

An Evaluation of Boys to Men's Reducing Sexism and Violence Program

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Key Findings

This evaluation of Maine Boys to Men's Reducing Sexism and Violence Program uses a quasi-experimental design to provide evidence that program objectives have been met by analyzing matched pre- and post-intervention participant questionnaires. A statistically significant change in the desired direction was observed in nearly three fourths of responses, including participants' understanding of media literacy, consensual relationships, and a willingness to intervene as a bystander in gender violent situations. Many of the remaining responses were exceptionally high or low in the desired direction both preceding and following the intervention. This indicates a pre-existing understanding of issues such as equal treatment of women and men, and acceptance of gay and lesbian individuals. A correlation analysis of responses between male and female participants shows that female participants had more desirable responses than males in the majority of cases.

Intervention

This study seeks to evaluate the outcome of the Reducing Sexism and Violence Program (RSVP), as administered by Maine Boys to Men. RSVP is a high school student-based violence prevention program. The program consists of a two-day retreat where participants learn about the roots of sexism, homophobia, and gender violence, along with the tools to address and prevent it. The intervention consists of modeling real-life school and social scenarios which address sexual harassment, dating violence and sexual assault, as well as values clarification exercises and media literacy activities to prompt critical thinking and open discussion while challenging traditional construction of gender roles. The curriculum for RSVP is partly based on the Mentors in Violence Prevention curriculum developed at Northeastern University. In the months following the retreat, participants are exposed to a subsequent "train the trainers" curriculum to support the material the learned at the retreat and to educate their peers on what they have learned.

This evaluation uses a quasi-experimental design to provide quantitative evidence that program objectives have been met. Program effectiveness is measured by using matched pre-test and post-test data gathered from program participants before and after the retreat portion of the RSVP curriculum. The RSVP program targets high school-age students primarily in grades 9, 10, and 11. Three high schools were selected to participate in this evaluation. Before attending the retreat, permission forms were secured from parents that included permission for students to participate in evaluation activities, including the completion of questionnaires.

This researcher was not present during the data collection process, but provided guidance to the RSVP program coordinator to administer the surveys in a methodical way in order to preserve the validity of the data. Pre-test surveys were provided to all participants by RSVP staff at the participating schools up to two weeks prior to the retreat. Post-test surveys were provided to participants immediately following the retreat. All surveys were completed on paper. This researcher compiled the surveys and entered the data in an electronic format to be used for analysis.

Program objectives

The RSVP curriculum lists program objectives, which will be used as a basis for measuring outcomes. Among the key objectives to be examined by this evaluation, are the following:

- Raise awareness of interpersonal violence and provide tools to change attitudes, behaviors, and norms concerning interpersonal violence
- Challenge thinking about traditional gender norms, behaviors, and their impact on partner violence
- Build empathy for women as victims of violence
- Understand dynamics of power and control and battery in intimate relationships
- Understand dynamics of sexual harassment
- Understand how homophobia contributes to violence, sexism, and harassment
- Introduce media literacy and acquire skills to read the sexualized images that companies are using to sell merchandise
- Introduce “bystander response,” its role in violence prevention, and tools for implementation
- Assist students to become leaders, and to use leadership skills

Subjects

The three high schools selected to participate in this study are all located in southern Maine and can be described as suburban and rural. An average of 30 students from each school were selected to participate in the program. Equal numbers of male and female students were chosen from each school.

Because of the program’s focus on leadership development, subjects are chosen by school faculty and administrators, as opposed to a random selection. An effort is made by Boys to Men staff to encourage the participating schools to select students for the program who possess leadership qualities, represent the diversity of the school’s population, as well as students of “social influence”. RSVP participants typically consist of leaders from athletic teams and clubs as well as students who do not participate in school activities but are seen as influencers within their social groups. This is believed to foster a diverse program, whose concepts can spread within the school community through socialization and bystander intervention.

The subjects used for this study include only those program participants that fully completed both the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires. Out of 90 total participants, 65 (72%) completed both the pre-test and post-test surveys. The reasons why some students failed to complete one or both surveys is not fully known. A number of students were absent from school on the day the pre-test was administered and some may have dropped out of the program prematurely or simply declined to complete one or both surveys. Of the 65 participants that complete both surveys, 58 percent were female and 42 percent were male. Respondents were primarily white (78 percent) and had an average age of 15.2 at the time of the intervention. See Table 1 for a breakdown of participant demographics.

