoretical framework for the present study was belief system theory. This theory

states that, in order to produce lasting attitude and behavior change, interventions must be designed to maintain people's existing self-conceptions (Grube, Mayton, & Ball-Rokeach, 1994). Self-conceptions are the roles people try to live up to and the people they strive to be. In the context of changing attitudes and behavior, Grube et al. concluded that it is possible to change attitudes and behaviors by using a single intervention. Such lasting change usually results from bringing persuasion targets to the point where they become dissatisfied with their current values and seek to change them to maintain self-enhancing perceptions (Grube et al.). Though men do not perceive themselves to be potential rapists, they do perceive themselves to have the potential to help survivors and to be people who can intervene when a rape situation might occur (Scheel, Johnson, Schneider, & Smith, 2001). They also perceive themselves to be potential bystanders who can intervene successfully to prevent a rape (Banyard et al., 2007). By approaching men in line with these self-perceptions, presenters of The Men's Program (Foubert, 2010) have been able to have long-term success changing men's attitudes and behavior (Foubert, Newberry, & Tatum, 2007).

The Men's Program, an all-male sexual assault peer education program, has been based in the literature on effective rape prevention

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programming methods (Brecklin & Forde, 2001; Schewe, 2002). The findings of a meta-analysis showed that programs presented to all-male audiences are much more likely to change men's attitudes and behavioral intent to rape than are those presented to coeducational audiences (Brecklin & Forde). In addition, as men increase their empathy with survivors, understand rape trauma, and have more aversion to rape, they report less likelihood of raping (Schewe). Furthermore, Schewe reported that studies depicting a man as a survivor significantly improves men's attitudes toward rape and/or lowers their behavioral intent to rape. In stark contrast, studies depicting a female survivor *increase* men's rape myth acceptance; one such program even increased men's reported likelihood of sexual aggression. Therefore, presenters of The Men's Program show a video (One in Four, 2010) describing a male-on-male rape experience designed to teach men how a rape experience might feel. The program also includes an emphasis on defining sexual consent along with training in bystander intervention techniques (Banyard et al., 2007). The program itself lasts about 1 hour and is usually presented by four undergraduate male peer educators, often part of peer education groups affiliated with the national nonprofit organization, One in Four.

An earlier focus group study with a follow-up survey of fraternity men and student–athletes has shown evidence of lasting attitudinal and behavioral changes resulting from this program (Foubert & Cowell, 2004; Foubert & Perry, 2007). Most reported both attitude and behavior change. Further research has found that after participating in this program, men predict that they will be less likely to be sexually coercive and that they would intervene to help prevent an alcohol-related rape from occurring (Foubert, Tatum, & Donohue, 2006).

Following many literature reviews noting that no study had shown a change in sexual assault behavior resulting from a program (Anderson & Whitson, 2005; Schewe, 2002), a study of The Men's Program recently showed quantitative results that men who see it at the beginning of their first year in college and join a fraternity commit fewer and less severe acts of sexual assault than do men who do not see it and join a fraternity (Foubert et al., 2007).

Given the high association between alcohol and sexual assault on college campuses (Loh, Gidycz, Lobo, & Luthra, 2005) and the limited amount of information provided by quantitative measures about the nature of attitude and behavior change associated with The Men's Program, the next logical research questions call for a method that can elicit more information. For example, does the program have an impact on choices men make in alcohol-related intimate situations? Does it change their attitudes regarding such matters? Does it change their behaviors? Given the broad and uncertain nature of these research questions, we determined that they could be best answered through qualitative methods, given their post-positivistic nature and the fact that they lend themselves best to a constructivist paradigm.

Given our desire to let men speak for themselves and not be constrained by quantitative measures of impact, we selected qualitative methodology for our study. We used a qualitative approach so that participants could describe in their own words whether and how the program impacted them. Such qualitative approaches help uncover the meaning of the intervention to the participants and help identify unanticipated phenomena and influences that may not have been previously known (Maxwell, 1996). In this present study, we sought to answer two overarching research questions:

1. In what ways does The Men's Program impact first-year male students' attitudes toward alcohol-related sexual assault 7 months after program participation?
2. Does participating in The Men's Program motivate men who see it to behave differently, particularly in alcohol-related intimate situations 7 months after program participation? If so, how?
2. More specifically, are any of your attitudes toward intimate sexual activity under the influence of alcohol different as a result of seeing the One in Four program? If so, what attitudes?
3. Since seeing the One in Four program in September, have there been any situations in which you have behaved any differently in any situation as a result of seeing the program? If so, please describe in detail how you behaved differently.
4. More specifically, was there any situation since seeing the One in Four program in September involving alcohol and potential or actual intimate sexual activity where you or others you were with behaved differently as a result of seeing the One in Four program? If so, please describe in detail how you or they behaved differently.

