



The Talk Project:

Evaluation of a Peer-to-Peer Sexual Violence Prevention Program for High School Students in Los Angeles

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Executive Summary

High school students in Los Angeles participated in The Talk Project, a single-session interactive presentation created and presented by teenagers to educate and empower other youth on the topic of sexual violence. The Talk Project presents information on the societal and systemic causes of sexual violence, as well as the laws of consent and the legal rights of survivors. An evaluation of The Talk Project's effects on students from three high schools (N = 188) is presented here. Compared to pre-tests, students who saw The Talk Project reported being significantly less likely to adhere to rape myths, and significantly more likely to engage in protective behaviors and intervene if confronted with a situation linked to sexual violence. Students reported that they found The Talk Project to be understandable and engaging, and that they would recommend the program to a friend.

Organizational Overview

The National Council of Jewish Women was established in 1890, and the Los Angeles section in 1909, as grassroots collectives of volunteers and advocates. Inspired by Jewish values, the organization strives to attain social justice for women, children, and families by safeguarding their individual rights and freedoms, and by improving their quality of life. The National Council of Jewish Women in Los Angeles (NCJW/LA) is comprised of a handful of thematic programs, which focus on community activism and volunteerism, advocacy, leadership, education, and community mental health and support. The Talk Project is a program of NCJW/LA's social justice and advocacy arm.

Purpose & Significance

The Talk Project was developed by the Teen Advocacy Working Group, a subgroup of NCJW/LA's social justice and advocacy program. The Teen Advocacy Working Group is a volunteer group of high school students interested in organizing around social justice issues. The group's goal in creating The Talk Project was to develop a peer-to-peer educational program that would fill a noticeable gap in school-based sexual violence education programming. The teens wanted to create something they could present in area high schools and which people their age would find more accessible and engaging than similar workshops presented by field experts.

The Teen Advocacy Working Group, under the supervision of NCJW/LA staff, Maya Paley, Director of Legislative and Community Engagement, and Alexa Schwartz, Program Assistant, constructed The Talk Project script based on their literature review of sexual violence. They conducted focus groups and made revisions to the script based on peer-, staff-, and social worker-feedback. They also recruited the educational distributors of *The Hunting Ground* film to act as partners in The Talk Project. Currently, The Talk Project screens *The Hunting Ground* – either in part or in its entirety – as part of the presentation, and has been able to offer the film to schools at a deep discount for those interested in involving other groups in the discussion on sexual violence, such as parents.

At the time of writing, The Talk Project had been presented at five high schools and one community youth group, to approximately 1,100 Los Angeles youth. The results from the first three of the schools are presented here, along with a basic analysis of our findings.

A note on terminology:

While The Talk Project discusses rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other related behaviors, The Talk Project uses the term “sexual violence” in its curriculum and throughout this report as a representative term.

Project and Evaluation Goals

It was NCJW/LA and the Teen Advocacy Working Group’s hope that The Talk Project would serve as an effective and engaging tool for reducing the instances of sexual violence among students. Based on our theory of change that “Behavior = Knowledge + Motivation (e.g. empowerment)”, we hypothesized that The Talk Project could achieve this goal through a two-tiered strategy:

- I. Educate students on:
 - a. the societal and systemic causes of sexual violence
 - b. the laws of sexual consent
 - c. the legal rights of survivors
- II. Empower students to:
 - a. speak out against sexual violence-supportive behavior
 - b. engage in healthy sexual relationships
 - c. make informed decisions about seeking legal justice and school support if sexual violence takes place

The Talk Project evaluation was constructed by a Masters level social work intern at NCJW/LA in order to:

1. Assess whether or not and to what degree The Talk Project is succeeding in its above-stated goals
2. Determine if and where changes should be made to the program
3. Gain a deeper understanding of students’ relationship with sexual violence, healthy sexual behavior, and how The Talk Project may have affected those relationships

Methods

Population

At the time of writing, The Talk Project had invited approximately 15 Los Angeles area high schools to host its presentation. Of the 15 schools, six arranged to present the program. The first three schools to whom The Talk Project presented are included in this evaluation. The total number of students who saw The Talk Project from those three schools is approximately 300, although the total number of surveys collected is less than that. In recruiting participants, The Talk Project contacted a mix of public, private, and magnet schools. However, of the schools included in our evaluation, two are private schools and one is a public magnet school.

In addition to the data we collected from our surveys, we also conducted semi-structured interviews with students and peer-educators to add to our overall understanding of The Talk Project's success. Every student who received a post-test survey was invited to leave their information to be contacted for a confidential interview. Thirteen students did so and we were successful in reaching six of them; three males and three females. In addition, we interviewed three peer-educators, all female.

Students who participated in The Talk Project and filled out our questionnaires identified as 48.4% female (N = 91) and 50% male (N = 94), with the remaining students identifying as either transgender or "other." Students identified as 54.8% White or Caucasian (N = 103), 3.7% Black or African American (N = 7), 16.5% Hispanic or Latino/a (N = 31), 7.4% Asian or Pacific Islander (N = 14), 1.6% Middle Eastern (N = 3), 7.4% Mixed Race (N = 14), and 4.8% as "other" (N = 9). A majority of students identified as heterosexual (88.8%, N = 167), while 2.1% identified as gay or lesbian (N = 4), and 4.8% identified as bisexual (N = 9). Thirty-four percent of respondents were in 11th grade (N = 64) and 66% were in 12th grade (N = 124).