Table 1. Characteristics of RSVP participants

Characteristic	N	% (N/65)
Gender		
Female	38	58%
Male	27	42%
Race/ethnicity		
Asian	1	2%
Black or African American	8	12%
Hispanic or Latino	2	3%
Native Hawaiian	1	2%
White	51	78%
Multiple races	2	3%
Age		
14	14	22%
15	28	43%
16	19	29%
17	4	6%
Grade		
9	36	55%
10	23	35%
11	6	9%

Design and procedure

Identical questionnaires were administered approximately two weeks prior to the intervention and immediately following the intervention. The questionnaires were coded with the birthdate (month/day) and middle initial of each subject, which allowed for the matching of the pre- and post-questionnaires on an individual subject level, without using the students' names. Responses consisted of check-boxes on paper questionnaires. Each questionnaire was coded manually by this researcher. SPSS Version 20 was used for analysis.

Evaluation Instrument

The pre- and post-intervention questionnaires were developed by the Maine Center for Public Health for a previous RSVP program evaluation¹. Input for the development of this instrument was received from Boys to Men program staff and a review of the literature of similar program evaluations. Northeastern University's evaluation of the Mentors in Violence Prevention Program was a significant influence in the development of this tool. The previous RSVP evaluation, prepared by RuthAnne Spence and Melissa Furtado, included both process and outcome evaluations. The outcome evaluation used the same questionnaire as the current study and also made use of a control group. It relied primarily on descriptive statistics of the mean response scores. This study goes a step further by conducting tests of statistical significance between pre- and post-intervention responses and by examining whether the responses to each item are correlated with the sex of the respondent.

¹ Spence, R., & Furtado, M. (2009). Reducing Sexism and Violence Program: A report on the evaluation. Maine Center for Public Health. Prepared for Maine Boys to Men.

Results

Results include analysis of pre- to post-intervention changes as well as differences by sex. Paired *t*-tests were conducted to assess pre- to post-intervention response for the total group, as well as for males and females individually. Spearman's rho correlation analyses were used to examine sex-level differences among responses.

Changes in general knowledge about violence against women

The goal of the first five questionnaire items is to demonstrate general knowledge of the basic tenants of domestic violence and sexual assault, including criminal statistics and local statutes. Possible responses to each of these items included *True*, *False*, and *I don't know*, with a correct answer established for each. At pre-intervention, the majority of subjects correctly answered three out of the five items. At post-intervention, the majority of subjects correctly answered all five items correctly. These results are shown in table 2.

The data for these five items were recoded as correct and incorrect in order to examine significant changes between pre- and post-intervention questionnaires. Significant changes were observed for three of the five items for the overall group. Overall the data demonstrates that awareness of men's violence against women was raised considerably.

Statistically significant sex differences were present for only one of the first five items in this group. See Table 4. Item 2, regarding knowledge of the dynamics of sexual harassment, shows females responding correctly more than males only on the post-intervention questionnaire, $r_s(65) = -.34, p < .01$.

Table 2. Changes in students' responses to general knowledge questions regarding domestic violence and sexual assault

Questionnaire item	% Responding correctly: pre/post ^a		
	Overall (N=65)	Male (N=27)	Female (N=38)
1 - According to Maine law, it may be considered rape if a man has sex with a woman who is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.	84.6/95.4 <i>t</i> =2.42*	81.5/92.6	86.8/97.4
2 - As long as you are just joking around, what you say or do to someone cannot be considered sexual harassment.	89.2/92.3	81.5/81.5	94.7/100
3 - People on TV and in the movies influence the ways that we act as men and women.	92.3/96.9	88.9/92.6	94.7/100
4 - Men perpetrate (commit) over 90% of violent crime in the U.S.	24.6/83.1 <i>t</i> =8.94***	25.9/88.9 <i>t</i> =6.65***	23.7/78.9 <i>t</i> =6.14***
5 - In the U.S., a man physically abuses a woman every 9 to 18 seconds.	32.3/66.2 <i>t</i> =4.82***	25.9/55.6 <i>t</i> =2.53*	36.8/73.7 <i>t</i> =4.20***

^a Possible responses include True, False, and "I don't know." The correct response for each item is True except for item 2

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed significance

Changes in subjects' attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs

The remaining 37 items on the questionnaire are intended to gauge subjects' attitudes about non-physical, physical, and sexual violence; media literacy; as well as their preparedness and willingness to intervene as a bystander in a gender violent situation. A 5-point Likert-style scale was provided using the following response set: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = unsure, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Items were frequently reverse-worded to prevent systematic measurement error.

