

A Qualitative Assessment of "The Men's Program:" The Impact of a Rape Prevention Program on Fraternity Men

John D. Foubert
Sharon A. La Voy



This qualitative study examined the impact of an all-male rape prevention program on fraternity men. Seven months after participating in "The Men's Program," fraternity men were asked whether during the previous year the program impacted their attitude or behavior and if so what about the program led to that change. Results point to the importance of establishing empathy with rape survivors to increase men's awareness and sensitivity to rape.

Research conducted during the 1980s showed that 15% of college women in a nationwide sample from 32 colleges and universities reported at least one experience since their fourteenth birthday that met the legal definition of rape (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). An additional 12% had experienced attempted rape without penetration. A more recent replication study using a survey of more than 4,600 college students at 136 institutions found that 20% of college women reported being forced to have sexual intercourse against their

John D. Foubert, PhD is the assistant dean of students at the University of Virginia; and Sharon A. La Voy, PhD is an assessment specialist at the University of Maryland, College Park.

will at some point in the past (Douglas et al., 1997). These daunting statistics indicate a substantial problem for student affairs administrators who seek to ensure the health and safety of their students as they pursue personal growth and academic excellence.

Although many studies have been conducted to assess the quantitative effect of rape prevention programs on men's attitudes (Lonsway, 1996), few have assessed the programmatic impact from a qualitative approach. One population that has received attention in the research literature on sexual violence is college fraternity men. Qualitative assessments of fraternities suggest that some fraternity members reinforce attitudes among themselves that help perpetuate sexual coercion against women (Martin & Hummer, 1989). Quantitative assessments support this suggestion (Garrett-Gooding & Senter, 1987; O'Sullivan, 1991; Schaeffer & Nelson, 1993).

Lonsway (1996) cites the recent rise in popularity of programs targeting all-male audiences. She notes that "because all-male programs offer the greatest promise in truly reaching the potential of rape prevention, such programs offer particular interest for future intervention and evaluation" (p. 242). One such all-male program is "The Men's Program." Based on research showing that male participants must consider rape from a personal perspective, with themselves as a victim, in order to fully empathize with rape survivors (Ellis, O'Sullivan, & Sowards, 1992), "The Men's Program" focuses on building victim empathy and on teaching men how to help women recover from a rape experience. Such empathy for the survivor has been shown to be effective in decreasing the likelihood of men raping (Hamilton & Yee, 1990; Schewe & O'Donohue, 1993). Several other research studies guided the approach to this program, particularly its all-male peer education format (Earle, 1996).

This all-male rape prevention peer education program has been shown by quantitative research to significantly lower men's rape myth acceptance and their likelihood of raping—effects shown to last for an entire academic year (Foubert & McEwen, 1998; Foubert, 2000). Yet, these quantitative findings only explained the effects directly measured by the instruments chosen for analysis. The present study used a qualitative approach, so that participants could define 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). The present study sought to fill that qualitative gap by conducting a multi-stage inductive analysis on open-ended questions among program participants 7 months after participating in "The Men's Program."

Method

Participants

Participants who answered the open-ended questions in the present study were also part of a quantitative study of the program's effects (Foubert, 2000). The quantitative study sampled members of eight fraternities at a large Mid-Atlantic public university. Of these eight fraternities, members from four participated in the program ($n=109$) and members from the other four constituted a control group ($n=86$). The present study assessed the program participants, 64% of whom answered open-ended questions 7 months after program participation. Participants had a mean age of 20.33 ($SD=1.23$) and were overwhelmingly White/Caucasian (91%) with an additional 2% African American/Black, 4% Asian American/Pacific Islander, 2% Hispanic/Latino/Chicano, and 1% Other. At the time of spring data collection, 3% were first-year students, 41% were sophomores, 35% were juniors, and 21% were seniors.