The Talk Project

The Talk Project was originally created as a 90-minute interactive presentation conducted by peer-educators. However, the varying lengths of school periods among institutions necessitated creating multiple programs ranging from 60- to 90-minutes. All high school students who attended The Talk Project saw a single session in which they were introduced to definitions and concepts surrounding sexual violence, including:

- Statistics on the prevalence of sexual violence in different populations
- The systemic and cultural factors that can precipitate sexual violence and how factors present overtly and covertly in our society
- Consent and what it does and does not look like
- An introduction to Title IX and overview of how students who have been victimized can use the law to get support and legal justice

The Talk Project includes clips from the film *The Hunting Ground*. In some instances, when school schedules allowed, students saw the film in its entirety directly before attending The Talk Project, as was originally conceptualized by The Teen Advocacy Working Group. We include an analysis of how seeing the film in its entirety (or in one instance, another film on the same topic) prior to attending The Talk Project affected outcomes.

Procedure

The Talk Project presentation and all post-test data collection occurred on campus during school hours and was overseen by a member of The Talk Project team. Pre-test and control group data collection methods varied by school. Some students filled out paper and pencil post-tests, while others completed the post-test online at SurveyMonkey.com. Evaluation of The Talk Project relied heavily on schools' willingness to help administer surveys. A member of The Talk Project was not always present for the administration of the pre-tests, and so we relied on school staff to ensure students did not collaborate while answering the questions.

The Talk Project provided permission slips to schools who requested them to administer to students and their parents. However, not all schools felt permission slips were necessary since The Talk Project was being incorporated as a mandatory part of their curriculum. Students did not receive course credit for attending The Talk Project or for filling out the evaluations, although in some instances teachers incentivized student participation with snacks. When possible, we attempted to administer pre-tests at least one week prior to The Talk Project, in order for the post-tests to feel more 'fresh' to students. Not every school was equally willing or had equal time or staff to fully engage in this process, however. This resulted in a bit of a hodgepodge of procedures, which are outlined here, and in Figure 1 below.



School A

Sixty-three out of about 65 total students at School A completed a written pre-test about one week prior to attending The Talk Project. Approximately 160 students from the 11th and 12th grade attended The Talk Project. All were administered a written post-test immediately following the presentation, with time allotted for answering the questions. Of the post-tests administered, 91 were returned complete.

School B

Pre-tests were administered to all 12th grade students in attendance immediately preceding The Talk Project, at which time The Talk Project staff were present. Written post-tests were administered to all

those still in attendance immediately following the presentation. Of the approximately 220 students who attended, 141 completely filled out the pre-test and 70 completely filled out the post-test.

School C

Thirty-two students who did not see The Talk Project received a digital link to the pre-test about a week before The Talk Project and completed the survey online. Those students who attended The Talk Project completed the same evaluation directly after participating in the event, but did not complete a pre-test. Of the approximately 35 post-tests administered, 27 were completed and returned.

Figure 1.

School Identifier	Demographic	Procedure	Timing	Total Students
School A (Private)	Entire 11 th & 12th grade cohorts	written pre-test (partial cohort) & written post-test (full cohort)	Pre-test: One week prior Post-test: Immediately following	Pre: 63 Post: 91
School B (Magnet)	Entire 12th grade cohort	written pre-test & written post- test	Pre-test: Immediately prior Post-test: Immediately following	Pre: 141 Post: 70
School C (Private)	Partial 11th grade cohort – 2 classes	Control group: 30-40 students from same cohort completed a digital evaluation	Control group: One week prior Experimental group: Immediately following	Pre: 32 Post: 27

Measures and Aims

The goal of our evaluation was to determine The Talk Project's success in educating students about sexual assault and its ability to influence students' self-reported intent to engage in certain behaviors either directly or indirectly linked to sexual violence.

Before deciding upon evaluation measures for The Talk Project, we undertook a literature review to determine best evaluation practices among other sexual violence prevention programs. Where possible, we focused on young adult, peer-to-peer, and school-based programs. We conducted our literature review in November and December of 2015, primarily using the Google Scholar database. We employed the search terms "sexual assault awareness," "sexual assault prevention," "sexual violence prevention," "rape prevention," "qualitative evaluation," and "efficacy," among others. In the end, we focused on three peer-reviewed studies and one meta-analysis of sexual violence education and prevention programs. We cross-referenced our findings from these sources with a thematic list of measurement instruments entitled "Measures for the Assessment of Dimensions of Violence Against Women: A Compendium" compiled by Michael Flood (2008) for the Sexual Violence Research Initiative.

Our literature review found that sexual violence prevention programs generally measure change in one or more of three domains: behavior, knowledge, and attitude. Obviously, accurately measuring change in sexual violence behavior is extremely difficult and ethically questionable and we found almost no

evidence of this practice. We did not find much evidence pointing to the evaluation of knowledge either. The studies we referenced generally measured outcomes in attitudes and behavioral *intentions*. The meta-analysis we referenced for this literatures review confirmed that the most commonly used outcome measures for sexual violence prevention programs are those that examine what are referred to as “rape attitudes,” “rape-related attitudes,” and behavioral intentions (Anderson & Whiston, 2005). Rape-related attitudes (or “sexual-violence related attitudes,” for our purposes) differ from rape attitudes (or “sexual violence attitudes”) in that the former are beliefs thought to *promote* sexual violence, such as gender stereotyping and negative beliefs about women, while the latter are beliefs *about* sexual violence, like victim-blaming and acceptance of sexual violence myths (Anderson & Whiston, 2005). “Behavioral intentions” refer to a person’s intent to commit an act. Here, “behavioral intentions” refer to the intention to commit an act of sexual violence, to undertake certain dating behavior like asking for consent, or to undertake certain bystander behavior. All of the studies we looked at measured both attitudes and behavioral intentions.