METHOD

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of 248 first-year male students who were attending a midsized southeastern public university with an undergraduate enrollment of approximately 5,000 students. As a required session for orientation, first-year male students in the present study saw The Men's Program during September of 2005. This sample constituted 85% of the 290 first-year male students eligible for involvement. All participants were enrolled full time, were traditional age first-year students (18–19 years old at the beginning of the academic year), and lived on campus, as required by university policy. Approximately 15% were men of color. Given prior research on this program showing that men of color react in remarkably similar ways to the program as do Caucasian men, separate analysis were not performed for men in different racial groups (Foubert & Cremedy, 2007).

Materials

At the end of the academic year in which they saw The Men's Program (7 months later), participants were asked to respond in writing to the following four open-ended questions.

1. Compared to *before* you participated in the One in Four program last September, are any of your attitudes now different as a result of seeing the program? If so, what attitudes?

Procedure

In September, participants completed consent forms, saw The Men's Program, and completed measures for a study of the program's effects. Seven months later, graduate student research assistants went door to door through the first-year residence halls to administer and collect follow-up surveys that included the aforementioned four open-ended questions. Researchers visited halls repeatedly over a 3-week period until they achieved an 85% overall return rate for the survey. Researchers were persistent about locating each potential participant; however, they did not ask a potential participant to complete the survey more than once if the participant declined participation. Participants were encouraged to respond out of a desire to contribute to the knowledge about the variables being studied and to obtain the monetary incentive for the study. Each research assistant achieved approximately the same return rate for his or her surveys. They explained that participation

was voluntary and that responses would remain anonymous. In return for completing the study, each participant received a \$10 gift card to a local convenience store. Each participant completed his survey privately and placed it in a common return envelope to ensure anonymity. Participants were given as much time as they needed to complete their survey while the graduate student waited down the hallway for him to complete it. The average participant took approximately 20 minutes to complete his survey.

Data Analysis

After survey completion, results were analyzed by three male researchers: a male faculty member, a male doctoral student, and a male master's student. All had training, coursework, and experience using qualitative methods and were well versed with the process used. Male researchers were used to analyze data in order to best understand the common male language and meaning of the statements made by participants. We analyzed the responses to the questions using Patton's (1990) description of a multistage inductive analysis. As an analysis that is part of a constructivist paradigm, there was no a priori structure imposed upon the voices of participants. We identified key terms and phrases that emerged by reviewing the responses provided by the participants. We next identified themes that helped organize participants' responses, paying particular attention to identify what was truly meaningful to the participants themselves. These steps afforded us the opportunity to suggest meaning, draw conclusions, and understand the data more holistically. Initially, we coded the data separately. After all individual data coding took place, we came together and discussed our coding schemas. Where data coding conflicted, we came to consensus through dialog and discussion, all the while utilizing the common analysis framework to guide

the process. Finally, consideration of "causes, consequences, and relationships" (Patton, p. 422) occurred whereby we attached meaning to findings and drew conclusions to help illuminate, understand, and extrapolate the data. Given that the second and the fourth questions were most central to the purpose of the study, we will provide more examples of the themes for those questions and will limit discussion of the first and third questions to a brief summary.

FINDINGS

Two thirds of our participants indicated that they experienced either attitude change or behavior change or that the program reinforced their current beliefs. One third of participants stated that they could not identify any attitude or behavior changes resulting from the program during the 7 months since seeing the program the previous September.

Attitudes

Seven months after seeing The Men's Program, participants responded to the question "Compared to *before* you participated in the One in Four program last September, are any of your attitudes now different as a result of seeing the program? If so, what attitudes?" The most prevalent theme including about a half of participants was "No change or reinforced my current attitudes." The second theme to emerge from answers to this question, which included responses from about a third of participants, was becoming "more aware" of (a) "laws and policies," (b) "personal responsibilities," and (c) the "impact and nature of rape." These participants consistently described how their awareness of various aspects of rape changed because of program attendance.

The third major theme to emerge during analysis of this question was participants' view of their newfound possibilities of "stepping

in” as a bystander to intervene. Some men stated that because of the program they were now better able to intervene when recognizing harmful situations. A fourth theme included comments from participants who stated that they would no longer “react violently to the attacker.” Finally, participants reported “sensitivity to rape jokes,” emphasizing how the use of rape jokes by some individuals can have damaging consequences to the desensitization of rape and other sexually aggressive attitudes and behaviors.

As a more detailed follow-up question, our second question was, “More specifically, are any of your attitudes toward intimate sexual activity under the influence of alcohol different as a result of seeing the “One in Four” program? If so, what attitudes?” This question sought to determine whether any attitudes changed exclusively in relation to the connections between alcohol and sexual assault. Five themes emerged from the data analysis, (a) “no/not really,” (b) “more cautious,” (c) “better understanding of what rape is,” (d) “no sex while drinking,” and (e) “accused men are the real victims.”

Though this question asked for more specific attitude change than did the first general question, more participants reported attitude changes in response to this question than on the previous question. Less than half of the participants claimed “no” or “not really” as an explanation to the question. Many participants who further explained their “not really” responses indicated that the program reinforced their current attitudes. The second theme to emerge for this question, mentioned by a quarter of participants, was becoming “more cautious” in intimate situations that involved alcohol as result of seeing the program. One particular example of this type of response was “I’m now more prone to say we should ‘continue’ when she is sober.”

This caution was exercised in obtaining

consent during intimate encounters involving alcohol. Participants’ noted that they now have a better understanding of how alcohol can make “intimate activity . . . dangerous since senses, memory, and decision making” abilities are impaired. Participants commented, “When alcohol is related, things get hazy and consent can’t necessarily occur.” Others described how they now understood that the influence of alcohol during sexual situations means that “it is very important to define clear consent and limits of sexual activity.”

Another theme centered on how participants now had a “better understanding of what rape is” due to seeing the program. We labeled the fourth theme “no sex while drinking.” Participants’ responses for this theme, reported by about 1 in 8 respondents, reflected a heightened awareness of ensuring that no alcohol consumption takes place during intimate situations. For example, one participant stated, “I’ve actually turned down sex with a drunk girl because I was worried, I guess this is a thank you.” The final theme that emerged in the attitude data analysis, composed of the comments of a few men who did not agree with the material presented, was labeled as “accused men are the real victims.” It was associated with statements from men that indicated that participants did not receive the desired program message as intended. For example, one participant commented, “I cover my ass, especially knowing how this school treats the accused. This whole thing criminalized all men. We’re obviously all sexual predators.” Though this comment reflected a man who reported that he would presumably not have sex under the influence of alcohol, it expressed strong resentment toward restricting this mode of behavior.

One obvious relationship in the data was that about half of the participants experienced either no change in their attitudes or reinforcement of their attitudes. This lack

of attitude change appeared to be caused by their current attitudes being in line with the program's message. As a consequence, they reported no attitude changes. The other half of participants reported many ways in which their attitudes experienced changes and attributed the cause of those changes directly to having experienced The Men's Program. These changes included everything from an increased general sense of awareness to a specific desire to be helpful in the process of intervening as a bystander when a situation calls for it. A substantial portion of participants reported that as a consequence of seeing the program that they had a newfound sense of how they should avoid intimate situations where alcohol is involved.

Behavior

The third question asked, "Since seeing the 'One in Four' program in September, have there been any situations in which you have behaved any differently in any situation as a result of seeing the program? If so, please describe in detail how you behaved differently." Three-quarters of participants answered this question with "no" or "not really." Given that many participants already described behavior changes in response to attitude change questions, it seemed that participants did not repeat responses involving behavior change when they had already reported it in response to attitude change questions. Three themes emerged in response to this question: (a) "prepared for intervention," (b) "using caution when intimate," and (c) "discouraging rape jokes."

The final question asked participants, "More specifically, was there any situation since seeing the 'One in Four' program in September involving alcohol and potential or actual intimate sexual activity where you or others you were with behaved differently as a result of seeing the 'One in Four' program? If

so, please describe in detail how you or they behaved differently."

Most participants responded "no" or "not really" to this question. However, two additional themes emerged from the responses including (a) "no drunk hook-ups" and (b) "willingness to intervene." One group of participants clearly expressed a personal practice of "no drunk hook-ups" with respect to their individual actions and behaviors while at parties and with women. One male wrote, "Yes, I have been hit on by drunk girls, but I don't do anything because they are under the influence." Men also turned down invitations for sex when they were drunk. A male commented, "I almost had sex with a girl when I was drunk once, but I thought about it and opted not to because there could be major consequences."

Another group of participants who reported a "willingness to intervene" as a bystander, and commented that they, and their friends, looked out for female friends at parties and made sure they went home with responsible men if they needed assistance. One participant wrote, "I have warned others not to take advantage of a drunk girl and also usually went with them to drop a girl off." Such men appear to understand the situational aspects that may lead to sexual assault and look after their female friends to ensure unwanted contact does not occur.

A majority of participants did not report specific changes in their behavior during the 7 months after participating in The Men's Program. A potential cause of this lack of behavior change was the lack of time for behavior change to occur. Given social and university policy constraints, some first-year students may not have been in situations where they were around many alcohol-related encounters in which they or others were involved. Another potential cause was that there was nothing in the program that was

effective in motivating change among those participants. Among participants who did report behavior change, the changes reported were indicative of a rape being prevented through bystander intervention or by the individual participant making a different decision in his intimate encounters.

DISCUSSION

In a quantitative study using the same participants, men who joined fraternities reported fewer and less severe forms of sexual assault committed over a 7-month academic year than did first-year students who did not report joining fraternities (Foubert et al., 2007). By using qualitative methods, the present study allowed participants to breathe life into these numbers by putting the program's impact into their own words. In doing so, student affairs practitioners can better identify program elements of promise and areas in need of continued development.

Research has shown that men vary in their risk for committing acts of sexual assault. For example, one study showed that men in fraternities are at three times the risk for committing sexual assault than are other men (Loh et al., 2005). That finding is noteworthy given results in a study contemporaneous to the present study showing the efficacy of The Men's Program in lowering the frequency and severity of incidents of sexual assault among men who join fraternities (Foubert et al., 2007). Men in the present study noted numerous ways in which they were changed by the program, including changes in their willingness to intervene as bystanders, their increased caution during alcohol-related intimate situations, and their choosing not to have intercourse with intoxicated women. The program seems to have been successful in targeting many of the men who needed it most. At the same time, it is clear that a few men were put off or simply

not reached by the messages of the program. What is unclear is whether these men were at any risk for committing sexual assault. Those who were put off by the program's messages may have felt that it did not apply to them; alternatively, they may be so high risk that the program had no way to get through to them.

Clearly, many participants reported that in the academic year after they saw the program they attributed attitude and/or behavior change to the program. Others reported that the program either did not change them or that it reinforced their current dispositions. The themes that emerged from data analysis tended to be related directly to the objectives of the program. Men whose responses fit into these themes seemed to indicate a deeper level of understanding of what rape is and how to assist those who may have become victims of sexual violence. Given that men reported such specifics about what they remember from the program and how their attitudes and behavior changed, it seems that their learning experience must have been a powerful one in which they deeply encoded the material presented to them.

Limitations

The study was limited in that open-ended questions were used on a written survey, which did not afford us the opportunity to ask follow-up questions, to see nonverbal reactions, or to probe for more detail in participant responses. Also, given the anonymous nature of these surveys, we were unable to conduct individual member checking to assess the trustworthiness of our interpretations.

Implications

Practitioners can learn many lessons from the findings in this study. On a grand scale, the process of basing programs in theory, research, and improving them through continuous outcomes assessment research has been affirmed.

The program modified and assessed in this study is based in belief system theory (Grube, Mayton, & Ball-Rokeach, 1994) was guided in its development by available research on rape prevention program elements (Schewe, 2002), and has been continuously improved by outcomes assessment research (Foubert & Perry, 2007; Foubert et al., 2006). In doing so, a powerful intervention was created resulting in the kinds of comments reflecting attitude and behavior change reported in this study.

Student affairs professionals who are in positions to make decisions about sexual assault programming efforts can be encouraged by the results of this study to use rape prevention methods that include all-male peer education; discussions of male-on-male rape, an empowering tone of how to help a sexual assault survivor; and an interactive discussion on how to intervene as a bystander if a rape situation seems like it might occur. In this study, that combination of methods led to comments where two thirds of men reported attitude or behavior change.

Student affairs professionals should also take caution from these results. Despite some success of a 1-hour program, a stronger commitment to the issue of sexual assault programming is needed on college campuses to adequately address this complex issue. Given that one third of participants did not report attitude or behavior change, and not all who did necessarily would conduct themselves in accordance with sexual assault policies, college campuses need

to devote more than one or two hours of programming to the sexual assault issue.

Conclusions

Ultimately, this study documents the experience of a large majority of first-year male participants who were able to describe specific ways in which a rape prevention program impacted their attitudes or behavior at the end of the academic year in which they saw it. The findings herein lend credence to the assertion that men's attitudes and behaviors can change in the long term after seeing a one-time, 1-hour program. The results are also a reminder that, though the program leads many to report desired results and that it has promising potential, more powerful interventions are still needed to dramatically reduce sexual assault on college campuses. Short, one-time programs are not sufficient by themselves. Dramatic change is much more likely with multiple interventions and changes in campus culture. This study offers both hope that programmatic efforts can reach men and successfully change their behavior to help end rape and a reminder that there is still much more ground to cover as we all work toward a day when the one in four statistic is shattered and women have more reason to feel safe on the nation's college campuses.

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