

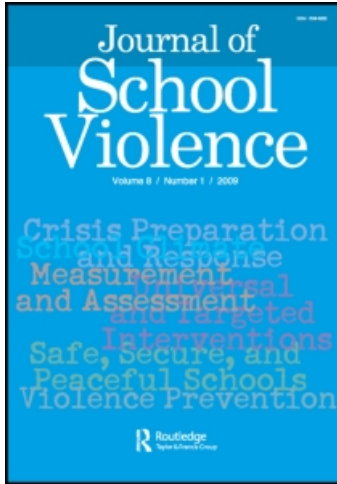
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Nada Elias-Lambert ^a; Beverly Black ^a; Yasoda Sharma ^a

^a School of Social Work, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, USA

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Middle School Youth: Satisfaction With and Responses to a Dating Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention Program

NADA ELIAS-LAMBERT, BEVERLY BLACK, and YASODA SHARMA

School of Social Work, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, USA

This study examined how group composition influences students' level of satisfaction with a dating violence and sexual assault prevention program. A 10- to 12-session program was presented to 396 urban African American middle school students in mixed- and same-gender groups. Both males and females were significantly more satisfied with the mixed-gender program than the same-gender program; females in both programs were significantly more satisfied than the males in both programs. Students especially liked the class activities, discussion, and teacher involvement in the program. The study findings support the importance of taking group composition and gender into consideration, as well as, students' reactions and recommendations when developing prevention programs for young adolescents.

KEYWORDS *middle school youth, dating violence, primary prevention, group composition*

Dating violence among youth has become a prevalent problem in American culture today. Studies suggest that between 20–59% of high school students have experiences with dating violence (Black & Weisz, 2004; Silverman, Raj, & Clements, 2004). Even as early as eighth and ninth grade, one-quarter of a sample of students reported experiencing dating violence (Foshee et al., 1998). According to the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 9.9% of students

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Address correspondence to Nada Elias-Lambert, LMSW, University of Texas at Arlington, School of Social Work, 211 S. Cooper St., Box 19129, Arlington, TX 76019, USA. E-mail: nada.elias@mavs.uta.edu

nationwide had been hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend during the 12 months before the survey. The prevalence of dating violence ranged from 7.2% to 15.7% across state surveys and from 6.6% to 17.4% across local surveys (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008). The literature documents the adverse behaviors known to be associated with dating violence on victims including: depression, low self-esteem, poor school performance, absenteeism from school, substance abuse, smoking, suicide, pregnancy, eating disorders, and risky sexual behaviors (Callahan, Tolman, & Saunders, 2003; Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001). Due to the alarming statistics and harmful consequences of dating violence, efforts to prevent dating violence are being implemented in schools across the United States and are increasingly targeting young teens (Fay & Medway, 2006; Weisz & Black, 2009).

Dating and sexual violence prevention efforts for adolescents are beginning to show promising results. In addition to changes in their knowledge bases and attitudes about dating and sexual violence, behavioral changes are occurring, and some changes are being maintained over time (Foshee et al., 1998; Jaycox et al., 2006; Wolfe, 2006). However, few studies have examined youths' responses to the dating and sexual violence prevention programs in which they participate, consequently, little is known about youth's satisfaction with programming. In addition, limited information is available about how the gender composition of a program influences participants' reaction to and satisfaction with prevention programs. This study examines middle school youths' levels of satisfaction in both a same-gender and mixed-gender dating and sexual violence prevention program. It also reports students' views on what they liked and disliked about the program. This study is not equating program satisfaction with program effectiveness. However, because participation in prevention programs is often voluntary, youths' interest in participating in programs is important. Youth communicate to other youth about their experiences. Youth need to participate for the programs to have an impact. Additionally, it is reasonable to assume that youth who report high levels of satisfaction with the program are more likely to be engaged in the program's activities and discussions.

Mixed- Versus Same-Gender Dating and Sexual Violence Prevention Programs

Few empirical studies address the issue of whether dating violence and sexual assault prevention programs should be presented to mixed-gender or same-gender audiences at the middle school and high school levels. However, at the college level research examining the effectiveness of mixed- versus same-gender groups indicates that prevention programs are more effective when presented in same-gender audiences (Brecklin &

Forde, 2001; Choate, 2003; Foubert & Newberry, 2006; Gidycz et al., 2001; Johansson-Love & Geer, 2003). They do not, however, address participants' levels of satisfaction with the programs.