One study in our literature review, which used a “Men as Allies approach,” assessed male and female behavioral intentions with different instruments, presumably because women are more frequently the victims of sexual violence and men are more frequently the perpetrators (Hillenbrand-Gunn, Heppner, Mauch, & Park, 2010). In this study, the men were measured on their willingness to intervene in situations considered “rape-supportive” (e.g. “How likely would you be to tell a friend, who was blaming a woman for being raped, that you disagree with him?”). The women were measured on their willingness to engage in “rape-preventative” behaviors (e.g. “How likely are you to ask friends about the reputation of a potential date?”) and victim-advocacy behaviors (e.g. “If your boyfriend forced you to have sex with him after you had too much to drink at a party, how likely would you be to tell a friend?”). While The Talk Project did not want to assess males and females differently, it was helpful for us to see how we might assess students’ behavioral intentions from the perspective of both potential-victim and potential-perpetrator.

The above study, as well as another study in our literature review that examined social norms and bystander intervention in college men, measured participants’ beliefs about *their peers’* beliefs and attitudes (Gidycz, Orchowski, & Berkowitz, 2011). Both studies referenced social norms theory (Berkowitz, 2005) as an approach to violence prevention. Researchers measured perceived peer beliefs with the assumption that those students who *believe* their peers are unsupportive of sexual violence and sexual violence-related behavior will be less likely to engage in sexual violence and more likely to engage in positive bystander behavior than those who believe their own sentiments against sexual violence are socially aberrant.

In the past, researchers have criticized the idea that attitudinal measures (e.g. sexual violence supportive attitudes or “rape empathy”) are good predictors of behavior (Anderson & Whiston, 2005). Before deciding to include attitudinal measures in our evaluation, we used what we had learned from our literature review to develop our own theory of change about sexual assault. We came up with the following equation:

$$\text{Behavior} = \text{Knowledge} + \text{Motivation (i.e. empowerment) to act}$$

Based on take-aways from our literature review and this working theory of change, we created a single, composite measurement instrument with which to evaluate students. The first page of the measurement instrument (Included in post-test format in Appendix A) captures demographics. Pages two through six comprise the body of the survey, and include 31 questions measured on five-point Likert scales, plus five additional questions that measure student satisfaction with the presentation itself (also measured on a five-point Likert scale). The individual instruments we used to construct our composite instrument are described below and are listed as references. Figure 2 (also below) shows how the four instruments we selected work together to evaluate all of The Talk Project's goals.

Figure 2.

	Section I Rape Myth Acceptance	Section II Bystander Attitudes	Section III Seeking Support and Utilizing Resources	Section IV Sexual Consent Vignettes
Education				
Societal & systemic causes of sexual violence	X			
Laws of consent	X	X		X
Legal rights of survivors			X	
Empowerment				
Speak out against SV-supportive behavior	X	X		
Engage in healthy sexual relationships		X		X
Survivors make informed decisions about legal justice & school support			X	

Section I: Rape Myth Acceptance Scale

Section I of our measurement instrument includes nine items from the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA) and a single item from the Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Scale (ARVS). The IRMA measures general acceptance of rape myths along five lines, or sub-scales (Payne, Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1999) and the ARVS measures general attitudes toward victims of sexual violence (Ward, 1988).

The IRMA is comprised of three subscales. The first is called *She asked for it*, and assesses a student's belief that the blame for sexual assault lies with the victim. An example of this type of statement is: "If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of hand." The second subscale, *He didn't mean to*, assesses a student's belief of the innocence of the perpetrator of sexual violence. An example of this type of statement is: "Rape happens when a guy's sex drive goes out of control." Our instrument also includes an item from the third subscale, *It wasn't really rape*. This subscale measures allegiance to victim blaming or excusing the perpetrator: "If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape."

In all three types of questions, students were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement, and were asked to respond on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates strong agreement and 5

indicates weak or no agreement. We changed certain gendered language in all questions to align with the fact that men and women can both perpetrate and be the victim of sexual violence.

It should be noted that students at School A (the first school we visited) found one particular question in this scale to be unclear and voiced this concern to their teacher while taking the pre-test, as well as in notes written on their post-tests. In response, we substituted a completely new question from the IRMA moving forward and threw out the data from this question at School A.

Section II: Bystander Attitudes

Section II of our measurement instrument is comprised of 12 items from the 16-item Bystander Attitudes Scale, Revised (BAS-R), which is a modified version of Banyard's Bystander Scale (Banyard, Plante & Moynihan, 2005; McMahon, 2010). The scale measures bystander behavioral intent in situations that appear to be leading to or appear to have been the result of sexual violence. The BAS-R makes statements about overt acts of sexual violence ("Confront a friend who is hooking up with someone who is passed out") as well as more covert acts of violence ("Confront a friend if I hear rumors that s/he forced sex on someone"). The BAS-R also makes statements about social behaviors that support what The Talk Project refers to as "rape culture." An example of this kind of statement is: "Challenge a friend who makes a sexist joke." Students were asked how likely they would be to engage in each behavior – from 1 "Not likely" to 5 "Extremely likely." In the interest of brevity, we did not include every statement in our composite instrument. As with the IRMA, we changed certain gendered language.