Paired *t*-test analyses were performed for each item. Statistically significant change in the desired direction was observed for 28 of the 37 items for the overall group, 20 of the 37 items for the male group, and 26 of the 37 items for the female group. These results are presented in Table 3.

Statistically significant sex differences were present for 26 of the remaining 37 items, either at pre-intervention only, post-intervention only, or at both. In all but one of these cases (item 28), females had more desirable responses than males, $r_s(65) = -.36, p < .01$. These results are presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Changes in Students' Responses regarding attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs

Questionnaire Item	Mean score: pre/post ^a		
	Overall (N=65)	Male (N=27)	Female (N=38)
6 - Teenagers sexually harass one another at my school.	3.62/3.97 <i>t</i> =-2.88**	3.70/3.96	3.55/3.97 <i>t</i> =2.59*
7 - A boy who tells his girlfriend whom she can hang out with is being too controlling.	4.08/4.52 <i>t</i> =-3.99***	3.78/4.41 <i>t</i> =-3.38**	4.29/4.61 <i>t</i> =2.31*
8 - Girls at school should expect to be touched when they wear short shorts or short skirts.	1.69/1.49	2.00/1.56	1.47/1.45
9 - Gay people get what they deserve.	1.48/1.43	1.93/1.81	1.16/1.16
10 - If I see a guy and his girlfriend physically fighting at school, it is none of my business.	2.29/1.83 <i>t</i> =3.33**	2.37/1.96	2.24/1.74 <i>t</i> =3.15**
11 - If a girl gets really drunk and has unwanted sex at a party, it is partly her fault.	3.00/2.09 <i>t</i> =5.50***	3.19/2.56 <i>t</i> =2.35*	2.87/1.76 <i>t</i> =5.37***
12 - Sometimes girls want to have sex even when they say "no."	2.40/2.11 <i>t</i> =2.30*	2.56/2.26	2.29/2.00
13 - Sexual assault is an issue that should concern both men and women equally.	4.31/4.48	4.11/4.48 <i>t</i> =-2.60*	4.45/4.47
14 - Making unwelcome sexual comments to a girl in the lunchroom or hallway is wrong.	4.25/4.52 <i>t</i> =-2.60*	4.07/4.44 <i>t</i> =-2.08*	4.37/4.58
15 - It is harmless to tell dirty jokes about women.	2.32/1.89 <i>t</i> =3.59***	2.48/2.22	2.21/1.66 <i>t</i> =4.48***
16 - Organizations which promote gay and lesbian rights are necessary.	3.92/4.29 <i>t</i> =-3.63***	3.59/4.07 <i>t</i> =-2.80**	4.16/4.45 <i>t</i> =2.32*
17 - Magazines and music videos show disrespectful sexual images of women.	3.82/4.38 <i>t</i> =-3.96***	3.56/4.19	4.00/4.53 <i>t</i> =-4.47***
18 - If I discovered a friend was gay I would end the friendship.	1.63/1.46 <i>t</i> =2.37*	2.26/1.85 <i>t</i> =2.83**	1.18/1.18
19 - A person is not really abusive as long as they don't physically harm anyone.	1.69/1.31 <i>t</i> =4.58***	1.89/1.33 <i>t</i> =3.41**	1.55/1.29 <i>t</i> =3.22**
20 - In serious relationships between males and females, males should be the leaders and decision-makers.	1.97/1.72 <i>t</i> =2.29*	2.70/2.26 <i>t</i> =2.13*	1.45/1.34
21 - It is okay for a boy to force a girl to have sex with him if she has flirted with him or led him on.	1.42/1.35	1.74/1.59	1.18/1.18
22 - If a guy forces his girlfriend to have sex with him when she doesn't want to, it is rape.	4.28/4.71 <i>t</i> =-3.86***	4.04/4.56 <i>t</i> =-2.40*	4.45/4.82 <i>t</i> =-3.18**
23 - It does not matter to me whether my friends are gay or straight.	4.43/4.48	4.00/4.04	4.74/4.79 <i>t</i> =0.81