Treatment

Participants saw a one-time, one-hour program during the beginning of the fall semester in their fraternity houses. The program format was primarily lecture-oriented, with a major focus on viewing and processing a video describing a male-on-male rape situation. Four male peer educators presented the program from a prepared script to each of the all-male audiences, after which they opened the floor for questions. The program itself was titled, "How to help a sexual assault survivor: What men can do." The program opened by setting a nonconfrontational tone, indicating that participants would be taken through a workshop designed to help them help women recover from rape. After a disclaimer, an overview, and a basic review of rape definitions, presenters told the audience they would be viewing a videotape that

described a rape situation. This tape, produced by the Seattle Police Department, describes a male police officer being raped by two men. At the conclusion of the video, peer educators indicated that the video depicted an act of violence (not sex) and that the next part of the program would draw parallels between the male police officer's experiences and experiences common to female rape survivors. After this extensive segment concluded, the men were taught some basic skills on how to help a woman recover from rape. Next, men were encouraged to communicate openly in their sexual encounters and to help change societal norms that condone rape. After questions from the audience were taken, the presenters noted that if the 1 hour in which the program took place was an average hour in the United States, then 99 women would have experienced rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault since the program began (Maguire & Pastore, 1995). This program is fully described by Foubert (1998). Seven months after seeing the program, participants completed a follow-up posttest containing the open-ended questions during regularly scheduled fraternity meetings.

Materials

Two open-ended questions were responded to by program participants, 7 months after seeing the program. These questions were "During the last year, did the program impact your attitudes and/or behavior? If so, how?" The second question was, "If your attitudes and/or behavior changed, what about the program led to this change?"

Data Analysis

The two open-ended questions were analyzed using a multistage inductive analysis. According to Patton (1990), when an inductive analysis is used to understand program activities and outcomes, specific observations are made followed by the determination of general patterns, categories, or dimensions. Patton (1990) suggests a multi-stage process for conducting an inductive analysis. This process begins with identifying key phrases or terms used by program participants in their responses; in this case, responses to open-ended questions. Next, the researcher should identify themes that help organize participants' responses to the program. Patton (1990) notes that the theme identification process is inherently creative, necessitating a careful approach

to identify what is truly meaningful in the data. Following this process, consideration of “causes, consequences, and relationships” (Patton, 1990, p. 422) becomes appropriate. In this interpretive process, the researcher attempts to attach meaning to findings and draw any appropriate conclusions. Yet, he notes that one must recognize that these conclusions do not reveal the generalizable results found in quantitative analysis. Rather, inductive analysis helps the researcher illuminate, understand, and extrapolate findings.

For the present study, each response to the open-ended questions was typed on a 3- x 5-inch card, along with the participant’s survey number. A doctoral candidate who was not the program’s author and who had experience and training in inductive analysis followed the process suggested by Patton (1990) for the two sets of responses corresponding to the two open-ended questions.

Key phrases and terms in the response were identified. Themes that emerged from those responses were identified and then grouped into seemingly appropriate categories. Next, possible causes, consequences, and relationships were suggested. These findings were shared with the principle investigator. A conversation occurred between the qualitative research assistant and the principle investigator whereby themes and the possible meaning of those themes were discussed. The two researchers then had the opportunity to critically evaluate these themes and make minor modifications to these themes as they jointly determined was appropriate.

Results

Of the 70 program participants who completed all the measures throughout the duration of the study, 57 gave a response to the first question: “During the last year, did the program impact your attitudes and/or behavior? If so, how?” Responses to this question clustered around five themes and an “other responses” category. These themes are listed in order from greatest number of participant responses that were categorized into the theme to least number of responses.

Theme 1: Yes, the program made me more aware.

The 19 responses that fit into this theme clustered around the major idea of increased awareness. Participants in this category reported that

the program made them more aware about rape, made them think, and increased their knowledge of how frequently rape happens. Characteristic responses included "Yes, it showed me just how often rape happens;" "It taught me that rape is common on college campuses;" "Increased awareness of the problem of rape, how to help victims;" and "Yes, I did not understand how serious it was, but it changed my attitude."

Theme 2: Yes, the program increased my sensitivity to rape.

The 11 responses that fit into the second theme clustered around the major idea that the program induced an increase in sensitivity toward what is experienced by rape survivors and how to help them recover. Compared to theme 1, theme 2 included responses that had a more empathetic tone. Characteristic responses included "Yes, made me learn how to deal with someone I know who may have just been raped;" "It made me more sensitive to rape victims;" and "Yes, by seeing sexual assault from a male perspective, it made me realize the trauma and social difficulties a woman faces after being raped."