Section III: Seeking Support and Utilizing Resources

In Section III of our measurement instrument, we borrowed an idea from a published paper on a high school rape prevention program (Hillenbrand-Gunn et al., 2010). Here, the authors used select items from an instrument developed by the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault (ICASA) that measures individuals' willingness to engage in what they refer to as "protective behaviors." The instruments ask what action respondents would take if put in different scenarios, such as, "...your boyfriend forced you to have sex with him after you had too much to drink at a party..." (p. 45).

For The Talk Project, we chose a single scenario: "Imagine a friend comes to you and tells you they think they have been sexually assaulted." Then we asked students to rate how likely they would be to respond by encouraging their friend to seek support and/or utilize medical and legal resources, for example: "tell a friend or family member," "go to the hospital or call the police," "tell school or college administrators about what happened," or "file a Title IX complaint" in the instance that they made a report to their school or college and no action was taken. We chose to present students with a scenario in which a friend was the victim rather than themselves based on the assumption that many victims of sexual violence feel intense shame, and that students would, therefore, be more likely to act on their beliefs on behalf of a friend. Students were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale from 1- "Not likely" to 5- "Extremely likely."

Section IV: PausePlayStop Vignettes

In addition to asking about their beliefs and intentions, we also wanted to assess students' understanding of consent, as it is defined by law. Because we were unable to find an existing measurement instrument in this area, we chose to present students with short vignettes to assess their understanding, an idea which

we borrowed from Gidycz, et al. (2011). The five vignettes we used came from the English website PausePlayStop.org.uk (Somerset and Avon, 2016). We asked students to analyze each vignette and decide how much, on a 5-point Likert scale, each vignette resembled 1- “consensual sex” or 5- “rape/sexual assault.” The vignettes featured in this section describe instances of enthusiastic affirmative consent, non-verbal affirmative consent, as well as sexual encounters where one or more partner is drunk, asleep, or obviously emotionally dis-interested in sex.

Student Satisfaction with The Talk Project

Students were asked five questions about their overall satisfaction with The Talk Project. The questions covered the novelty of the material presented, and the clarity, comprehensibility and interestingness of the presentation. Students were also asked about their comfort level during the presentation, i.e. “Even if I didn’t do so, I felt comfortable enough to ask questions and engage in dialogue.” They were also asked if they would recommend The Talk Project to a friend. These questions were added to our measurement instrument after School A.

Data Analysis

We analyzed our data in an Access database. All data, including respondent demographics and answers to individual questions were entered into a relational database (Microsoft Access). The study design did not allow pairing of individual pre-test and post-test scores, so pre-test and post-test responses were analyzed in aggregate. Differences in pre-test and post-test average scores were evaluated for statistical significance using a two-tailed t-test assuming unequal variances. Statistical significance was assumed for $p < 0.05$.

Qualitative Assessment

At the end of the quantitative measurement instrument, which we administered to all students who saw The Talk Project, students were asked to include their contact information if they would be willing to participate in a short, semi-structured interview to talk more in-depth about their experience with the presentation. Response rates for these qualitative interviews varied from school to school, from 0% to almost 13%. Not all students who left their contact information were reachable for interview.

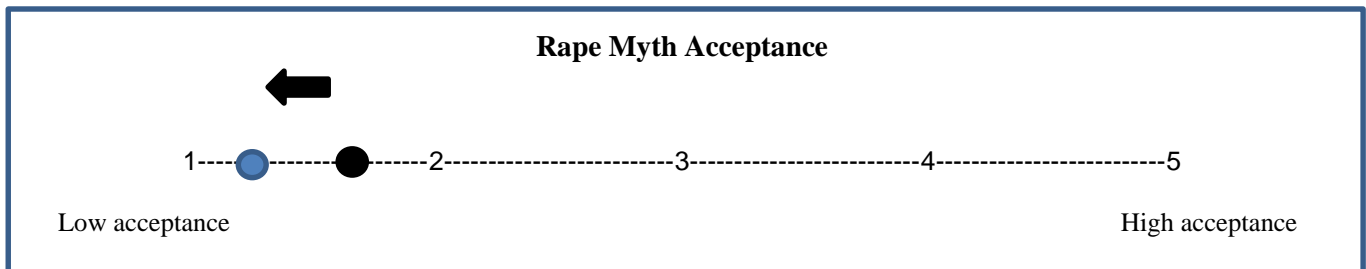
Qualitative interviews were conducted over the phone between two and three weeks after students saw The Talk Project, and one interview was conducted via email because of scheduling difficulties. The purpose of the interviews was to get a deeper understanding of how The Talk Project affected the way students think about sexual violence and how the peer-to-peer model affected that outcome. Qualitative interviews were also conducted with some of The Talk Project’s peer-leaders to assess how the experience of constructing and delivering the program shaped their understanding of sexual violence and of themselves.