24 - Men and women are equal and should be treated the same way.	4.46/4.62	4.26/4.30	4.61/4.84 $t=-2.98^{**}$
25 - The media influences the way I think about myself and others.	3.66/4.08 $t=-3.59^{***}$	3.44/3.81	3.82/4.26 $t=-3.81^{***}$
26 - If a female is battered, she has done something to cause it or ask for it.	2.12/1.71 $t=4.05^{***}$	2.44/2.04 $t=2.66^*$	1.89/1.47 $t=3.02^{**}$
27 - I can help prevent violence against women at my school.	3.88/4.34 $t=-4.58^{***}$	3.93/4.41 $t=-3.32^{**}$	3.84/4.29 $t=-3.2^{**}$
28 - I would not be able to stop a guy I didn't know very well from hitting his girlfriend.	2.63/2.46	2.26/2.19	2.89/2.66
29 - I would confront a group of my male friends about their sexual language or behaviors.	3.43/3.95 $t=-4.50^{***}$	3.15/3.67 $t=-2.66^*$	3.63/4.16 $t=-3.64^{***}$
30 - I have the skills to help support a female friend who is in an abusive relationship.	3.95/4.52 $t=-6.50^{***}$	3.78/4.37 $t=-3.86^{***}$	4.08/4.63 $t=-5.28^{***}$
31 - If there was a group of guys I didn't know very well harassing a girl at a party, I would not try to stop them.	2.23/1.85 $t=2.86^{**}$	2.22/2.15	2.24/1.63 $t=3.83^{***}$
32 - I would not tell a group of my male friends that it was disrespectful to make sexual comments about girls.	2.43/1.95 $t=3.72^{***}$	2.74/2.11 $t=2.77^*$	2.21/1.84 $t=2.49^*$
33 - I would tell my friend to stop calling his girlfriend names.	4.05/4.34 $t=-2.93^{**}$	3.93/4.04	4.13/4.55 $t=-4.34^{***}$
34 - I know how to educate my friends and peers about male violence against women.	3.05/4.34 $t=-11.85^{***}$	3.19/4.37 $t=-5.73^{***}$	2.95/4.39 $t=-10.77^{***}$
35 - I would say something to a friend who is acting inappropriately toward a woman.	3.95/4.34 $t=-4.74^{***}$	3.93/4.30 $t=-2.60^*$	3.97/4.37 $t=-4.09^{***}$
36 - It would be too hard for me to confront a stranger who was being abusive toward a woman.	2.97/2.49 $t=3.78^{***}$	2.70/2.26 $t=2.28^*$	3.16/2.66 $t=2.98^{**}$
37 - If I saw a girl I didn't know very well at a party, and she was being taken advantage of by a guy, I would help her get out of the situation.	3.94/4.34 $t=-4.59^{***}$	3.81/4.19 $t=-2.29^*$	4.03/4.45 $t=-4.34^{***}$
38 - I would stop my friends from harassing someone who is gay.	4.28/4.45	3.96/4.15	4.5/4.66
39 - A man can control his behavior no matter how sexually aroused he feels.	3.92/4.11	3.78/3.70	4.03/4.39 $t=-2.28^*$
40 - It is okay to call a guy a "fag" if he is not acting like a man.	1.85/1.46 $t=4.43^{***}$	2.33/1.74 $t=4.12^{***}$	1.5/1.26 $t=2.3^*$
41 - Boys don't sexually harass girls in high school - it is just joking around.	2.02/1.65 $t=3.81^{***}$	2.22/1.78 $t=3.31^{**}$	1.87/1.55 $t=2.31^*$
42 - It's okay to call a girl a "dyke" if she is not acting like a girl.	1.74/1.46 $t=3.21^{**}$	1.89/1.67	1.63/1.32 $t=3.14^{**}$

^a Responses were based on a five-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Unsure; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree. A high mean score is generally desirable except on items 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 26, 28, 31, 32, 36, 40, 41, and 42.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed significance