Milhausen, McBride, and Jun (2006) suggested that same-gender smaller groups used in tandem with larger mixed-gender interventions might be most effective for college students. Foubert and Newberry (2006) found that programs presented to all-male audiences are much more likely to change men's attitudes and behavioral intent to rape than those presented to coeducational audiences. A meta-analysis conducted at the university level by Brecklin and Forde (2001) found that in males, more attitude change was found in same-gender audiences. Other studies have found that presenting to same-gender audiences provides better opportunity to address the saliency of the information being presented (Foubert & Newberry, 2006; Gidycz et al., 2001). None of these studies addressed participants' preferences for attending a same-gender or mixed-gender program.

A meta-analysis conducted by Anderson and Whiston (2005) contradicts Brecklin and Forde's (2001) findings that same-gender programs are more effective for college males than mixed-gender programs. However, there were differences in the evaluation methods of these two meta-analyses. Brecklin and Forde's (2001) results related only to rape attitudes, whereas Anderson and Whiston (2005) also measured behavioral intent to rape. Anderson and Whiston (2005) found that women may have better outcomes in an all-female setting and that mixed-gender programming may not be effective for behavioral intentions. Pacifici, Stoolmiller, and Nelson (2001) found that for programs focusing more narrowly on rape and high-risk populations, same-gender programs are more effective at the high school level. Yet, for interventions that are more universal with the objective of effecting changes in incipient behavior or attitudes, mixed-gender interventions are more effective. They argue that mixed-gender interventions are appropriate because (a) they avoid blaming one gender, (b) both males and females have rape-supportive attitudes, and (c) males and females can learn to understand and communicate directly with each other. Similar to other studies, this study did not address students' reactions to participating in same-gender or mixed-gender groups.

Weisz and Black (2009) found that about 25% of dating violence and sexual assault prevention programs with middle and high school students used a separate gender format. Even though program educators saw benefits to presenting to mixed-gender groups, many felt the benefits of separating the genders out-weighed the benefits of keeping them together. Thirty percent of the program staff interviewed by Weisz and Black (2009) used both mixed-gender and same-gender groups. They also found that many educators consider various factors in ultimately deciding whether or not to separate girls and boys, including what a school asks for; the topic and the

specific populations being addressed; and the availability of time, space, and male facilitators. However, the authors did not report on youths' views about participating in same-gender or mixed-gender groups.

Role of Gender in Group Dynamics

Drawing on the group dynamic literature about the role of gender in groups suggests that separating genders may lead to higher levels of satisfaction with dating and sexual violence prevention programs. Research has long found that males and females behave and respond differently in groups, and that this greatly influences the group process (Shaw, 1976). Additionally, it is known that greater commonalities among group members leads to greater group cohesiveness and greater group cohesiveness leads to higher levels of satisfaction among group members (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950; Shaw, 1976).

Drawing on studies of various kinds of groups, findings suggest that same-gender group composition can lead to higher levels of participant satisfaction. For example, among a sample of undergraduate students developing a wedding plan, Wong, Shi, and Wilson (2004) found that those in the same-gender group reported higher levels of satisfaction with the group decision than those in a mixed-gender group. Savicki, Kelly, and Lingenfelter's (1996) study of undergraduate students on computer mediated communication found that females were most satisfied in same-gender groups and males were least satisfied in same-gender groups when they were given decision-making tasks.

Program Recommendations

No studies known to the authors report on youths' perceptions about what they like and dislike about dating violence and sexual assault prevention programs, their recommendations for improvement; and how youths' perceptions and recommendations differ by gender or for youth participating in a same-gender versus a mixed-gender prevention program. One study on teen pregnancy prevention found that youth made many helpful recommendations to improve the program including presentations by adolescent parents to help students better identify with the challenges faced by young parents and peer-led pregnancy prevention programs (Garwick, Rhodes, Peterson-Hickey, & Hellerstedt, 2008).