Findings

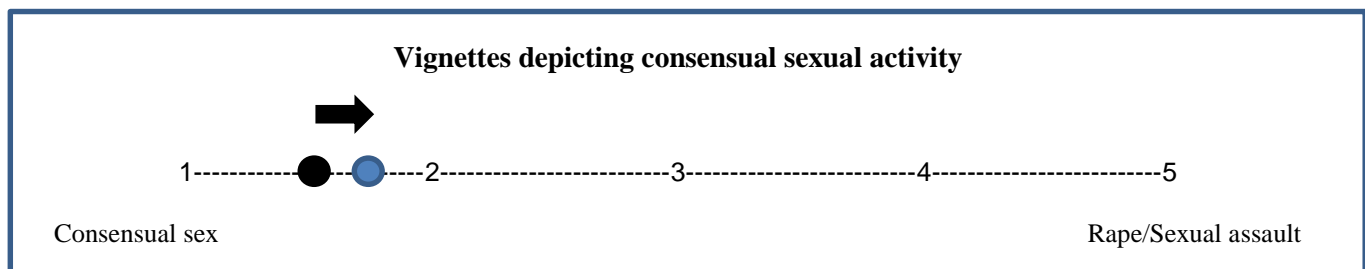
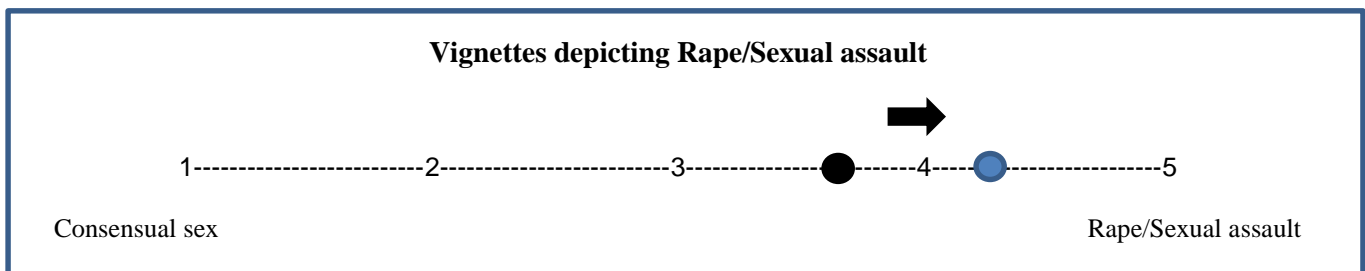
Hypothesis I: Students will demonstrate significantly increased knowledge of the societal and systemic causes of sexual violence, and the laws of sexual consent.

Our hypothesis that The Talk Project would significantly increase students’ knowledge of the societal and systemic causes of sexual violence was supported by students’ responses to the questions in Section I of our survey on rape myth acceptance. On average, students’ scores in this section decreased from 1.61 to 1.26 on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 shows a low adherence to sexual assault myths and 5 shows a high adherence. Scores in this section showed an average decrease of .35 points with a minimum score decrease of .18 points and a maximum score decrease of .51 points.



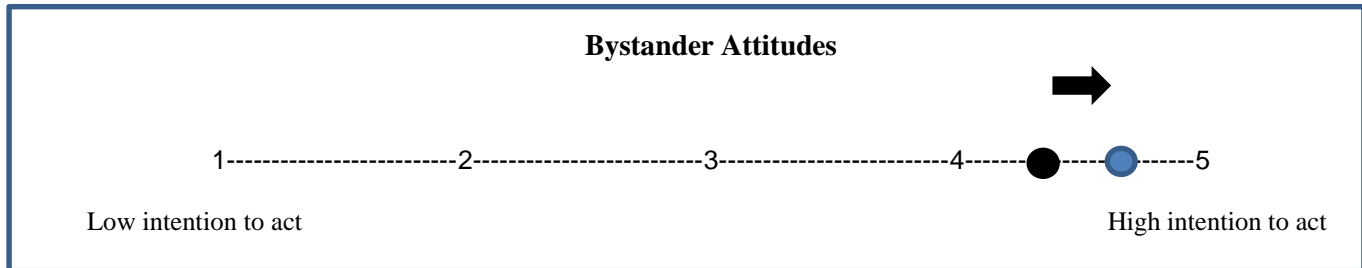
Our hypothesis that The Talk Project would significantly increase students' knowledge of the laws of sexual consent was only partially supported by students' responses to the questions in Section IV of our survey, which used real world vignettes to gauge students' understanding of consent. Students' responses were divided along content lines of the vignettes they were asked to assess.

Students' average scores on vignettes depicting rape increased from 3.70 to 4.23, where 1 indicated "consensual sex" and 5 indicated "rape/sexual assault." This resulted in a shift of .53 points in our target direction of change. On vignettes depicting consensual sex, students' average scores also increased, however, from 1.50 to 1.73. This resulted in a shift of .23 points in the *opposite* direction from our target. However, it should be noted that, while scores increased, they did not start far from our target outcome and stayed relatively close. It should also be noted that our survey only featured two consent vignettes, and our findings were only statistically significant for one of those vignettes. For this reason, it is difficult to draw conclusions about students' understanding of real-world consent.

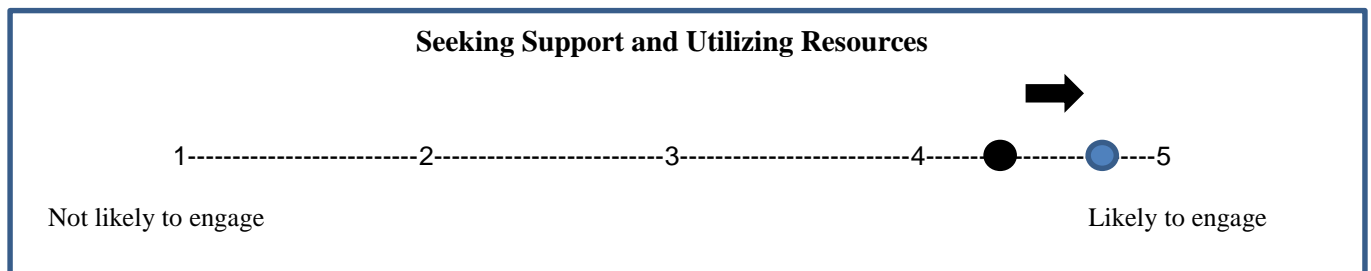


Hypothesis II: Students will demonstrate a significant increase in feelings of empowerment to stop sexual violence, as evidenced by their reported willingness/intention to intervene in sexual violence situations and by their reported willingness/intention to engage a friend in protective behaviors after an incident of sexual violence has occurred.