Table 4. Correlations Between Responses of Male and Female Participants

Questionnaire item	Pre	Post
2 - As long as you are just joking around, what you say or do to someone cannot be considered sexual harassment.	—	-.34**
8 - Girls at school should expect to be touched when they wear short shorts or short skirts.	-.32**	—
9 - Gay people get what they deserve.	-.48***	-.44***
11 - If a girl gets really drunk and has unwanted sex at a party, it is partly her fault.	—	-.35**
13 - Sexual assault is an issue that should concern both men and women equally.	.24*	—
15 - It is harmless to tell dirty jokes about women.	—	-.33**
16 - Organizations which promote gay and lesbian rights are necessary.	.30*	—
17 - Magazines and music videos show disrespectful sexual images of women.	.26*	.28*
18 - If I discovered a friend was gay I would end the friendship.	-.62***	-.45***
19 - A person is not really abusive as long as they don't physically harm anyone.	-.26*	—
20 - In serious relationships between males and females, males should be the leaders and decision-makers.	-.63***	-.50***
21 - It is okay for a boy to force a girl to have sex with him if she has flirted with him or led him on.	-.42***	-.35**
22 - If a guy forces his girlfriend to have sex with him when she doesn't want to, it is rape.	.26*	—
23 - It does not matter to me whether my friends are gay or straight.	.45***	.34**
24 - Men and women are equal and should be treated the same way.	.28*	.45***
26 - If a female is battered, she has done something to cause it or ask for it.	-.34**	-.39**
28 - I would not be able to stop a guy I didn't know very well from hitting his girlfriend.	.36**	.26*
29 - I would confront a group of my male friends about their sexual language or behaviors.	.32**	.32*
31 - If there was a group of guys I didn't know very well harassing a girl at a party, I would not try to stop them.	—	-.28*
32 - I would not tell a group of my male friends that it was disrespectful to make sexual comments about girls.	-.29*	—
33 - I would tell my friend to stop calling his girlfriend names.	—	.30*
36 - It would be too hard for me to confront a stranger who was being abusive toward a woman.	.26*	—
38 - I would stop my friends from harassing someone who is gay.	.35**	.47***
39 - A man can control his behavior no matter how sexually aroused he feels.	—	.34**
40 - It is okay to call a guy a "fag" if he is not acting like a man.	-.47***	-.37**
41 - Boys don't sexually harass girls in high school - it is just joking around.	-.25*	—
42 - It's okay to call a girl a "dyke" if she is not acting like a girl.	—	-.25*

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed significance

Discussion

General knowledge about violence against women

Subjects reported a considerable increase in knowledge of violence against women statutes and statistics. This is an indication that the intervention was successful in breaking down some myths and misconceptions regarding men's violence against women. For example, before the intervention, only 25 percent of subjects believed the statement "*Men perpetrate (commit) over 90% of violent crime in the U.S.*" to be true. Following the intervention, 83 percent of subjects believed this statement to be true. This increase was more significant among male subjects than female subjects and reflects the program's objective to avoid casting all men as potential perpetrators. Program facilitators, in an effort to reduce gender shaming, stress that while men commit the vast majority of violent crimes, the vast majority of men are non-violent. Subjects also showed significant improvement in their understanding of how domestic violence and sexual harassment are defined and treated under state statutes.

Post-intervention changes in subjects' attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs

Overall, the changes in subjects' attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs with regards to dating violence, sexism, sexual assault, and prevention after the intervention were very encouraging. The changes observed from pre- to post- intervention are all in the desired direction.

The questionnaire included seven items (9, 16, 18, 23, 38, 40, 42) that concerned attitudes toward known or perceived gay and lesbian individuals. The pre- and post-intervention responses indicate that subjects' attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals was positive and that they gained further understanding of how homophobia contributes to violence, sexism, and harassment. The average responses to these items were either exceptionally high or low in the desired direction both before and after the intervention, indicating a pre-existing high level of acceptance of gays and lesbians. For each item, females responded in the desired direction more often than male subjects. However, Table 4 indicates that desired change from pre- to post-intervention was more significant among males for items 16, 18, and 42. These results show that females have a slightly more favorable view of gay and lesbian issues, while males have the potential for a greater shift in their views.

Items 27-38 on the questionnaire all relate to the respondents' willingness act as bystanders to prevent sexism, dating violence, and sexual assault in their schools and amongst their peers. For 10 of these 12 items, there was an overall significant change in the desired direction. By far, the most significant change from pre- to post-intervention was observed in question 34 (*I know how to educate my friends and peers about male violence against women*), with responses heavily weighted toward "Unsure" before the intervention and heavily weighted toward "Strongly Agree" after the intervention [$t(65)=-11.85, p<.001$]. This is evidence that the program achieved its primary objectives to give participants the confidence to become active bystanders and skills become leaders in violence prevention.

For item 28, the average score for all responses was approximately 2.5, with no significant change observed between pre- and post-intervention. This may indicate confusion by the respondents with regards to the wording of the item, which poses as a double negative (*I would not be able to stop a guy I didn't know very well from hitting his girlfriend*) and suggests a negative desired response (*disagree*). This researcher suggests the re-wording or elimination of this item for future evaluations.

Overall, the results of this study provide strong evidence that the objectives of the RSVP program are being met. This study was limited by the lack of a control group and by having only a single post-intervention questionnaire. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the program impact, a more comprehensive longitudinal study must be done. However, this type study is rare in the violence prevention field and requires significant resources; as prevention is inherently difficult to measure due to the compounding influences on subjects over time.