The current study was part of a larger investigation that sought to examine the effectiveness of a dating violence and sexual assault prevention program. Due to the fact that one of the schools in the study did not have an additional room available to separate the genders, the program was presented to the boys and girls together. Given this circumstance, we examined the differential effects of youths' participation in a same-gender

and mixed-gender prevention program. Mixed and inconclusive findings about the programs' effectiveness left questions unanswered about youths' satisfaction with the programs' differences (Black, 2005). The current study sought to understand how satisfaction levels differ between same-gender and mixed-gender prevention programming. No studies known to the authors have explored youths' satisfaction in participation in dating violence and sexual assault prevention by group composition.

METHOD

Participants

From 2002–2006, a total of 396 sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students participated in a dating violence prevention program where 286 participated in a same-gender group (180 females and 106 males) and 108 participated in a mixed-gender group (58 females and 50 males). Nearly all (98%) of the youth in the program were African American. Of the youth participating in the program, 362 (125 males and 237 females) completed satisfaction surveys. Of the 362 students who completed the satisfaction surveys, 267 students (101 males and 166 females) provided qualitative feedback on the survey.

Chi-square and independent *t*-test analyses were conducted at pretest to examine differences between youth participating in the same-gender and mixed-gender programs. Based on the chi-square analyses, youth in the same-gender program and youth in the mixed-gender program did not significantly differ with regard to gender, $\chi^2(2, n = 398) = 3.87, p = .144$; grade in school, $\chi^2(2, n = 396) = 3.24, p = .198$; current living situation, $\chi^2(5, n = 341) = 5.13, p = .400$; or number of dating partners they had, $\chi^2(5, n = 340) = 7.34, p = .196$. Based on the independent *t*-test analyses, youth in the same-gender program and youth in the mixed-gender program did not significantly differ with regard to their attitudes about dating violence victimization and perpetration, $t(175) = .433, p = .665$; number of abusive behavior acts perpetrated against a partner, $t(262) = -1.08, p = .277$; and victimized by a partner, $t(147) = 1.07, p = .289$.

Measures

We measured student satisfaction using a survey developed by one of the authors. The survey included 12 items addressing students' satisfaction with the program (listed in Table 1). Items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with 5 as the highest level of satisfaction. A principle component factor analysis, using a varimax rotation, was conducted with 12 items. After the factor analysis, one factor was retained as it was the only one with an

TABLE 1 Students' Satisfaction With a Dating Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention Program

	Male <i>n</i> = 125 program type				Female <i>n</i> = 237 program type			
	Mixed gender <i>n</i> = 41		Same gender <i>n</i> = 84		Mixed gender <i>n</i> = 85		Same gender <i>n</i> = 152	
Program satisfaction	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I liked this program	4.22	0.79	3.55	1.10	4.56	0.66	4.06	0.93
What I learned will be useful in life	4.34	0.73	4.00	0.94	4.59	0.73	4.42	0.87
What we did in class was fun	3.95	0.87	3.39	1.20	4.38	0.76	3.98	1.03
Teacher did a good job	4.51	0.51	4.10	0.91	4.69	0.60	4.41	0.73
Program was interesting	4.12	0.71	3.58	1.03	4.44	0.73	4.07	0.90
Important subject to learn	4.37	0.83	3.90	1.00	4.54	0.65	4.41	0.80
I felt comfortable asking questions	3.83	0.80	3.58	1.14	4.07	1.02	4.03	0.97
Teacher did a good job answering questions	4.39	0.59	4.05	0.93	4.38	0.82	4.39	0.88
I learned a lot from the teacher	4.34	0.73	3.87	1.05	4.44	0.68	4.23	0.81
Program made a positive difference in my life	4.00	0.84	3.64	1.16	3.99	0.91	3.49	1.25
I would tell friends to take program	3.76	0.94	3.11	1.33	4.40	0.73	3.91	1.09
I would like more info on dating violence	3.63	0.86	3.04	1.24	4.25	0.86	3.84	1.07
Total satisfaction	49.46	6.23	43.80	9.58	52.71	5.97	49.24	7.42

eigenvalue greater than 1 (eigenvalue = 6.06). All the items loaded on this primary factor explaining 50.5% of the variance. A total satisfaction scale score was computed as the sum of all 12 items with a range of 12–60. The satisfaction scale had good reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .90). For qualitative feedback, on the last day of the program students completed a survey asking what the students' liked most or least about the program and any changes they would like to see for the program.

Procedure

A dating violence and sexual assault prevention program was presented at two inner-city middle schools, both with approximately 700 students, located in a Midwestern city during the school years of 2002–2006. Seventy-six percent of students in both schools participated in the free lunch program and both schools had problems with fighting, absenteeism, and suspensions. Less than 25% of students in both schools met the state's educational attainment standards.

The program used the Dating Violence Prevention Project Curriculum (Avery-Leaf, Cascardi, O'Leary, & Cano, 1997). Evaluation results of the

school-based curriculum have found that participants increased their knowledge and help-seeking intentions, and decreased intent to use aggression (Cascardi, Avery-Leaf, O'Leary, & Slep, 1999). The curriculum was used because it was designed for an ethnically diverse student population and was flexible enough to be implemented within the constraints of school class periods. The curriculum targeted the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of youth with the primary goal of preventing their participation in dangerous relationships. The program focused on (a) various forms of aggression and control in relationships; (b) ways to express anger and convey one's needs in relationships other than through the use of aggression; (c) personal rights and responsibilities in relationships; (d) "red flags" of dating and sexual violence and distinguishing between acceptable and respectful behaviors and hurtful, unacceptable behaviors; (e) communication and anger management skills; and (f) resources for help-seeking. The curriculum included videos, role-playing, experiential exercises, handouts, and discussion.

The program consisted of 10 to 12 fifty-minute sessions. In year 1, only same-gender sessions were offered during the winter semester in one school. In years 2–4, the same-gender program was presented during the fall at one school (same school as presented in year one) and a mixed-gender program was presented at another school during the winter. In the same-gender program, the program was presented during a required health class. Health classes were grouped by grade level and thus presentation of the program was by grade level. The mixed-gender program was presented during a life skills class that included male and female sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students. Although the life skills class was identified as an elective, the school offered very few elective options. Thus, a large majority of the students enrolled in the life skills class. All students in the health classes and life skills classes were invited to participate in the program and received parental consent forms. Only those students who assented and received parental consent participated in the program. About 75% of students in the health classes and about 80% of students in the life skills classes participated in the prevention program. Teachers accompanied youth not receiving parental consent to a different room. The study received university human subject approval.

Data Analysis Plan

A 2 (group composition) \times 2 (gender) factorial ANOVA analyzed the difference in the level of overall satisfaction with the program of both males and females when they were placed in the same-gender group and the mixed-gender group. Student responses from the open-ended questions were entered into NVivo. The data were coded by looking for themes that emerged from the participants' responses. Two of the authors assigned a code to each statement; when differences emerged, they reached a consensus on the coding

scheme. Many of the comments received more than one code. Statements that did not directly relate to the question being asked received no code.

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

The interaction between group composition and gender was not significant, $F(1, 358) = 1.52, p = .22$. Students' satisfaction scores in the mixed- and same-gender groups were not influenced by their gender. A significant main effect for group composition was found, $F(1, 358) = 26.67, p < .05$. Students in the mixed-gender group reported higher levels of satisfaction ($M = 51.09, SD = 0.72$) than students in the same-gender groups ($M = 46.53, SD = 0.51$). A significant main effect for gender was found, $F(1, 358) = 24.16, p < .05$. Females ($M = 50.98, SD = 0.51$) reported higher satisfaction scores than males ($M = 46.64, SD = 0.72$).

Qualitative Results

The satisfaction survey included three incomplete statements that the students were asked to finish (a) "the part of the program that I liked the most was," (b) "the part of the program that I liked least was," and (c) "changes I would like to see for this program are." Several themes emerged for each question and those themes were then analyzed based on gender and mixed- versus same-gender audiences.

The Part of the Program That I Liked the Most Was...

As shown on Table 2, class activities, class discussion, program content, and teacher involvement emerged as the elements of the program students liked the most. This was true across genders and type of program.

CLASS ACTIVITIES

About 54% of the students stated they liked the class activities (worksheets, videos, role-plays, games, and collages) the most. Slightly more males (46%) than females (43%) enjoyed the class activities the most. Males in same-gender programs (52%) enjoyed the class activities more than males in mixed-gender programs (34%), while females in mixed-gender programs (60%) enjoyed the class activities more than females in same-gender programs (34%). The students' favorite part of the class activity was a video presentation, with 39% stating they liked it the most. Examples of students' comments about the video include:

I liked the movies that they showed us and how they broke it down so we can understand. (Female)

How they showed the video and how they tried their best to answer any questions. (Male)

When we watched the movies and the teachers ask questions and talk about things that we really should be listening to. (Female)

CLASS DISCUSSION

The class discussion (question-and-answer session, openness, sharing of personal experiences, and real life stories) was a major component of the program that students enjoyed. As shown on Table 2, more females (29%) than males (16%) noted how much they enjoyed the class discussion. Also, about 34% of the females in same-gender presentations stated that they enjoyed the class discussion compared to 20% of females in mixed-gender presentations. Females in the same-gender presentations made the following comments:

When we had a group discussion about some of the ideas girls shared.

Being with a girl my age and talking to them.

How we were able to express ourselves with no harm.

In contrast, males were slightly more satisfied with the class discussion in mixed-gender groups than in same-gender groups.

PROGRAM CONTENT

The program content was another theme that many students (29%) expressed as a favorite component of the program. The information that students stated they enjoyed learning about included topics such as dating violence, sexual assault, dating, relationships, developing skills to handle dating violence, types of abuse, red flags, and learning who to talk to when help is needed. As shown on Table 2, females (22%) enjoyed the program content more than males (11%). Males (29%) and females (35%) in mixed-gender programs enjoyed the program content more than males (2%) and females (14%) in same-gender programs. Some student comments about the information gained include the following:

Learning that violence and abusive relationships can be very dangerous. (Female)

TABLE 2 Students' Feedback About What They Liked Most and Liked Least About the Dating Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention Program

Topic	Like most						Like least					
	Male			Female			Male			Female		
	Total <i>n</i> = 125	Mixed gender <i>n</i> = 41	Same gender <i>n</i> = 84	Total <i>n</i> = 237	Mixed gender <i>n</i> = 85	Same gender <i>n</i> = 152	Total <i>n</i> = 125	Mixed gender <i>n</i> = 41	Same gender <i>n</i> = 84	Total <i>n</i> = 237	Mixed gender <i>n</i> = 85	Same gender <i>n</i> = 152
Class activities	46% (58)	34% (14)	52% (44)	43% (103)	60% (51)	34% (52)	8% (10)	7% (3)	8% (7)	7% (17)	8% (7)	7% (10)
Class discussion	16% (20)	20% (8)	14% (12)	29% (69)	20% (17)	34% (52)	9% (11)	2% (1)	12% (10)	10% (23)	9% (8)	10% (15)
Class work	3% (4)	7% (3)	1% (1)	1% (3)	2% (2)	0.7% (1)	20% (25)	15% (6)	23% (19)	9% (21)	7% (6)	10% (15)
Program content	11% (14)	29% (12)	2% (2)	22% (52)	35% (30)	14% (22)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Teacher involvement	10% (13)	7% (3)	12% (10)	7% (16)	7% (6)	7% (10)	7% (9)	7% (3)	7% (6)	2% (4)	2% (2)	1% (2)
No changes	2% (5)	2% (1)	5% (4)	6% (14)	14% (12)	1% (2)	14% (17)	27% (11)	7% (6)	26% (61)	32% (27)	22% (34)

The part that I like the most was when we had talked a dating violence and that would help us throughout our life. (Female)

Getting to learn about dating violence. (Male)

TEACHER INVOLVEMENT

The final theme that emerged in students' responses to what they liked best about the program was the involvement of the teachers. About 17% of students stated they most liked the teachers and their involvement in the program. As shown on Table 2, slightly more males (10%) than females (7%) stated they liked the teacher involvement the most. Males (7%) and females (7%) in mixed-gender programs equally enjoyed the teachers' involvement, while males in same-gender programs (12%) liked the teacher involvement more than females in same-gender programs (7%). Students mentioned how they enjoyed the group interaction with the teachers and how the teachers taught the information at a level the students could understand:

The teachers made easy connections with the students. (Female)

The teachers showed much respect for us. (Female)

How the teachers were outspoken, confident, and respectful. (Female)

The way the teachers helped me understand when I had a question. (Male)

Overall Satisfaction

Some students stated they liked everything about the program. Slightly more females than males reacted with total satisfaction for the program. Students made comments including the following:

I liked everything. (Male)

Nothing was bad about this program and it was really helpful. (Female)

I love this program and you. (Female)

The Part of the Program That I Liked the Least Was...

As shown on Table 2, the themes that emerged for the second survey question were class work, class discussion, and class activities. These three themes were about equally disliked by the students.

CLASS WORK

About 16% of students stated that their least favorite part of the program was the class work, such as homework or tests. Males (20%) disliked the class work more than females (9%). Males in mixed-gender (15%) and same-gender (23%) programs disliked the class work more than females in mixed-gender (7%) and same-gender (10%) programs. Many students made comments stating their least favorite part of the program was when they had to do the survey or take a test (they were most likely referring to the pretest and posttest they completed).

CLASS DISCUSSION

About 15% of students stated that the class discussion was their least favorite part of the program for both males and females. As shown on Table 2, an almost equal percent of females in same-gender (10%) and mixed-gender (9%) programs stated they liked the discussion least. On the other hand, more males in same-gender (12%) versus mixed-gender (2%) programs noted how much they disliked the class discussion. Students' comments about their dislike of the class discussion include the following:

Having to volunteer to answer questions. (Female)

Talking about problems with other classmates. (Female)

CLASS ACTIVITIES

About 13% of both males and females stated their least favorite part of the program was the class activities such as watching the video or doing the role-plays. As shown on Table 2, males and females in both same- and mixed-gender presentations about equally disliked the class activities. Students' comments included the following:

Having to stand up in front of students rehearsing an act about dating violence. (Female)

I don't like to act that much, but around you all I was comfortable. (Female)

Just over 23% of students stated there was nothing about the program that they would change. More females (26%) than males (14%) stated they would not change anything about the program as reflected in the following comments:

There is nothing I like the least it was all fun for me. (Female)

Nothing really, I had a great time, every part of this program was helpful and I learned a lot. (Female)

Changes I Would Like to See for This Program Are...

When the students were asked what changes they would like to see for the program, two main themes emerged: program content and program format.

PROGRAM CONTENT

About 35% of students stated they would like to see changes in the program content. Some of the changes they mentioned were more activities (like videos and role-playing), less work, more real life stories, more discussion, taking field trips, and more skills development. Slightly more males (30%) than females (20%) stated they would like to see some changes in the program content. More females in the mixed-gender program (31%) than in the same-gender program (14%) wanted to see changes in program content, while more males in the same-gender program (32%) than in the mixed-gender program (24%) wanted to see changes in program content. Some student comments included the following:

More role playing and dramatizations so we can keep getting better at solving and trying to make relationship better or get through our head what we should do. (Female)

I would like to see more movies that show us what physical abuse and verbal abuse will look like in real life. (Male)

PROGRAM FORMAT

Overall, more males (27%) than females (12%) stated they would like to see changes in the program format. Within groups, more males in the same-gender program (31%) than in the mixed-gender program (20%) said they would like to see changes in the program format, while more females in the mixed-gender program (15%) than the same-gender program (10%) said they would like to see changes in the program format. Some changes the students mentioned they would like to see include making it more fun and exciting and providing more food and prizes. More female students stated they want the presentation to be longer and more often, while more male students stated they would like it to be shorter and less often, they commented:

I would like for them to maybe, be able to do this at every school. It a really good program [*sic*]. (Female)

More actions so we wouldn't be so bored. (Male)

Slightly more females (23%) than males (19%) stated they would not make any changes to the program as suggested by the following comments:

I learned and this program will be useful in my life. (Female)

Nothing everything is perfect. (Male)

DISCUSSION

This study of middle school students' satisfaction with and reactions to a dating violence and sexual assault prevention program suggests that youth generally respond well to their experiences in prevention programs. Males and females in both the same-gender and mixed-gender program expressed satisfaction with the programs. Only about 1% of all youth participating in the program were dissatisfied; another 7% of youth were neutral about the program. These findings suggest that when dating violence and sexual assault prevention programs are offered, youth react favorably. Satisfied students having favorable experiences in voluntary prevention programs is likely an important step in impacting youths' attitudes and behaviors about the use of violence in their relationships.

Youth in this study, both males and females, were more satisfied in mixed-gender groups than same-gender groups. Although the results of the study do not offer a clear explanation as to why both males and females were more satisfied in mixed-gender groups, we speculate that the age of the students may have played a role. Perhaps many youth in middle school have not yet come to value same-gender relationships and instead place a high premium on negotiating male-female relationships. Middle school girls and boys may appreciate the opportunity to discuss the issues of dating in a supportive environment where flirting and jostling can take place. Perhaps older adolescents have outgrown this and come to value the benefits of being with a group of their same gender since many studies focusing on college students suggest benefits of same-gender group composition (Brecklin & Forde, 2001; Choate, 2003; Foubert & Newberry, 2006; Gidycz et al., 2001; Johansson-Love & Geer, 2003). Regardless of the reason why middle school youth may prefer mixed-gender programs, findings suggest that prevention educators need to consider gender and composition when developing programs for young adolescents. There may be program effectiveness benefits when prevention educators present at least some portion of programs to mixed-gender audiences when working with middle school youth.

As expected, overall girls were more satisfied than boys with participation in both same-gender and mixed-gender prevention programs. Middle school girls are often eager to talk about relationships and express their personal feelings and thoughts. According to Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2007), girls are socialized to express their personal feelings, while young men are socialized to restrain their feelings. Results of the study suggest that gender does not play a role in the level of program satisfaction when programs are presented to same-gender or mixed-gender groups. Although findings from other studies (Anderson & Whiston, 2005) suggest that females may be especially more satisfied in same-gender groups and appreciate sharing in a group with other females, we did not find this. Perhaps middle school girls have not yet come to value the closeness that can emerge in groups of the same gender.

Students' comments about the class discussion were supported by the possibility that girls in middle school may be more able to engage in meaningful group discussions than boys. Females in same-gender programs enjoyed the class discussion more than males in same-gender programs. Males in mixed-gender programs had more positive feedback about the class discussion than males in same-gender programs. Gender stereotypes may play a role in the student's enjoyment of the class discussion. Since the topic of discussion has to do with dating, males might feel more comfortable sharing when around females in order to show their masculinity. Adolescent males might have a fear of sharing and being open with other males for fear of being thought of as too feminine.

Results on students' feedback about the program inform prevention educators that students enjoy the interactive components of prevention programs. Most students in the study expressed that they especially enjoyed the class activities (videos, role-plays, games, collages) and the class discussions. These activities need to be a central part of prevention programming. Findings also reveal that students valued the teachers' involvement and openness with the students. Many students mentioned that they liked that the teachers were able to make connections with the students and were respectful of the students. Teachers play an important role in helping students feel comfortable in sharing their feelings. Thus, caution needs to be used in selecting teachers who can relate well with youth.

Some students stated that they disliked the class activities because they were uncomfortable sharing their feelings or acting in front of their classmates. This finding suggests that educators need to be aware of and protect those students who may not want to share. Sharing personal issues among middle school classmates should be done cautiously as confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Helping youth distinguish times to openly share versus times to privately share with an adult is an important role of prevention educators (Weisz & Black, 2009).

Study Limitations

An important limitation of this study is that student feedback was gained via a written survey. Many students had difficulty in writing and this may have restricted what they expressed. Focus groups may have allowed for more in-depth information about student perceptions about the program. Focus groups in mixed- and same-gender groups would have possibly provided the authors with the opportunity to learn more about how group composition affected the program.

Conclusion

Future research needs to address the relation between students' satisfaction with the program, their participation, and outcomes. Some prevention programs located in schools may require students to attend. Levels of student satisfaction in required programming may be of secondary importance to program effectiveness. However, in programs where participation is voluntary, as was in the program in this study, students' satisfaction is critical in order to get them in the program, keep them in the program and have them recommend the program to friends. We also need further research on how group composition relates to program satisfaction and outcomes across age levels. Group composition is just one of the many aspects of programming that affects students' levels of satisfaction. Other aspects of programming need to be studied as well. This study was conducted with African American students. Future research needs to focus on cultural differences in relation to students' levels of satisfaction.

This study is an important first step in learning about youths' perceptions about same-gender and mixed-gender dating violence prevention programs. To develop effective programming, youths' views must be considered. Satisfied youth may yield greater participation in prevention programming.

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