Our hypothesis that students who attended The Talk Project would report feeling significantly more empowered to intervene in sexual violence situations was supported by students' average scores in Section II of our survey on bystander attitudes. In this section, students' average scores increased from 4.28 to 4.62 on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 indicates a low willingness or intention to intervene in or help prevent a sexual violence situation and 5 shows a high willingness or intention to do so. This change resulted in an average score increase of .34 points toward our target outcome.



We hypothesized that students who attended The Talk Project would report a significantly increased willingness or intention to encourage a friend to seek support from friends and family and utilize medical and legal resources after an incident of sexual violence, and our hypothesis was supported by students' scores in Section III of our survey. In this section, students' average scores increased from 4.31 to 4.70 on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 indicates a low willingness or intention to encourage the friend and 5 indicates a high willingness or intention to do so. The average change in this section of the survey was .39 points in the direction of our target outcome.



Student Satisfaction with The Talk Project

Students' responses indicated that the material presented during The Talk Project was not new to them, as evidenced by an average score of 2.88 on the question, "The material presented was new to me." The average score for the remaining four questions about the interestingness and understandability of the peer-educators in this section was 4.35. All questions were measured on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 indicates a low level of satisfaction (or in the case of the first question, novelty) and 5 indicates a high level of satisfaction.

Discussion & Implications

Quantitative Findings

Overall, our findings indicate that students gained a significant understanding of the societal and systemic causes of sexual violence, as well as the confidence to act to end sexual violence-supportive behavior and offer protective behaviors when appropriate. We saw this in our findings for Section I (rape myth acceptance), Section II (bystander attitudes), and Section III of our survey (self-protective behaviors). Students' scores moved in our target direction of change fairly uniformly across these three sections. Females had consistently "better" scores at both pre-test and post-test than did males, a finding which was

statistically significant. We did not find any significant differences between those students who watched *The Hunting Ground* film as part of The Talk Project and those who did not.

As previously mentioned, students were more likely to rate vignettes as “rape/sexual assault” after seeing The Talk Project, regardless of whether the vignette depicted rape/sexual assault or consensual sexual activity. There were only five vignettes on our survey. Of those, three depicted rape/sexual assault, and two depicted consensual sexual activity. The results from all three of the rape/sexual assault vignettes were found to be statistically significant, but only the results from one consensual sex vignette was. Because of this, it is difficult for us to draw conclusions about students’ real-world understanding of consent.

It is possible that score movement toward “rape/sexual assault,” on consensual sex vignettes is indicative of students’ increased level of awareness of and caution during ambiguous sexual consent situations where affirmative consent is not *explicitly* given. The sexual consent vignette whose findings were found to be statistically significant depicts two young people who are described as being “tipsy, but in control.” In the vignette, they make positive comments to one another about their sexual pleasure, but do not *explicitly* ask for or give consent. Students may have been confused in this very gray area, and chose to err on the side of caution in their assessment, an outcome The Talk Project believes is favorable. In either case, The Talk Project and/or teachers might find it beneficial to spend additional time discussing the vignettes with students, as well as the importance of open communication and asking clarifying questions with partners during sexual encounters.

What we can say for certain is that male students consistently rated rape/sexual assault vignettes as significantly *more consensual* at both pre-test and post-test than their female counterparts did. This suggests that, while The Talk Project achieved its goals with male students, there is more room for improvement with this demographic in particular.

Finally, students reported being satisfied with The Talk Project overall, but their scores indicated the material presented may not have been entirely new to them. This may have been the result of confusion about what exactly constituted The Talk Project, the peer-to-peer presentation or *The Hunting Ground* film. Students may also have been hesitant to report a low level of understanding, especially if they were already engaged in sexual activity. Regardless, it is possible that The Talk Project is not presenting novel material, at least to private and charter school students. If this is the case, The Talk Project could better solve problems of repeated curriculum by reaching out to area high schools to get a better idea of their sexual education curriculum and how The Talk Project can either support or supplement their existing efforts.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative interviews with students revealed varying levels of sexual violence education prior to attending The Talk Project. While some students had researched the issue for class or participated in a club and had lots of prior knowledge, others relied on TV and YouTube for their information. This disparity in education levels suggests The Talk Project is acting appropriately by starting with the basics of sexual violence education.

When asked what they took away from The Talk Project, students described a greater understanding of the prevalence of sexual violence, especially in their own spheres. This awareness seemed to engender some fear among students. One interviewee asked the interviewer what his female friend could do to prevent sexual assault from happening at college, and suggested including this kind of information in the presentation. Based on others students' comments, this is a sound recommendation.