Theme 3: No, I have always been against rape so it didn't change me.

The 10 responses that fit into this theme clustered around the major idea that given their opinions prior to the program, they did not experience a change in their attitude. Responses characteristic of this theme included "I have always been against rape and already had to help a survivor;" "No, I've always condemned any type of rape or sexual assault;" and "No, I already know that rape and sexual assault are serious offenses, and those who commit them should be punished."

Theme 4: No.

The 9 responses that fit into this theme stated either "No" or "Not really," indicating that the program did not change their attitude or behavior.

Theme 5: Yes, it made me aware that men can be raped.

The 4 responses that fit into this theme clustered around the major idea that the program increased their awareness that men can be raped. Characteristic responses within this theme included "Yes, I have become more aware of the facts that men and women can both

be raped;" and "Sure, made me realize that women aren't the only ones that can be raped."

Other Responses

The 4 responses that were placed into this group did not logically fit into other themes, and did not seem to specify the effect the program had on them. For example, one response was "Not really, but I still remember the speech about the guy on the street, so maybe." Another was "The video was good."

Possible Causes, Consequences, and Relationships

Given the brevity of most responses, the answers given are likely to be the first thing that came to participants' minds. Responses to this question indicated that the program was effective, given that over half of the respondents stated that the program affected them and that the effect was in the direction of increased awareness and sensitivity toward rape. This seemed to be a particularly positive result given that the program had been presented 7 months earlier. It appeared that a cause for participants feeling more aware after watching the program was that the program was presenting new information to them. When participants reported that the program made them more aware, this was interpreted to mean that participants had not thought as much about the problem of rape prior to experiencing the program. It was also encouraging that when some of the participants said the program did not affect them, they did not indicate a negative reaction to the program itself. In many cases, they indicated that they were already knowledgeable about the subject matter and that the program affirmed their current opinions. Of those who indicated that the program changed their attitude or behavior, the major commonality among their responses was awareness of the rape issue, of the victim's experience, and of the fact that men can be raped.

Portion of Program That Was Most Impactful

Question 2 asked participants "If your attitudes and/or behavior changed, what about the program led to this change?" Of the 70 program participants who completed all measures throughout the duration of the study, 31 responded to this question. All 31 of these also

answered the previous question. Responses fell into four themes and an “other responses” category.

Theme 1: No.

The 10 responses that fit into this theme stated either “No” or “Not Applicable,” indicating that either the program did not change their attitude or behavior or that there was nothing in particular about the program that changed their attitude or behavior.

Theme 2: The Video

The 8 responses that fit into this theme indicated that the videotape in which a rape of a male officer is described was the influential element of the program that led to their change in attitude or behavior. Characteristic responses in this area included “The video we watched,” “Very graphic video,” and “Cop story.”

Theme 3: Made Me More Aware

The 6 responses that fit into this theme indicated that the part of the program that changed their attitude or behavior was that it made them more aware of how bad rape can be. Though no specific part of the program was mentioned by this group, they indicated that they were most affected by the general way the program increased their awareness of how awful a rape experience feels. Characteristic responses in this theme included “Just the general knowledge of it; I never knew much of a percentage of women were raped;” “It made me realize how bad it is for a woman;” and “It just made me understand how it could affect someone more.”

Theme 4: The “How to Help a Survivor” Portion

The 3 responses in this theme mentioned that the impactful part of the program for them was the “how to help a survivor” portion. Characteristic responses included “The segment about how to help and counsel a rape victim was particularly useful. I know women who have been sexually assaulted, and this program would be useful for a person who has friends who have been assaulted;” and “I know how to help a rape victim.”

Other Responses

Four other responses did not fit well in other categories, and they do not really fit together as a group. These four responses were

“Interesting way of presenting material,” “I felt strongly against beforehand,” “I think women do not make it up as much as I once thought,” and “The constant ‘one in four’ that can be seen on campus either in newspaper or message boards.”