“People are scared of going to school... Like, we're *planning* what to do so things like [sexual assault] don't happen to us. Like, we won't go anywhere alone... People were saying that they would take their Mace or something with them, so that nobody can get to them.” - Jasmine, age 17

“[The] reports about sexual harassment... really opened up my eyes. Because I have a girlfriend... it makes me more protective. It does make me look out for her more. The fact that both of us are going to college next year, and seeing this video, and seeing all those reports of sexual harassment [and the perpetrators aren't] even suspended... That actually made me really upset. So, you know, it really made me look at the world differently.” - Ryan, age 17

Students also described an increased awareness of the roles they or their friends might play in perpetuating sexual violence and rape culture:

“Even the *simplest* things could be considered sexual assault. You could tell that everybody was kind of re-evaluating what they do every day, or even, they're close to someone, or, you know, someone of the opposite sex... You could tell that they think about their actions before they perform them after seeing the film.” - Ryan, age 17

Students generally saw the peer-educators as providing a higher level of comfort than a professional speaking on the topic of sexual violence might provide. One student we spoke with questioned the validity of information being presented by teenagers, and another thought the peer-educators did not garner as much respect as an adult would have. However, the majority of students we spoke with thought the peer educators successfully created a safe and comfortable environment for conversation to occur.

“[Students are] used to just ignoring adults and not giving much respect ... If you hear someone that's around your age talking about it, you'd feel more connected to someone your age.” -Isabel, age unknown

For their part, the peer-educators generally reported getting involved with The Talk Project to educate themselves and others. Based on the three educators with whom we spoke, they succeeded and surpassed their goal. The educators reported increased confidence speaking about sexual violence in their everyday lives. Lauren, one of The Talk Project's original authors, described her process of beginning to think like an advocate:

“[Thinking] about sexual violence... has become so normal for me... I think that's the nature of the work. I think you just get so used to thinking about it that I just think about it all the time

now... I feel much more prepared... I know if [sexual violence] were to happen to me in the future, that any range of reactions would be normal.” – Lauren, Peer-Educator, age 19

“I think I’m no longer embarrassed or nervous to stand up for this cause, because I think before, it was something that made me uncomfortable to talk about with other people who were not as passionate about it as I was. But once I joined The Talk Project and joined this, like, great support of people, I think it really empowered me...” - Emily, Peer Educator, age 16

The peer-educators also reported positive effects from expanding their network of like-minded individuals. For Lily, the youngest of the peer-educators, the effect was especially profound, and helped her develop a sense of self:

“I think we’ve all been able to develop our opinions and kind of develop what we believe in through The Talk Project... [The Talk Project] really helps us to see the world more clearly, and kinda see what *we* feel about what’s happening around us.” - Lily, Peer Educator, age 14



Limitations

While this evaluation of The Talk Project was able to capture data from around 200 high school students, we recognize that this is a relatively small sample size. Our inability to pair pre-test scores with post-test scores may have affected our findings in that non-paired data may have “smoothed out” some of the individual variance in scores. We were also generous when inputting students’ scores. We erred on the side of including surveys rather than throwing them out when there was a question of students having read the questions or answered straight down the line.

All of the students we surveyed were from private or charter high schools, which may limit the applicability of our findings to public schools. We might assume this to be the case especially if other schools have fewer resources to devote to health education, which was often students’ source of information before attending The Talk Project, and may have allowed them to absorb our material more easily.

Executing a scientifically-rigorous study in a school environment is particularly challenging, and this should also be considered. Due to time and logistical constraints, many students completed the pre-test and post-test on the same day, which may have influenced their responses. Those who did not complete both tests on the same day were unsupervised by The Talk Project staff when taking the pre-test, and so we cannot be certain that students did not discuss their answers. Even when The Talk Project staff was present, the size and close proximity of the student body, as well as students’ tendency to chat with others, meant that some discussion was almost inevitable. While time was built into The Talk Project to complete both pre- and post-tests, students often seemed eager to move onto their next class. Some appeared to rush through the surveys, while others did not fill them out at all, as evidenced by the small number of post-tests collected compared to the total number of attendees at certain workshops.

Finally, a number of students chose to ignore the directions on our surveys and circle multiple answers, often writing notes explaining why or caveats about the answer they chose. While this helped us see areas for improvement in both our program and our evaluation methodology, it also limited the number of questions we were able to analyze.

Conclusion

Based on findings from the first three high schools to receive The Talk Project as a sexual violence prevention intervention, we believe the program is an effective way to educate and empower students on this important issue. Students’ responses to our surveys and comments in semi-structured interviews indicate engagement with The Talk Project material. Moreover, they indicate the beginning of deeper thought about sexual violence prevention, on both the personal and systemic levels. We hope that schools and educators reading our evaluation will find our results equally encouraging and will choose to host The Talk Project. With ongoing evaluation, The Talk Project will continue to refine its message according to schools’ and students’ needs. With continued support from schools, it will continue to bring forth an open and honest discussion about sexual violence in Los Angeles.

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This is a survey about The Talk Project. It should take you about five minutes to complete. All of your answers will be kept confidential and will only be shared with The Talk Project staff from NCJW/LA. Thank you for your participation.

Please circle the answers that best represent you:

- I. What grade are you in?
 - a. 9th
 - b. 10th
 - c. 11th
 - d. 12th

- II. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Transgender
 - d. Other
 - e. Prefer not to answer

- III. What is your race?
 - a. White or Caucasian
 - b. Black or African American
 - c. Hispanic or Latino/a
 - d. Asian or Pacific Islander
 - e. American Indian or Native American
 - f. Middle Eastern
 - g. Mixed Race
 - h. Other
 - i. Prefer not to answer

- IV. What is your sexual orientation?
 - a. Heterosexual or Straight
 - b. Gay or Lesbian
 - c. Bisexual
 - d. Other
 - e. Prefer not to answer

- V. Some students at your school may have filled out a survey like this one – either online or on paper - prior to attending The Talk Project. Did you fill out a survey like this one before attending The Talk Project?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

- VI. Did you attend a school screening of “The Hunting Ground” and/or view the film as part of the workshop?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Please answer each question by circling the number that **best** corresponds to the amount you agree or disagree with each statement.