Possible Causes, Consequences, and Relationships

Many people did not answer this second question very directly, which makes determining causes, consequences, and relationships difficult. The video seemed to be the most impactful portion of the program. This question may not have gotten at what it was intended to discover. It may also have been too specific a question to ask about a 1-hour program seen 7 months earlier.

Discussion

The inductive analysis of the open-ended questions answered 7 months after program participation supports the conclusion that the intervention had a lasting impact. When asked whether their attitude or behavior were impacted by the program, over half of the respondents who answered this question indicated that it did. All of those who mentioned that the program changed their attitude or behavior reported that the program changed them in the direction of increased awareness of or sensitivity to rape. Those who believed the program did not change their attitude or behavior often reported that the reason the program did not change them was that they already agreed with the program’s message.

The part of the program most likely to be mentioned as impactful, in response to a second question, was the video. Other impactful parts of the program included the general way the program raised awareness and the “helping a survivor” section. On the whole, it is impressive that participants not only tended to believe that they were impacted by the program in a manner in which the program was intended, but also that they indicated this change 7 months after program participation. The increased awareness of and sensitivity to rape reported in the inductive analysis helps confirm the increased awareness of and sensitivity to rape suggested by the quantitative measures.

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations. The first was that other events occurring in the months after the intervention could have affected the results. For example, several publicized incidents of sexual assault and rape occurred on the campus in which this study took place during the academic year in which the program was evaluated. Although all participants would have had an equal likelihood of being exposed to information about these incidents, it could be that some participants were affected in different ways by these incidents. These incidents could have led to greater awareness of rape among people on campus, including program participants. If participants heard rumors of false reporting, this could have impacted how they answered questions on the follow-up posttest concerning whether participants would believe a rape survivor's story.

In addition, all participants were students on the same campus, all of whom were members of fraternities. Thus, the findings of this study illuminate the reactions of fraternity men. In addition, given that only 9% of the participants in the present study were African American, Latino, Asian American, or of other non-White ethnicity, these results should not be generalized to non-White students. The low number of participants in the present study who were members of traditionally underrepresented populations points to the need for future research to assess rape prevention program efficacy on these populations.

Participant attrition was also an issue of concern. Participants who completed a follow-up posttest constituted 64% of those who completed measures in the fall. These participants were similar to pretested participants on measures assessed in a pretest; yet, there is no way to know if they would have differed 7 months later when the open-ended questions in this study were asked.

Implications

These findings have several implications. First and foremost, this study implies that it is possible for a rape prevention program to have an impact on program participants 7 months after program participation. In this particular study, the "How to help a sexual assault survivor: What men can do" workshop elicited strong indicators of change long after the program concluded.

Several implications for promising areas of future research are suggested by the results of this study. For instance, participants could be asked more directly worded questions about their sexually coercive behavior in the year after the program was presented. An individual interview approach could also be used to determine this information.

It also seems appropriate to use focus groups to get more deeply into how participants interpret what they learned from the program. Such focus group studies could be conducted by dividing program participants into multiple groups. One group could be assessed immediately after the program, another could be assessed at the end of the semester, and a third at the end of the academic year. Participants could be asked questions similar to the open-ended questions used in the present study. Additional questions could attempt to pinpoint how participants reacted to each segment of the program, what they found informative, what disturbed them, what they believe did and did not impact them, and whether they thought the program changed their attitude or behavior.

Conclusion

By using a rape prevention program that combines several effective portions of the research literature (Earle, 1996; Ellis, O'Sullivan, & Sowards, 1992; Hamilton & Yee, 1990; Schewe & O'Donohue, 1993), program participants reported how a rape prevention program administered 7 months previously positively impacted their attitude and behavior. These results lend strong support to the use of this and other similar victim empathy programs as student affairs administrators seek to intentionally construct campus environments where no more rape occurs. Clearly, much work has to be done before rape's prevalence is attenuated. In particular, we await proof of behavioral change resulting from a rape prevention program. Results of the present study suggest that as this behavior change is sought, use of "The Men's Program" is a worthwhile and important step in the desired direction.

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