Strongly
Disagree

Neutral

Strongly
Agree

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1. Someone who is sexually assaulted while they are drunk is at least somewhat responsible. | 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 |
| 2. If a person doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say that they were sexually assaulted. | 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 |
| 3. Many people who report sexual assault are lying because they are angry and want revenge on the accused. | 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 |
| 4. People who have been sexually assaulted tend to exaggerate how much it affects them. | 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 |
| 5. If a person goes to a room alone with someone at a party, it is the person's own fault if they are sexually assaulted. | 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 |
| 6. Someone who is a tease deserves anything that might happen. | 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 |
| 7. Someone who dresses in sexy or slutty clothes should not be surprised if someone tries to force them to have sex. | 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 |
| 8. Sexual assault happens when a person's sex drive gets out of control. | 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 |
| 9. Most rape and sexual assaults are committed by strangers. | 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 |
| 10. When people are sexually assaulted, it is often because the way they said "no" was unclear. | 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 |

Please answer each question by circling the number that **best** corresponds to how likely you are to engage in each of the following behaviors.

Not
Likely

Neutral

Extremely
Likely

11. Ask for verbal consent when I am intimate with my partner, even if we are in a long-term relationship.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

12. Stop sexual activity when asked to, even if I am already sexually aroused.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

13. Check in with my friend who looks drunk when they go to a room with someone else at a party.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

14. Say something to my friend who is taking a drunk person back to their room at a party.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

15. Challenge a friend who made a sexist joke.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

16. Confront a friend who plans to give someone alcohol to get sex.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

17. Refuse to participate in activities where people are rated based on their appearance.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

18. Confront a friend who is hooking up with someone who is passed out.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

19. Confront a friend if I hear rumors that they forced sex on someone.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

20. Report a friend that committed sexual assault.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

21. Stop kissing or having sex with a partner if they say to stop, even if it started consensually.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

22. Decide not to have sex with a partner if they are drunk.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

Imagine a friend comes to you and tells you they think they have been sexually assaulted. Please answer each question by circling the number that best corresponds to how likely you are to engage in each of the following behaviors.

Not
Likely

Neutral

Extremely
Likely

23. Encourage them to tell a friend or family member about what happened.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

24. Encourage them to go to the hospital or call the police.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

25. Encourage them to tell school or college administrators about what happened.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

26. Encourage them to file a Title IX complaint if they have already told school or college administrators about what happened and they feel the situation was not handled appropriately.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

Please rate each vignette on a scale of 1 to 5 according to how much each situation looks like consensual sexual activity or rape/sexual assault. Please circle only one answer.

27. Malakai meets Tom at a club, they get along really well, and Malakai asks Tom back to his place. When they get there they start kissing while stumbling towards Malakai's room. Tom sounds a little tipsy, and says, "H-h-h-heeeeee! Wheeeere you goin'? You're so niceshh...I schleepy..." Malakai undresses Tom and Tom giggles. They have sex.

Consensual sex Rape/Sexual Assault
 1-----2-----3-----4-----5

28. Sarah and Angel meet on a dating app and go on a date one night. The date has gone really well with lots of talking and flirting and even some touching in the taxi back to Sarah's place. When they get back to Sarah's place, things get steamy. They start undressing each other and touching each other's bodies. Dan says what Sarah is doing feels good. Sarah asks him if he wants sex and he says yes. They have sex.

Consensual sex Rape/Sexual Assault
 1-----2-----3-----4-----5

29. Zach and Aneeta have been together for a few months, and have had consensual sex lots of times. Aneeta is staying over at Zach's one evening and heads to bed early. Zach joins her later and is feeling horny, but Aneeta is already asleep. He starts kissing her; she shrugs him off sleepily. Zach continues to kiss Aneeta, putting his hand down her pants and his fingers inside her.

Consensual sex Rape/Sexual Assault
 1-----2-----3-----4-----5

30. It's Chung and Mercedes' third date. James is pretty sure that tonight will be the night they go all the way, so after sharing a pizza and kissing on the sofa he starts undressing her, but she doesn't seem to be that into it and she isn't kissing him back. Her body has gone rigid so James asks if she is ok and she mumbles, "Yeah, I'm fine." They have sex.

Consensual sex Rape/Sexual Assault
 1-----2-----3-----4-----5

31. Alicia and Jayden meet at a house party. They play a few drinking games and end up kissing. They are both tipsy, but in control. It gets more passionate and Alicia leads Jayden to an upstairs bedroom. She tells Jayden where to touch her and starts kissing him passionately. He kisses her back and asks her to take her clothes off. They have sex.

Consensual sex Rape/Sexual Assault
 1-----2-----3-----4-----5

Please answer each question by circling the number that best corresponds to how you feel about The Talk Project:

Disagree Neutral Agree

32. The material presented was new to me. 1-----2-----3-----4-----5

33. The material presented was clear and understandable. 1-----2-----3-----4-----5

34. The peer-educators were interesting and engaging. 1-----2-----3-----4-----5

35. Even if I didn't do so, I felt comfortable enough to ask questions and engage in dialogue. 1-----2-----3-----4-----5

36. I would recommend The Talk Project to a friend. 1-----2-----3-----4-----5

Thank you for your participation!

We are looking for volunteers who want to share their feedback about The Talk Project and help us improve. Please fill out the following information if you are interested in being contacted for a short, confidential phone interview.

Name:

Phone Number:

Email address: