

PREVENTION OR PERPETUATION: AN ANALYSIS OF YOUTH SEXUAL VIOLENCE

PREVENTION PROGRAMS

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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In the United States today, at least one-third of women will experience some form of sexual violence, typically before they reach the age of thirty. In order to make sense of such an alarming trend, this thesis aims to explore current sexual violence prevention programs meant to address this phenomenon within youth populations in the United States. The thesis seeks to identify the characteristics of youth sexual violence prevention programs to determine how comprehensive these programs are, what may be missing from them, and to evaluate the degree to which these programs reflect current theories and best practices. The primary method of this study is qualitative content analysis. Use of this method in the research reveals that there are recognizable strengths as well as discernible gaps in existing sexual violence prevention programs targeted at youth. These findings indicate the potential for further study of these gaps in content and a need for an updated approach to sexual violence prevention, one that is situated at the intersection of theory and best practices. The paper concludes with implications and considerations for future research and practice.

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Introduction

The Predominance of Sexual Violence

Every day in the United States, women make choices regarding their sexuality. They choose how to enact their femininity, what clothing they would like to wear to represent themselves and their sexuality, and they decide if, when, how, where, why, and with whom to engage in sexual activity. When women in the U.S. make these choices they do so within greater societal structure, a long-standing one that does not consistently value their right to choose nor the decisions that they make. This larger framework of society is marked by a system of masculine power and authority, female objectification, and heterosexism that is reinforced by a system of male domination that has been at the core of American culture since the birth of the nation. Given these existing systemic inequalities and inequities, it follows that women remain more vulnerable to sexual exploitation of various kinds.

According to the Rape Abuse and Incest National Network, "One out of every six American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime," (RAINN, 2009, p. 1). Similar data was also reported in research conducted at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which add that approximately eighteen percent of women in the United States are victims of unreported sexual violence (CDC, 2004). If the roughly eighteen percent of incidents of sexual violence that go unreported each year are taken into consideration along with the sixteen percent that are reported, then that rate almost doubles to over thirty percent. That would mean that almost one third of the entire

female population of the United States becomes a victim of sexual violence in her lifetime.

Scaling down from the sexual violence trends that are observed within the female population at large, the data related to adolescent females is still appalling. The CDC reports that forty-two percent of female rape victims report that they were assaulted before they turned eighteen years old. Further still, nearly thirty percent of young women who are raped, were between the ages of eleven and seventeen, and twelve percent of girls are raped before they reach the age of ten (CDC, 2012). Taking this information into consideration, it is clear that the impact of sexual violence on youth in the United States is just as remarkable as its impact on adult women. All in all, these devastating patterns in sexual violence that these numbers illustrate are evidence of a serious, deep-seated problem in the US, and something must be done to address the prevalence of sexual violence in this country.

Situating the Researcher and Contextualizing the Research

Throughout my youth, I worked as a peer educator with two anti-assault and abuse organizations, Rallying Youth Organized Together Against Rape (RYOT Against Rape) and Students Together for the Outreach and Prevention of Abuse (STOP Abuse), which were based in Monroe County, Pennsylvania. Both of these organizations, each in their own way, offered youth a safe space to process their own experiences with sexual violence and physical abuse, and provided a forum in which they could develop their skills as vocal opponents to these phenomena. My work with these organizations began in high school and continued throughout my undergraduate career. In high school I was a peer educator, teaching my fellow

students about sexual violence, dating violence, sexual harassment, and how to maintain healthy relationships with peers. As I transitioned into college, I also had the opportunity to attend conferences on behalf of these groups in order to educate adults working in sexual violence prevention on the integral role youth can play in prevention efforts in order to preserve organizations like these and to inspire the formation of new ones.

Unfortunately, neither one of these organizations is still in operation today, due in part to budgetary concerns but also due to a shift from primary to secondary prevention programming in my home district. Nevertheless, during my time with these groups, I was able to develop a better understanding of healthy and safe sexual relationships, recognize the importance of consent, and learn how to speak up and speak out about issues related to sexual assault, abuse, and violence. My experience in these organizations led me to pursue, first, a minor in women's and gender studies as an undergraduate, and then a master's in the field. My work as an activist and outspoken advocate of educating and empowering youth to end sexual violence is the very reason I am writing this today.

Not all young people in the United States have access to the same opportunities I did at their age. Many high schools and colleges lack the resources, financial and otherwise, to establish and maintain organizations to enable students to develop the tools they need to stand up to sexual assault, abuse, and violence. Instead, schools today adopt less comprehensive programs that educate youth about the vague dangers of sexual assault, engage students in borderline victim-blaming dialogues about how to act and dress to avoid unwanted sexual attention, and teach

students to call for help in situations of sexual violence. While these programs may be better than nothing, they do not necessarily empower students to help themselves, take proactive measures to develop healthy relationships and recognize problematic behavior early on in a situation, or enable them to take action and end the epidemic of sexual violence. What, then, is the impact of participating in these programs on long term trends in sexual assault and how will this affect future generations of men and women who grow up in this climate?

The goal of this project is to understand the current landscape of sexual violence prevention education, to highlight the areas of improvement that are present in existing education programs, and to make sense of how these programs relate to current theory and best practices in sexual violence prevention. There are three questions that I explore through this research process. These questions are:

- 1) What are the characteristics of youth sexual violence prevention programs?
 - A) Whom do they target?
 - B) What are their goals?
 - C) Where and how are they implemented?
- 2) How comprehensive are these programs and what may be missing from them?
- 3) To what degree do these programs align with the most relevant theory and reflect best practices of sexual violence prevention?

Through an analysis of current prevention curricula and contemporary theories related to this field, I hope to uncover the areas of overlap and notable gaps in the content of these programs to better understand how to develop an improved and up-to-date program for sexual assault prevention education in the future.

While some scholars may think this topic passé, sexual violence and sexual violence prevention are currently situated at the heart of a heated debate on the national stage. The outcry over the Steubenville rape case, in which a group of young men in an Ohio high school publicly and repeatedly sexually assaulted an unconscious female classmate and shared images and video of the incident via social media is one prominent case. The federal complaints regarding sexual violence lodged against Swarthmore College due to the institution dissuading victims from reporting incidents of sexual violence and altering victims' statements in official documents is yet another example. And to cite one last case—the uproar against administrative silence regarding sexual assault at Dartmouth College and retaliatory actions taken against victims and their advocates is yet another instance of recent events that have launched this area of inquiry back into the spotlight across the nation. Scholars across the country are working to make sense of the prevalence of sexual assault in secondary schools, and on college and university campuses, trying to understand what measures should be taken to address this phenomenon. As such, the methods and aims of this research have potential implications for both theory and practice related to sexual violence awareness, education, and prevention.

Review of the Literature

The two main bodies of literature that have shaped my study are research on theories of sexual violence and research in the field of sexual violence prevention. Publications within these areas describe the various factors influencing sexual violence prevention and education, elements of effective prevention programs, the interplay of gender theory and prevention education, as well as the established definitions of terminology related to the central topic of inquiry. An exploration of this literature provides an important framework for analyzing the data collected, exploring emergent themes, and understanding the broader impact of the outcomes of the research study.

Defining Sexual Violence

Within the past century, theorists and practitioners who work in fields related to gender, sexuality, and sexual violence have provided a plethora of ideas regarding the origins, histories, causes, and manifestations of sexual violence in all of its forms. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines sexual violence as simply any “sexual activity where consent is not obtained or freely given,” (2004), literature in the field suggests that there is far more to it than the CDC would have people believe. This paper relies upon definitions and depictions of sexual violence that lie within several distinct schools of thought: control theory, socio-biological and evolutionary theories (addressed in tandem), and the objectification and commoditization of women. What follows is a brief review of these theories and the ways in which they classify sexual violence.

Power and control theory. Early scholarship on rape and sexual assault often focused on aspects of mental health and psychiatric treatment for both perpetrators and victims. In the mid-twentieth century, scholars began to examine sexual violence more in depth, focusing on its role as a tool of control, the complex range of emotions involved in acts of sexual violence, and the use of sexual violence as a weapon in certain sociopolitical contexts. During this time, discussions of power, control, and violence began to surface as scholars and practitioners began to examine firsthand accounts of sexual violence. The work of Groth, Burgess, and Holstrom (1977) is reflective of this transition period in academic practice, examining the more complex elements of sexual violence through the lens of their theoretical and professional foundations in psychiatry.

In their work, *Rape: Power, Anger, and Sexuality*, the Groth et al. discuss at length the notion of sexual violence as a means of asserting power based upon the accounts of perpetrators and victims of sexual violence. After categorizing and analyzing over two hundred accounts, the authors reveal that there were no reported rapes in which the motives for perpetration were sexual in nature. Instead, all of the instances of sexual violence described were motivated by a need to assert authority or from overwhelming anger, either at the victim or someone close to her. In both of these examples, what the authors refer to as power rapes and anger rapes, the male perpetrators are asserting themselves by taking control of the bodies and minds of women and using this control to inspire fear within them or the people whom they love. Thus, this study is one of the first to put forth a theory of rape as a tool of power and control in society.

Susan Brownmiller (1993), a contemporary of Groth et al., was one of the first feminist theorists to write explicitly about rape and sexual assault as an expression of power. Rather than take a more clinical, psychiatric perspective, in her book, *Against Our Will*, she writes about sexual violence from a historical perspective, tracing its progression from the earliest societies to the modern social landscape. Her definitive work gave rise to what is now known as control theory, which contends that sexual violence, at its core is about men gaining and maintaining control of women. As Brownmiller explains:

“From prehistoric times to the present, I believe, rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear”

(Brownmiller, 1993, p. 15).

This statement adequately summarizes the overarching claim that Brownmiller addresses in her book and lays the framework for the idea that sexual violence is primarily a tool of control.

While this powerful statement and Brownmiller’s theory overall is somewhat provocative, there is merit to her claim. Specific contexts such as war, economic depression, and natural disaster lend themselves to this theory, as there are several documented instances of a spike in the rate of sexual violence during times like these in history (Brownmiller, 1993). Through the fear and intimidation bred by sexual violence, men are able to assert their supremacy over women and to manipulate their thoughts and behavior. This control allows men to assert and

preserve their dominant status in society and the power that comes along with it, trapping women in a cycle of subjugation and humiliation.

This idea is further supported by the more timely work of A. Nicholas Roth in which he discusses theories of rape and what leads men to engage in acts of sexual violence. He states that the aim of a man who rapes is “to capture and control his victim” and describes how rape allows men to “express issues of mastery, strength, control, authority, identity, and capability” (2001, p. 25). Similar to Brownmiller’s work, Roth describes a theory sexual violence as a tool through which men can and do control the thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and ambitions of women. Rape and sexual violence are the ways in which men are able to feel strength and power, thereby ensuring that women are kept in their due position—under the sway of men.

Socio-biological and evolutionary theories. Socio-biological and evolutionary theories include a philosophy of sexual violence that involves the biological processes of humans and their evolution over time. One of the key publications that examine both of these theories is a work by Owen Jones (1999) on the connections between sex, social context, and biology.

In this work, Jones claims that rape has an evolutionary basis that is more or less rooted in natural selection, a genetic process whereby living beings that are not fit enough to survive, die. This leads to evolution because only the “fittest” or most evolutionarily sound creatures will survive (Jones, 1999). This half of Jones’ argument is in direct alignment with evolutionary theories of rape that suggest that rape is an inevitable phenomenon stemming from changes in the physiology and

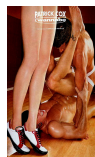
biology of the human body (Jones, 1999). While he discusses this perspective at length, Jones does not contend that this biological or evolutionary basis alone provides a sound explanation for the incidence of sexual violence.

The author instead argues in favor of socio-biological theory, claiming that true definitions of sexual violence are generated by the integration of social-scientific and biological perspectives of the issue. Jones discusses the idea that there are certain elements that evolutionary theory overlooks, like the fact that human beings are capable of reason and that they have free will (Jones, 1999). Those who perpetrate sexual violence have choice and a brain that allows for the evaluation of human emotions and the distinction between right and wrong. Accordingly, in the United States, laws that determine the penalties for acts of sexual violence tend to rely upon the socio-biological definitions rather than evolutionary models because they represent a more holistic approach to understanding the behavior. For this reason, as well as their historical significance in the evolution of the study of sexual violence, these two points of view have contributed to the theoretical underpinnings of this study.

Objectification and commoditization of women. Finally, the research conducted for this study also relies upon interpretations of sexual violence that take into account the impact of the economy and government on the treatment of women, particularly within the United States. Sex exists within the US as a commodity, something to be purchased (Mardorossian, 2002). From scantily clad women in television advertisements and magazines to strip clubs and escort services, *sex sells*. This phrase permeates the modern culture of the US and few

manage to escape its influence. This process of commoditizing female sexuality can also be referred to as objectification, as, in this context, women lose their personhood and are essentially reduced to the status of objects.

Particularly, within this process, women become defined by their body parts and are no longer seen as a whole being. Women are breasts, buttocks, legs, hair, mouth, eyes, or any other portion of the body that can be exploited for a profit. Below are four advertisements that illustrate the objectification of women that permeates contemporary society. These ads are part of a project developed by Scott Lukas (2006) entitled *Dual Objectified*, which aims to highlight the ways in which women and female sexuality have become commodities. The first, a perfume ad, contains only a woman's thigh with a man's hand positioned in a sexually suggestive way. In the second, there is a naked pair of women's legs standing, with a man on the floor looking up at her. The third is an advertisement for vodka in which we can see a woman's buttocks while she removes pants from a man in front of her. The final advertisement depicts women stripping off their clothes. These ads, which are by no means the most provocative that exist, are everyday devices that many people have come to accept as appropriate and normal.



With advertisements like these, both women and men begin to see females as objects rather than people. These ads clearly demonstrate the ways in which women are reduced to their parts and allow for men and women alike to accept and perpetuate the status of women as commodities. This process of objectification

facilitates to instances of sexual violence because women are not seen as people worthy of respect and safety, but rather are seen as objects to manipulate and abuse without culpability (Mardorossian, 2002).

Moreover, this perspective on the commoditizing of women also lends itself to a more nuanced theory of sexual violence that aligns with more historical views of women as objects. In their work regarding the transformation of laws regarding sexual violence in Canada, K. Edward Renner and Kathleen Yurchesyn (1992) argue that according to the country's laws prior to 1983, acts of sexual violence were much more akin to crimes like robbery. Rape and sexual assault were less about violence against women and more about taking a piece of something away from a woman. According to the authors, current definitions of sexual violence should be more like earlier descriptions in order to make any progress within the legal or public policy spheres. The authors write that decades ago, although women were wrongly considered to be property, rape and sexual assault were more easily punished than in the current system wherein victims have to prove that they were forced into the sexual situation and that they, themselves, are not to blame for the sexual violence perpetrated against them (Renner & Yurchesyn, 1992). Thus, the authors illustrate that the notion of women as objects can be a double-edged sword when considered with regard to rape. The theory does set women up to be victimized, but it can also be used to ensure timely and just action by the legal system when instances of rape and sexual assault occur.

Both the modern and historical outlooks on the commoditization and objectification of women provide a compelling classification of and context for

sexual violence. Not only do these concepts provide a theoretical framework for understanding sexual violence and its development within society over time, they also suggest possible approaches to preventing the perpetuation of this behavior. As a result, this theory of sexual violence has provided one of the key critical lenses through which the research was examined.

Preventing Sexual Violence

The reputation of sexual violence prevention as a field of study has experienced frequent peaks and valleys over the course of the past five decades. At certain times it has been considered cutting-edge, while at others it carries little significance. However, with the marked increase of acts of sexual violence within youth populations during the past decade, there is a renewed interest in this area of research and practice. As with any prominent issue in contemporary society, there are a variety of opinions regarding the significance of sexual violence prevention and a multitude of perspectives on what programs and initiatives should look like. Considering the specific research questions that this study seeks to answer, which aim to shed light on the general characteristics of prevention—its audience, goals, motivations, comprehensiveness, and connections to current theory—there are three areas of literature on sexual violence prevention that inform this research. Those areas are levels of prevention, the importance of mobilizing men, and bystander effect.

Identifying levels of prevention. One of the most important things to note about prevention is that initiatives exist at a variety of levels. According to the CDC, there are typically three levels of prevention: primary, secondary, and tertiary

(2004). Each level represents not only a different type of approach to sexual violence prevention, but also indicates the timing of the prevention initiative as related to instances of sexual violence. For example, primary prevention occurs *before* any instances of sexual violence take place, whereas secondary and tertiary prevention both take place *after* trauma has occurred (CDC, 2004). Secondary prevention should be implemented immediately after a person experiences sexual violence, however tertiary prevention typically occurs long after the experience has passed, as a means of establishing a long-term response to the traumatic experience and addressing the lasting impact of sexual violence.

Literature on levels of prevention indicates that primary responses are the preference of most sexual violence prevention programs (Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 1988). Most organizations hope to connect with targeted groups prior to any occurrence of sexual violence in order to empower the individuals whom they support to speak up and speak out when there is a threat of sexual violence. In addition, evidence suggests that primary prevention is more successful than secondary or tertiary prevention in the long term. This is largely due to the fact that taking action *before* sexual violence occurs allows primary prevention programs to take measures that can reduce the overall likelihood of violent events and/or decrease the number of incidents that do occur (Miller-Perrin & Wurtele, 1988; CDC, 2004). Secondary and tertiary methods, on the other hand, focus more on providing services to victims, holding perpetrators accountable, and preventing further instances of sexual violence once they have occurred (CDC, 2004).

However, those same sources of evidence indicate that more institutions currently rely upon secondary and tertiary prevention practices. As the CDC reports, “At the current program level, priority is often given to secondary and tertiary approaches to violence prevention to provide much needed service to victims and to hold perpetrators accountable” (CDC, 2004). Their report explains that this trend likely exists because federal funding for sexual assault prevention is only provided after instances of sexual violence have occurred. Since, ultimately, studies suggest that well-researched and appropriately implemented secondary and even tertiary prevention programs hold great potential for success, there is some merit to the current allocation of funding. In spite of this, the lack of federal funding for primary prevention programs is worthy of note and may reflect serious implications for sexual violence prevention policy, especially given the evidence from Miller-Perrin and Wurtele (1998) regarding the advantages of primary prevention methods for survivors of sexual violence.

Overall, exploring research on levels of prevention provides essential background needed to appreciate the structure, goals, and implementation of sexual violence prevention programs. The ability to understand and evaluate the essential aspects of the programs that this study examines and to gain insight into the greater landscape of sexual violence prevention is crucial to the research and adds to the overall impact of this study on the broader academic and practical community. Thus, learning more about the levels of prevention and what they mean has supplied a vital component of strong, critical content analysis.

Mobilizing men. Current literature on the prevention of sexual violence does not shy away from the urgent need to situate men at the center of the prevention movement. Many theorists believe that as Alan Berkovitz (2005) so boldly declares, “Men must take responsibility for preventing sexual assault because most assaults are perpetrated by men against women, children, and other men” (p. 163). The central idea behind this movement in prevention is that men hold both the responsibility and the power to take a stand against sexual violence and to alter the problematic notions of masculinity that perpetuate such violence. As such, the most effective prevention programs are those that organize and empower groups of men to stand against their peers who perpetrate sexual violence and the mindsets that fuel its prevalence. Philosophies of masculinity and prevention play an integral role in situating this study. First, studying this literature has illuminated a key characteristic of sexual violence prevention in revealing whom current prevention programs target. What’s more, these theories provide critical context for the research questions that guide this inquiry and expand the conceptual foundations needed to make sense of the programs analyzed within this work. For these reasons, examinations of the role of men in sexual violence prevention are at the heart of the theoretical framework of this research project.

Bystander effect. Both previous experience with this area of study and an initial review of published works suggest that the bystander effect may be one of the most important elements of contemporary literature on sexual violence prevention. Generally, bystander effect refers to the tendency of an individual to refrain from taking action in an urgent situation when there are other potential actors present

(Coker, Cook-Craig, Williams, Fisher, Clear, Garcia, & Hegge, 2011). As it relates to sexual violence, bystander effect is the name given to the culture of silence and inaction that exists around the phenomenon and the passive acceptance of sexual violence by the peers of both the perpetrator and the victim (Coker et al., 2011).

Most of the literature consulted for this study touched upon the matter of bystander effect, regardless of the intended focus of the article. It seems as if this trend is related to the overwhelming number of instances in which acts of sexual violence could have potentially been stopped had a peer spoken out against what was happening at the time. Due to the prevalence of bystander effect, many prevention scholars argue for the need to develop programs that empower members of these silent majorities to break the silence (Berkowitz, 2005; Cissner, 2009). In fact, the CDC identifies bystander interventions as one of the most powerful approaches to sexual violence prevention because of the fact that “a person’s closest social circle—peers, partners, and family members—can shape the individual’s behavior and range of experience” (2004, p. 4). Thus, when analyzing prevention programming, the context provided by exploring scholarship on bystander effect becomes crucial to analyzing content and synthesizing relevant findings.

Connecting the Literature to the Research Questions

Taken as a whole, these bodies of literature combine to form the theoretical framework of this content analysis study. The purpose of my research is to improve understanding of what youth sexual violence prevention programs are like today and what elements may be missing from the current milieu. Hence, answering the

focal questions of this study requires establishing a sound foundation in both sexual violence theory and prevention literature. Doing this ensures that the research reflects a clear understanding of what sexual violence is and what effective prevention measures are, while it also provides the researcher with the knowledge-base needed to assess whether or not these programs are comprehensive and well-aligned to contemporary theory and best practices in sexual violence prevention. In this sense, to do justice to the problem of youth sexual violence prevention, these theoretical lenses are used in various combinations to make sense of the findings of this research and to ensure that the implications and next steps are well founded and pertinent to the questions at hand.

Methods

While there are strong theoretical and practical considerations contributing to my interest in studying these questions, the impetus to design and implement this study originates from my personal connection to the topic. As mentioned in the introduction, my background as a scholar and an activist has largely been in the areas of sexual violence and youth sexual violence prevention. Within the many roles I held during high school and college in organizations that serve to end sexual violence, I had the opportunity to observe the beginnings of a shift in the way that institutions that serve youth populations address issues of sexual violence. This shift held the potential to make or break the movement to empower youth not only to recognize patterns of behavior that lead to sexual violence, but also to end this epidemic once and for all. Now, five years later and from a new perspective on the phenomenon of sexual violence, I have the opportunity to reflect upon that shift and to make sense of it from an academic perspective and explore potential next steps for prevention, education, and activism.

By and large, this study seeks to bring to light current trends in sexual violence prevention education for youth populations in the United States. For the purposes of this paper, youth is defined as children ages twelve to eighteen (12-18), those children who are usually enrolled in middle school or high school in the US. This age group was selected as the target population primarily for two reasons. First there is a dearth of literature related to how this demographic group is being educated about sexual assault and prevention, and what communication about sexual violence looks like for their generation. Second, given that nearly half of

women who report being raped in the US are assaulted before their eighteenth birthday (CDC 2012), it is important to examine the ways in which youth are being educated about sexuality and sexual violence in adolescence. Hence, the organizations introduced in this study and the materials for analysis retrieved from these are meant for use with children within this age range.

Accordingly, the aim of this project is to gain a better understanding of a cross-section of current youth sexual assault prevention programs. This is achieved through a content analysis—specifically a conceptual or thematic analysis, which explores patterns and themes that emerge in the literature—of contemporary sexual assault prevention materials (Maxwell, 2005). Using this approach for analysis, this study explores the aforementioned research questions and highlights the strengths and identifies possible areas of improvement of existing education programs. In doing this, it is my hope to develop new knowledge regarding how to better support and empower today's youth to end sexual violence.

Program Selection

As I began the search for programs to review for this study, I was interested in investigating programs that targeted youth, used education as their chief method of operation, and had a strong—preferably publicly voiced—opposition to sexual assault and/or gender based violence. Accordingly, I drafted a list of three screening questions to reference when determining whether or not a program would be suitable for analysis in this project. Those three questions are as follows:

1. Does the organization explicitly work to address sexual violence?

2. Are programming activities targeted toward youth (ages twelve to eighteen)?
3. Does the organization provide explicit training or education?

If all three of these questions were answered affirmatively, then the organization was eligible for further consideration and if not, it was excluded from the study.

After some initial investigation into current youth sexual violence programs, I found that there were only about six well-established programs that seemed to fit these focal criteria. There were two elements of my selection criteria that seemed to have most greatly impacted the sample size of this study. The first is the restrictive age range given to refine the term youth in this study. As it stands, there are only a handful of sexual violence prevention programs intended for use with children between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Of these programs that I was able to find, the only three that I found that were specifically developed to explore the issue of sexual violence prevention. This relates to the other selection criterion that likely contributed to the small sample size of my research, which was an explicit focus on addressing the matter of sexual violence. Many of the sexual violence prevention programming options that exist today are either couched in a more expansive health and wellness curriculum, such as those used in most K-12 high schools in the United States, or they are situated in external organizations without a definite mission to concentrate on sexual violence prevention, such as campus-based youth groups or independent community centers.

While programs that specifically meet the three criteria are undoubtedly the best fit for the inspirations, motivations, research questions, and goals of this study,

there are quite a few additional programs with similar approaches that could have easily been included in my analysis if I had amended my requirements. For example, both the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) and the YMCA/YWCA offer youth-centered programming focused on sexual assault prevention education for young people. Their programs employ formats that are similar in nature to those used by the programs in my analysis, however the orientation and framing of these traditional youth organizations' programs did not reflect an explicit mission related to preventing youth sexual violence, which is truly critical to this analysis. This is because programs that are *specifically designed* to respond to the problem of sexual violence tend to be rooted in better practices and have a more lasting impact on their participants—especially females—than those that are more broad in scope (Schwartz, 1991). Nevertheless, though I did not consider the work being done in these groups appropriate for my research interests, I acknowledge the potential benefit of more mainstream institutions and youth-centered groups confronting the problem of sexual violence.

Of the six programs that fit the sampling criteria, I had originally planned to analyze each one of them. My objective was to develop a more thorough picture of what constitutes youth sexual assault prevention education today and to determine if and how it could be improved or expanded upon in the future to be more effective. However, after some additional investigation, I discovered that it would not be possible to continue as planned. First, one of the organizations had dropped the sexual assault and gender violence premise from its mission, seemingly in an effort to reach a broader audience and become more profitable. Additionally, a second

organization that I had considered, disbanded before I was able to collect the materials necessary for review, thereby eliminating it from the study. Finally, further research on two of the programs brought to light the fact that they were, in actuality, two elements of the same program. This simply means, however, that they were combined and analyzed as one program for the purposes of this research. Thus, this study relies upon an analysis of three established, enduring programs meant to equip youth with the tools and knowledge needed to take a stand against sexual violence.

A Brief Note Regarding Program Access: Barriers to Better Knowledge

Perhaps the most fascinating part of the program selection process was learning just how challenging it could be to gain access to a prevention education organization. Although there were a number of organizations that met my criteria, very few were actually options for analysis due to barriers such as travel costs, geographic location, institutional constraints, and strict privacy and nondisclosure agreements. Of all of the barriers I encountered in my initial search, I found cost to be the most problematic. While some of the organizations I contacted, offered me limited access to information and materials about their particular approaches to sexual violence prevention and their work, many of them would not offer me any information about themselves or their operations without paying a fee. For instance, I was unable to view a sample lesson for one of the organizations without first paying a membership fee, and for another organization I was not even able to learn of their mission statement or program vision without access to their paid website, which held all of their information available for a costly fee. Based upon these

experiences, I could not help but ask myself what implications this could have for the greater issue of sexual assault prevention and access to supports.

My experience suggests that many organizations are so concerned with protecting their specific approach that they lose sight of protecting the very people who would benefit the most. In fact, some organizations I contacted were explicit about the fact that they could not share information with me over the phone or via email, but I was welcome to order a copy of their curriculum and start there. When I noted that cost would prevent me from doing so, they directed me to a CDC fact sheet and sent me on my way. Taking this into consideration, it became clear to me that access to certain types of sexual assault prevention materials are proprietary and largely inaccessible to women and girls who are unemployed or from low-income communities. Given that women from all walks of life are at risk of sexual violence, this limited and unequal access is important to note.

Program One: Mentors in Violence Prevention

Developed in 1993 at the Center for the Study of Sport in Society at Northwestern University, Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) is a program that was originally designed to teach male student athletes to use their status to speak out against sexual violence. The program, now implemented nationwide, has since expanded to incorporate female student athletes at both the high school and university level, as well. MVP is active in high schools and colleges across the country, and has also been adopted by the United States military and several professional sports teams nationwide. The overall goals of the program are to educate and empower young people—primarily men—to combat rape culture in

contemporary society and to create a new generation of influential men who demonstrate a deep-seated commitment to ending gender violence.

To meet these goals, MVP uses strategies designed to end the bystander effect—the tendency of people to do nothing to help a person in danger when there are a significant number of witnesses present—such as peer mentorship and educational workshops. Overall, the program has received positive reviews in multiple independent program evaluations and is, arguably, the most comprehensive youth sexual violence prevention program available to date.

Justification for inclusion. MVP is widely recognized by researchers, educators, and government agencies as a world-class gender violence prevention program that has been proven effective across age ranges, genders, and geographic locations. Since MVP teaches bystander intervention skills from a social justice perspective and its core messages are about power and privilege, both of which are tied into theories of sexual violence, it is a worthwhile example to include MVP from a theoretical perspective as well.

Program Two: Safe Dates

Safe Dates is a nationally implemented, evidence-based dating violence prevention curriculum intended for use at the middle school and high school levels. Created in the 1990s, and updated and re-launched in 2010, the program was designed for implementation specifically within school classrooms, such as health or life skills classrooms. There are additional components that can be used for extension, enrichment, and empowerment in after-school and community-based activities. The program combines lecture, art, and drama in an effort to teach

students how to understand what healthy relationships look like, make sense of why and how unhealthy patterns emerge in relationships, and to begin the process of helping students establish clear and healthy boundaries for their relationships.

Unlike other established programs, Safe Dates makes an effort to include parents and family members in the process of helping students develop healthy dating behaviors and lifelong tools for maintaining these behaviors. While it has not been evaluated as thoroughly as MVP, Safe Dates has been reviewed by a few independent agencies with fairly positive reviews of their multifold approach and engaging curriculum.

Justification for inclusion. Safe Dates is a long-standing, well-regarded primary intervention for dating violence, sexual violence, and bullying prevention. The program is intended for an audience youth ages ten to eighteen, a critical age range for intervention based upon current trends of note in the ages of perpetrators and victims of sexual violence. Including information regarding Safe Dates offers insight into current school-based approaches to sexual violence prevention education and sheds light on what comprehensive programming looks like at present.

Program Three: Branching Seedz of Resistance

Branching Seedz of Resistance is a youth-led division of the Colorado Anti-Violence Program, focusing specifically on issues of harassment, dating violence, and sexual violence in the LGBTQ youth community. While the organization is based in Colorado and run locally, alumni of Branching Seedz are located across the United States and many of them are expanding the reach of the organization to include

their new locales. Started in 2009, the program offers both activism-based and workshop-based programs meant to educate youth on these central issues and provide them with the tools to fight against them in the public spheres of government and policy. Activities and materials for prevention education address root causes of violence in the LGBTQ community, offer support for students as they establish healthy behaviors and equip themselves to take a stand against dating and sexual violence, and build students' confidence in the power and strength of the LGBTQ community. No formal evaluations of the organization were found, but the program has been well received by other anti-violence programs and youth advocates in the region.

Justification for inclusion. The Branching Seedz program provides a clear picture of what grassroots, youth-driven sexual assault and violence prevention programming looks like. The organization not only places youth at the center of its operations, but also empowers them to design and implement curricula and activist learning experiences that are meaningful and relevant to their own lived experiences, which is not common in such organizations. Inclusion of Branching Seedz offers the unique perspective of what youth believe the key issues are in sexual assault and violence prevention education.

Selection of Materials for Review

Each organization offered a plethora of materials that could be analyzed for this project: statements of purpose, descriptions of the organizational mission, vision statements, curricula, funding reports, and many more. This analysis concentrates on statements of purpose or mission statements, as well as curricula

and related educational materials because the specific goal of this project is to develop a better understanding of who these organizations are, what they aim to do, and how they are able to support and empower youth to end sexual violence. The information most pertinent to these goals is typically found in mission statements and curricula, thus they became the primary materials for review.

Defining mission statement and statement of purpose. For the purposes of this investigation, the terms “mission statement” and “statement of purpose” refers to the information that organizations provide regarding the mission, vision, and goals of their work. Organizational theory holds that the mission statement or statement of purpose should clarify the beliefs and values of an organizations, provide a picture of the preferred future, and make a strong statement concerning aims and values of the organization and its members. Regardless of its specific format or phrasing, for an organization to be included in this study, these declarations must describe a commitment to educating youth on the matter of sexual violence and its prevention and express hope for a future with a more informed, safer generation of men and women. A brief summary of the mission statements and statements of purpose for the organizations involved in this study is included in the methodology section of this paper and these elements of the organizations are also analyzed in the findings and discussion sections.

Defining curricula and educational materials. For the purposes of this investigation, the terms curricula and educational materials refer to any materials related to the education of youth in the area of sexual assault prevention. This includes complete programmatic plans that involve workshop scripts, informational

texts, and interactive learning activities, as well as more brief materials such as flyers, brochures, and web pages. Regardless of length or format, for an organization's resources to be included in this study, these materials must be used directly for the instruction of youth on issues of sexual assault and gender violence and the dissemination of information about these matters as well. A description of the curricula and educational materials for each organization is provided in brief in the methodology section of this paper and is described in greater detail in the discussion and findings sections.

The Process of Content Analysis

Data were collected using primarily the qualitative method of content analysis. While there are a multitude of definitions and descriptions of content analysis, the following interpretation best suits the purposes and goals of this project:

Content analysis is a technique for examining information, or content, in written or symbolic material. In content analysis, a researcher first identifies a body of material to analyze [...] and then creates a system for recording specific aspects of it. Content analysis is used for exploratory and explanatory research, but is most often used in descriptive research. (Neuman, 1997, p. 31)

In other words, content analysis is the systematic study of various forms of communication, typically focused upon description rather than explanation. The use of content analysis seemed most appropriate for my investigation because it will allow me not only to make sense of the prevention materials themselves, but also to draw conclusions about the organizations that designed them and the overall societal context in which they are situated. What thematic content analysis will enable me to do, which other approaches do not necessarily accommodate, is to take

an in-depth look at exactly what information these programs are presenting, how it is being presented, and how that may or may not be related to theoretical, practical, or societal norms of our time. The rich description of the behaviors and beliefs of these organizations that this analysis will provide offers a snapshot of what is happening here and now in sexual violence prevention education.

Further still, from that snapshot, I can then use relevant literature to unpack the *why* behind the arrival of prevention education at this point and, ideally, make recommendations for researchers and practitioners based upon what the image reveals and what is missing from the larger picture. Since my analysis of these programs and materials is meant, in part, to shed light on alternative approaches to sexual assault prevention education, using a research method based upon highly detailed description seemed to be the best option for me to ensure I gathered the most in depth information about currently accepted approaches and how they might be expanded or changed in future inquiry and practice.

Data Analysis

The system of evaluation that I use to examine the data is a fairly straightforward process of qualitative coding. While engaging in the process of data analysis, I began to see connections forming between the themes that emerged through the conceptual analyses of the three focal programs. Although I entered into the process of collecting, reviewing, and analyzing the materials from these programs with a short set of a priori codes, codes developed before examining relevant data that are often linked to the research questions, much of the thematic

coding for the analysis of this data was inductive, meaning the codes emerged through thoughtful and generative interaction with the data (Maxwell, 2005).

Additionally, using an issue-focused analysis, which "move[s] from discussion of issues within one area to discussion of issues within another, with each area logically connected to the others" I began my analytic process by coding the data according to very general categories (Weiss, 1994, p. 154). These general categories are what Maxwell calls "organizational categories" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 97), which, as the name suggests, serve to organize the data in clear and logical ways. The specific organizational categories that I use more or less stem from my research questions and the theories I held on the subjects at the heart of my research prior to beginning data collection.

These labels allowed me to sort my data into a few smaller categories, which I could then analyze further based on recurring trends that emerged from the review of the materials from each organization to create "substantive categories", which are entirely linked to the content of the data collected (Maxwell, 2005, p. 97). Also, reflecting upon my positionality and researcher bias—based upon the personal experiences with youth sexual violence prevention that were mentioned in the introduction to this paper—via analytic memos has helped facilitate the development of the descriptive and substantive codes, by helping me recognize patterns in the data and to develop terms to adequately describe the trends that appeared. Memo writing ultimately facilitated two key steps of analysis: local integration, in which the data are closely interpreted, and, inclusive integration, in which the data are "organized into a coherent sequence" (Weiss, 1994, p. 157).

Altogether, this systematic process led me to uncover a few significant findings within my research.

Validity of the Research

Perhaps one of the greatest concerns that arise with any type of content analysis research is the ease with which the work's claims can be called into question. I have taken three steps to ensure the validity of my findings. First, I worked to address researcher bias, by writing reflexive and analytic memos, which enabled me to scrutinize the preconceptions my lived experience produced. Writing these memos has helped me to clarify these biases and to ensure that they are not causing misinterpretation or misrepresentation of data (Maxwell, 2005, p.108).

Additionally, as a means of addressing the issue of subjectivity, I integrated the content of my memos on identity and bias into the research paper to make certain that I carefully justify the decisions that I have made when designing, implementing, and reflecting upon my study (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007). By engaging in these particular best practices of qualitative researchers, I am doing my part to ensure that my findings are not tainted by my biases and that a close approximation of 'truth' can be gleaned from the research.

Finally, to avoid accepting my findings at "face validity", the name that Krippendorff has given to the tendency to believe one's data to be sound and generalizable simply because they are in alignment with the researcher's own predictions or expectations, I discuss my findings rooted in the theoretical lenses introduced in the review of the literature (1980, p. 70). This provides an additional dimension to my study that grounds not just the questions and methods, but the

data, in sound and reliable literature. Thus, through taking these measures, I will be able to address some of the potential concerns regarding validity that are common in content analysis studies.

Findings

Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP)

Methods of implementation. Of the three programs reviewed in this analysis, Mentors in Violence Prevention had the most consistent methods of delivery, which was ultimately one of the greatest pedagogical strengths of the program. Typically, the MVP program is delivered in dyadic and group discussion, in single-sex and mixed-gender workshops. Multiple teaching approaches are used including large group instruction, small group instruction, and partner instruction activities, which make use of paired facilitation guides to engage students with relevant material (Cissner, 2009). Additionally, MVP has also used formal and informal peer teaching strategies successfully, with students who have completed the program often returning to lead the program for their peers.

Mission statement. The mission statement of Mentors in Violence Prevention reflects an urgent need to confront the epidemic of sexual violence in modern society. The organization created a primary program of intervention that is comprehensive and based upon gender and violence research and best practices. MVP also recognizes and aims to eliminate the propensity for young men in positions of power or status—such as athletes, soldiers, and other leaders—to perpetrate acts of sexual violence. Overall, MVP hopes to empower young men and women to end sexual and gender-based violence, and to equip them with the skills and mindsets needed to make better choices in potentially dangerous situations.

Curriculum. The chief training tool for MVP is the Playbook, a series of real-life scenarios based on the experiences of young men and women in college and high

school depicting abusive male (and sometimes female) behavior. Participants are challenged to consider a number of concrete options for intervention before, during, or after an abusive incident. The Playbook is highly interactive and is both science- and theory-based. It is rooted in the work of Dr. Ronald Slaby on youth violence prevention and it aligns with Alan Berkowitz's work on single gender groups (Cissner, 2009). Supplemental activities such as videos, facilitation guides, trust and teambuilding activities, situation-specific curricular materials, context-specific curricular materials, and even outside speakers are also available, but they are not a part of the core Playbook curriculum.

Emergent themes. Through a comprehensive exploration of MVP's methods of implementation, mission statement, and curriculum, it becomes clear that their work is driven by three central themes: the central role of men, leveraging social status, and minimizing bystander effect.

The central role of men. While Mentors in Violence Prevention offers programming for both men and women, men and the role that they play in sexual violence is at the heart of their curriculum. As it happens, the materials reviewed for this analysis, which are intended for use with both male and female participants, focus almost entirely on the interests, behaviors, thought processes, and actions of young men, and how they can be used or altered in order to mobilize men to end sexual violence. One element of the MVP program that illustrates this reality well is the very premise of the curriculum. Initially designed primarily for use with male athletes on college campuses, MVP employs common language from the sporting world to appeal to the presumed interests of young men and help them become

invested in the program and its goals (Cissner, 2009; MVP, 2013) Though the target demographics of MVP seem to have shifted, the language and general theme has remained the same since its inception. Thus, it is clear that the program does continue to endeavor to attract and engage young men and their peers in an effort to meet their programmatic goals.

Leveraging social status. As is the case with many youth-centered organizations today, MVP attempts to capitalize on the social status and esteem of their participants to create change. Since the program was originally designed for use with student athletes, this emphasis on popularity was not particularly surprising. What was surprising, however, was the way in which this element of the program has evolved. No longer focusing specifically on athletes and their mainstream popularity, MVP is now used in a variety of youth contexts such as associated student body assemblies, on-campus faith-based groups, school-based Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), ethnic and cultural centers, and other on-campus youth organizations (MVP, 2013). As such, the definition of status and the representation of popularity look drastically different from group to group and place to place. Accordingly, this shift has allowed MVP to expand its reach as an organization and to expand its curricular resources and activities to accommodate the changing social landscapes in which the organization operates.

Minimizing bystander effect. One of the chief aims of MVP is to put an end to the phenomenon of bystander effect, as it relates to sexual violence. As a matter of fact, the current tagline for the organization is, "End the silence, stop the violence," which perfectly captures the central premise of their work with youth populations.

Generally, the program presents a central message to participants that what is most critical for them to recognize is the fact that they both can and should take action when they witness sexual violence, a reality with which many young men struggle (Berkowitz 2005). Trainers and materials emphasize the fact that doing nothing to stop an instance of sexual violence is just as problematic as perpetrating the act, helping participants to recognize the responsibility and the power that lies with the bystander in these situations. In fact, one of the central exercises of the program asks participants to visualize an important female in their lives (the examples trainers list off for youth participants are: a sister, girlfriend, classmate, cousin, or even your mother) being mistreated, verbally degraded, and then sexually assaulted—all while another person is watching—and then to talk through how it made them feel to imagine such a scenario (MVP, 2013). Engaging in the activity helps the students to recognize the culpability of the bystander in acts of sexual violence by tapping into their own pain, disbelief, sadness, and rage and using that to help encourage participants to be active agents on behalf of women in these situations. Thus, through changing bystanders into actors, Mentors in Violence Prevention hopes to prevent sexual violence before it occurs.

Framing and circulating the content. MVP disseminates information to coaches and participants through three forms of media: textual resources, personal interaction, and online content. Making use of this variety of platforms allows the program to improve access for individuals who engage with their program and facilitates participation in the program from individuals with varying levels of literacy and different learning modalities. The organization's content focuses on

bystander effect and alternative constructs of masculinity. This means that their work is presented primarily as a conversation among friends about men, women, and the way that men think about, view, and treat women. Although there are some noted drawbacks to a male-centered program, one strength worth noting is that taking women out of the heart of the dialogue is a shift away from the victim-blaming and sex-shaming programs that have become so prolific in contemporary society.

Resources and/or supports for victims of sexual violence. Interestingly enough, MVP does share a great deal of information with participants about what may happen after an instance of sexual violence and where they can turn for support. Trainers discuss safe spaces for victims, friends of victims, and bystanders to seek help and report sexual violence in their communities. What's more, they even discuss what options for support exist for perpetrators or perceived perpetrators of sexual violence, and the consequences for perpetrating sexual violence or being complicit as a bystander in these situations. What was missing from the discussion about the aftermath of sexual violence and the resources that are available was an explicit conversation about what the after effects of sexual violence are for any of the involved parties. Perhaps this is due to the fact that MVP primarily focuses on the prevention aspect of their mission, or perhaps it is related to the areas of expertise and the gaps in knowledge of the team who designed the program. Regardless of the reasoning, the information was not present in the curricular materials, and that does come across as problematic.

Safe Dates

Methods of implementation. The Safe Dates program has three delivery levels: 1) school-based support groups for youth at risk for dating and sexual violence due to previous victimization, perpetration or exposure to violence; 2) a ten-week classroom curriculum for use in schools or community groups; and 3) an organization or school-wide workshop on prevention strategies (Foshee, Bauman, Arriaga, Helms, Koch, & Linder, 1998). There is also a digital component to the program that is meant for use with the in-class curriculum. Typically the program is implemented as a combination of a ten-week classroom-based module and an after-school or community-based support group (Foshee et al., 1998). However, institutions that choose to implement the program can decide what option or combination of options works best for their specific climate, culture, and population.

Mission statement. The mission of the Safe Dates program is to educate and empower students end the culture of silence around dating violence and sexual assault and to inspire students to work to put an end to gender based violence in their generation (Respect Works, 2011). The program uses cutting-edge research on anti-bullying initiatives and violence prevention to ensure that the youth of today are adequately prepared to act responsibly in situations of dating violence, sexual violence, and bullying. A secondary goal of the Safe Dates program is to provide students with the skills and mindsets needed to foster healthy, happy relationships with their peers (Foshee et al., 1996). This element of Safe Date's mission is what sets them apart from other organizations, groups that focus more on potential dangers and risks of relationships rather than drawing attention to the benefits and joys of appropriate romantic and platonic relationships.

Curriculum. Overall, the Safe Dates curriculum focuses specifically on prevention of harassment and sexual harassment as part of training students to become role models and leaders in preventing teen dating violence, sexual harassment, and bullying. There are elements of the program that serve as cautionary tales and examples of undesirable relationships and behaviors, as well as elements that exemplify safe behaviors and appropriate peer relationships (Foshee et al., 1996). Structurally, Safe Dates consists of an eight-hour training curriculum followed by a youth-led prevention project and is spread over ten weeks. At the end of training, students identify a related problem they want to address and develop an awareness project to present to peers at school and/or in their communities. Should schools and organization choose to extend the program beyond the ten-week training, to start a support group or develop peer education workshops, there are supplementary resources available from the creator of the program, although they are not a part of the official set of curricular materials.

Emergent themes. An analysis of the methods of implementation, mission statement, and curriculum for Safe Dates establishes the significance of three key themes: establishing healthy relationships, improved and informed decision making, and seeking help.

Establishing healthy peer relationships. At its core, Safe Dates focuses on improving relationships among today's youth. As such, much of the work students are asked to engage in during their time in the program is meant to help students learn how to create and maintain positive and healthy social connections, whether romantic or platonic (Foshee et al., 1996). One activity that students are asked to

engage in early on is to spend some time reflecting upon the qualities that they admire in a person and those that they dislike, and to use that information to take an informal inventory of the important people in their lives and determine whether they fit in the preferred or undesirable category (Respect Works, 2011). From this activity, as the lesson guide highlights, it is expected that students learn to see that they do have some awareness of how they would like to be treated and that they may sometimes lose sight of whether or not their relationships meet those standards.

This theme was consistent throughout all of the materials I examined for Safe Dates, which truly reflects how central it is to the organizational mission. Even more remarkable, however, is the fact that it is the only program of the three reviewed that directly asks youth to evaluate and determine their baseline standard of treatment. I found this particularly interesting because, as some of the literature on dating violence prevention has noted, the more that people know about what they expect in a relationship, the easier it is for them to take action when they realize their expectations are not being met (Sugarman, 1989; Rich, 2010). Hence, in equipping young people to do so, Safe Dates makes it easier for them to identify problematic patterns of behavior and take the appropriate course of action to either change the environment or to get themselves out of it.

Improved and informed decision-making. Also prevalent in the Safe Dates materials was language that called upon students to make better choices and to base their decisions on evidence from their experiences. This is another theme that is messaged consistently throughout the organizational communications of Safe Dates

and seems to be just as central to the program goals as building healthy relationships. Somewhat surprisingly, much of the evidence that these materials ask participants to use when making decisions is not based on the research and theories that are presented in the texts. Instead, they ask participants to rely primarily on what they know about themselves and their preferences, what could be considered common sense, and what they are learning from large-group discussions, when considering certain scenarios (Respect Works, 2011). For instance, during role-plays and when evaluating scenarios, students are asked to use information from these three categories to evaluate peer relationships and think through incidents that may indicate trouble.

What complicates this seeming innovative and encourage approach is the fact that the program targets middle and high school students for support. Because of this, asking students to rely on prior knowledge and intuition may be problematic. Although activities like the one previously discussed give youth the opportunity to engage in the process of building their knowledge bases through reflection, participants in the Safe Dates program are often young enough not to have had extensive experience with building relationships, which may undermine the effectiveness of these particular strategies. Nevertheless, based upon observations from other sections of the curriculum, there still seem to be enough instances in which the authors of the curriculum provide data and statistics that can serve as foundational knowledge for the students for these strategies to be sound.

Seeking help. Even though Safe Dates is a program that claims to be focused on empowering youth to take action against sexual violence, the majority of the

actions that the curriculum asks students to take rely upon other people. Typically, those people are adults, but there are instances in which activities in the program discuss reaching out to peers for support. In six of the ten lessons plans I analyzed, Safe Dates recommends that students reach out to others for assistance and/or guidance when confronted with or concerned about the likelihood of sexually violent behaviors or events (Respect Works, 2011). Additionally, in lessons that focus on identifying risk factors for sexual violence within relationships, participants were advised to consult with a trusted adult or peer before approaching their partner or friend about the situation (Foshee, Bauman, Arriaga, Helms, Koch, & Linder, 1998). While seeking help from others is unquestionably a form of taking action, whether or not it aligns with the focus on empowerment found in the program's mission statement is up for debate.

Framing and circulating the content. All of the content included in the Safe Dates curriculum is presented either in texts or via interactive activities such as skits and scenarios. While there is some variation here, the program is targeted more toward a literate, academic audience, which may alienate some participants who have more difficulty accessing and relating to this approach. There are no modern multimedia elements to the Safe Dates curriculum, but there is a CD-Rom that can be purchased with the printed materials that offers a way to access the materials digitally, though not adding to the curriculum in any way. Additionally, the program is framed as a youth health initiative and is often paired with existing life science and health programs in K-12 educational institutions. Although this does expand the reach of the program, it has the potential to negatively impact its

effectiveness for participants who express minimal interest in academic content and school-based activities.

Resources and/or supports for victims of sexual violence. The Safe Dates curriculum does share information about the impact of sexual violence on those who experience it and those who witness it. One of the core lessons that students learn during the program involves how sexual violence affects young people and how they can get through such a traumatic experience. Students are asked to outline a brief action plan based upon what they learn and explain why they recommended their selected approach (Respect Works, 2011). Despite the fact that the activity is organized as a simulation or role-play of sorts, it still helps students develop a plan that could be used in a real-life scenario and it takes a few small steps toward preparing them to respond to sexual violence in their communities and circles of friends. That said, the recommended closing thought of the resource and response lesson in the instructor script remind students that learning and implementing strategies to prevent sexual violence is far more powerful than learning resources to help in the aftermath. Thus, as with MVP, we again see the emphasis on the importance of stopping violence before it starts rather than knowing what to do when it happens. Though not inherently inappropriate, failing to equip students with the information they need to take care of themselves or their peers should sexual violence occur does seem questionable for an organization focused on empowering and educating youth on the matter.

Branching Seedz of Resistance

Methods of implementation. Branching Seedz of Resistance does not have a set method of implementing sexual violence prevention programming. Rather than one central curriculum and one specific approach to prevention education, there are a variety of different campaigns with various formats for raising awareness, educating, and promoting student engagement and activism. Each campaign has a primary and secondary leader, and typically includes website resources as well as many activities, media, and programming materials to support the initiatives. Branching Seedz also provides connections to external organizations and institutions and facilitator guides through its parent organization, the Colorado Anti-Violence Program, to assist members that would like to add school-based or education-centered components.

Mission statement. Overall, the mission of Branching Seedz of Resistance empowers lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth to “build community power to break cycles of violence affecting LGBTQ people” (Colorado Anti-Violence Program, 2013). Their mission also discusses the use of specific strategies such as community organizing, digital and non digital media campaigns, and participatory action research to provide members with the tools needed to take meaningful action against sexual violence and gender violence. Both of these elements are unique to the Branching Seedz framework and were not observed in the materials reviewed for the other two organizations, emphasizing the innovative and bold approach to violence prevention that the organization is operationalizing for its mission.

Emergent themes. Examining the methods of implementation, mission statement, and curriculum for Branching Seedz of Resistance in great detail suggests that there are four salient themes in the organization's content: youth empowerment; holistic approaches to ending violence; leadership, initiative, and creativity; and sexual violence and the LGBTQ community.

Youth empowerment. Perhaps what is most significant about Branching Seedz is the manner in which it both frames itself as a youth-driven body and actually operates as one, as well. When engaging with Branching Seedz of Resistance, young people have the privilege of guiding their own learning and support one another through the process of examining some very real, very adult issues as an organization. There are still adults who oversee the operations of the organizers and programming, which helps ensure that there is a safe, stable, sound space for members to participate in the activities and dialogues, but the planning and implementation is the responsibility of the participants who design it. In this way, Branching Seedz proves itself as a program that states a mission of empowering youth and actually makes use of an operational framework that allows them to truly use that power to help the organization and its participants reach their goal of bringing an end to sexual violence.

Holistic approaches to ending violence. Contrasting the other two programs in this study, Branching Seedz addresses the matter of ending violence from a multitude of perspectives in a plethora of ways. Rather than using one approach (as with Safe Dates and school-based intervention) or spotlighting one particular message (as with MVP and bystander effect), their methods allow them to

consider the phenomenon of sexual violence holistically or comprehensively. This means that members can explore creative options such as spoken word or visual art, organize town-hall meetings or canvassing excursions, or develop participatory action research projects, just as a few examples, in order to improve their understanding of sexual violence and to share that understanding with their peers. Relying upon such an expansive approach helps break down barriers to accessing information such as unfamiliarity with certain languages or illiteracy, it accommodates individuals of differing physical or cognitive ability, and establishes a means for broad communities of people to interact with the work that they are doing.

Leadership, initiative, and creativity. The Branching Seedz program is flexible, evolving, and truly youth-driven, which demonstrates the value that the administrators of the organization place upon developing leadership skills, embracing creativity, and fostering the drive of young people. From their mission statement to their regular operations, it is clear that Branching Seedz is a space for young people to innovate, learn, and take charge. Of the three core activities at the center of the organization's calendar, two of were developed by past members and one was developed with the intent to provide a forum for members to voice their concerns about the things they see happening in their communities and to develop plans meant to address those concerns (CAVP, 2013). Taking this into consideration, along with the mission and methods of Branching Seedz, it is clear that leadership, initiative, and creativity are fundamental elements of the organization.

Sexual violence and the LGBTQ community. Finally, unlike the other programs I analyzed for this study, LGBTQ issues were integral to the teaching, learning, and activist work of Branching Seedz. Particularly as it relates to sexual violence, students have the opportunity to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data regarding the LGBTQ community and to use these data to drive programming for the organization. There was one year, for example, when the survey data students collected indicated high instances of manipulative behaviors and physical abuse among the people in their sample (CAVP, 2013). Subsequently, the youth-leaders for that year decided to invite a local relationship counselor to facilitate a retreat for the group and to help them work together to develop safe peer networks as they worked through the problems in their community.

In addition to empowering members to discover and confront what is happening in their communities, Branching Seedz also coordinates projects and workshops that inform their peers about what is happening in the country overall. Information is aggregated from sources like the CDC, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and community-based LGBTQ centers across the nation to ensure that young people in the program have a clear picture of what trends in sexual violence look like for LGBTQ individuals (CAVP, 2013). This information becomes the talking points for a multi-session workshop in which members react to the data, talk through what it means, and discuss what can be done about it and by whom. Through these initiatives, Branching Seedz is paving the way for participants to expand the dialogue about sexual violence in LGBTQ communities, which is a critical step in the direction of putting an end to the phenomenon.

Framing and circulating the content. What sets Branching Seedz apart from the other two programs under review is that there is not actually a Branching Seedz program. Instead of developing and presenting a static curriculum, the organization allows members to design and implement anti-violence programming that is unique to their interests and needs. This, in effect, creates a de facto curriculum in that there are existing templates for workshops and panels, as well as recommended resources, lines of research, and local partnerships that members of the organization tap into year after year as they generate interactive, educational sexual violence prevention programming.

Moreover, the flexibility provided by the member-driven curricular materials and activities allows information to be framed differently from year to year. As an example, the materials from one year of Branching Seedz members framed their conversations around sexual violence as a matter of breaking the cycle of violence against women, whereas in another year the conversation was situated in a broader dialogue about the unexplored issues of romantic and peer relationships in the LGBTQ community (CAVP, 2013). The way in which content is allowed to evolve within Branching Seedz, as it relates to both information and mode of dissemination, maximizes both the reach of the organization and the accessibility of the information that they share with their participants.

Resources and/or supports for victims of sexual violence. Branching Seedz of Resistance is the only one of the three organizations that engages youth in a discussion around the trauma of sexual violence and the impact that it has on victims and those who love them. This seems to be facilitated by the absence of an

established, or single preferred curriculum. Instead members have the authority to determine what needs to be discussed, when, and how. In addition to talking members through the potential impact of sexual violence on the mental and physical health of victims, Branching Seedz connects members to people in the community and other organizations in the area that can provide support and treatment for those who are impacted by the phenomenon.

For instance, the agenda for one workshop includes a panel discussion that engages representatives from local medical clinics, community counseling offices, and women's centers in dialogue about sexual violence against women and then provides them time to speak about the ways in which their facilities can provide access to necessary services and materials (CAVP, 2013). By organizing their programming in this way, facilitators within the organization are able to engage participants in their work to end sexual violence, while also acknowledging the fact that sexual violence is a very real part of our world today and that young people need to be equipped to respond to instances of sexual violence safely and responsibly. This element of the Branching Seedz approach is not only practical, but also empowering. It gives young people the tools to either make healthy and informed decisions about their own physical and mental health or to support their peers as they attempt to do so for themselves.

Discussion

Rather than discuss each specific thematic marker at length, I opted to pare down the lengthy list of codes and organize a discussion based upon the most significant themes. Thus, the most prominent themes that emerged from this content analysis are described in greater detail below.

Naming the Phenomenon

The first theme that emerged during data analysis was the complex process of naming the phenomenon that these programs aim to eradicate. Each of the organizations, throughout their curricular materials and foundational documents, use some combination of the following four terms to reference its work: sexual assault, sexual violence, dating violence, and gender violence. However there are specific terms that are used more frequently depending upon the organization or the specific program or campaign to which the materials refer. For example, the majority of the documents from MVP describe its mission as one centered upon the need to end the epidemic of gender violence in society (MVP, 2013). This is reiterated in literature written about the organization which refer to it repeatedly as an organization designed to confront gender violence (Cissner, 2009). This theme is of particular interest to me because it raises the question of just how much it matters what one chooses to call a certain phenomenon.

In order to make sense of this, I looked back at the literature reviewed for this study to shed some light on the potential impact of this naming trend. In her work, Brownmiller (1993) and Jones (1999) each write specifically about rape, which falls into the contemporary category of sexual violence. As such, their works

did not have much to contribute to this theme. However, Mardorossian's (2002) work examines both sexual violence and gender violence, which opened the door for a more extensive discussion of terminology.

Adding to the conversation, the work of Malik, Sorenson, and Aneshensel (1997) offers a general argument in favor of the terms dating violence and gender violence. The authors imply that referring to gender violence and/or dating violence may be more appropriate for youth populations who are experiencing a form of violence in romantic or peer relationships that is not yet violence of an explicitly sexual nature. Essentially, the authors assert that each type of violence should be named as it is, rather than relying upon an umbrella term that may not necessarily be applicable in every situation. Similarly, Foshee, Bauman, Arriaga, Helms, Koch, and Linder (1998) employ the terms dating violence and sexual violence because the program that their study examines is targeted at high school aged youth, where there is a broader spectrum of romantic relationships. Since many students are just beginning to enter into romantic relationships, dating violence is an appropriate term. However, because there are students who are involved in sexual relationships within that community, sexual violence can be used as well.

Sexual Violence Prevention as Education

One of the elements of the three focal programs that I chose to analyze for this study was what I referred to in the methods section as *methods of implementation*. Because they are so deeply connected to both mission statements and curricula, methods of implementation offer an additional perspective on the

specific pedagogical and practical frameworks used within each organization. A few key elements stood out as particularly salient.

The two programs that I reviewed that were more developed and had stronger scholarly frameworks for their practice frequently referenced their beliefs in the importance of educating their participants and teaching them how to develop strategies in response to the threat of sexual violence. In her evaluation of the Mentors in Violence Prevention program, Cissner (2009) praises the commitment that the organization has to education and the meaningful contributions that MVP is making to the field of pro-social literacy. In that same vein, Foshee et al. (1996) tout the academic nature of the Safe Dates program and promote the fact that their program can be integrated with existing health, life science, and human development courses at the school site. Hence, this literature stresses the robust and respected bridge that exists between sexual violence prevention programs and general education programs, and calls attention to the inherent value of linking academic and social learning programs.

All in all, the repeated emphasis on education as key to ending sexual violence within and across these organizations justifies and solidifies the status of educational intervention in the prevention landscape. Examining the methods of implementation for these three programs has provided insight into what it looks like to teach sexual violence prevention and the importance of teaching it well. What's more, the emergence of this theme of an education-specific focus brings to light the strong pedagogical and conceptual foundations for the goals and missions put forth by the organizations under review.

Overlapping Purposes

Looking back at my process of inquiry, the most fascinating part of conducting this study was investigating the mission statements for the organizations under review. It was interesting to see the overlap among the organizations at the heart of this research, especially given the distinct ways in which they work to achieve their purposes. For instance all three programs reflect a strong sense of urgency in their mission statement or statement of purpose, often relying upon statistical data to bolster their causes. Nevertheless, it seems to be that creating this air of urgency is a strategic and valuable maneuver. Cook-Craig and Ciarlante (2012) would argue that developing this urgency helps prevention programs garner support for their specific approach and serves as a way of engaging the public and, ideally, motivating them to take action.

Furthermore, each of these programs aims to be a method of primary prevention against sexual violence, though they could be adopted as secondary or tertiary measures as well. Like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2004) explain in their report on sexual violence prevention, primary interventions, whether universal or targeted, have the greatest likelihood of success and thus would do well as a proactive, first line of defense for preventing sexual violence. This is echoed in the research of Morrison et al. (2004), which supports the notion that the sooner a program of prevention is implemented, the more effective that program will be in the end. Given the tendency of institutions and organizations to adopt sexual violence prevention programs as a secondary or tertiary intervention,

it makes sense that these examples would be forthright about their desire to serve as a primary means of prevention.

Finally, empowerment is also at the heart of each of these organizations. In spite of the vast differences in how this tenet of the program missions manifests itself in practice, its function in the theoretical foundations of the three groups was ostensibly the same. Mentors in Violence Prevention, Safe Dates, and Branching Seedz of Resistance all seem to be aware of just how important it is to combat sexual violence, which is characterized by fear, anger, objectification, and the loss of power, with a narrative of empowerment, hope, and validation. Regardless of who is charged with the task of taking responsibility for ending sexual violence, the persons who do so must feel that they are strong, worthy, and capable enough to rise to the challenge. For this reason, this particular area of overlap is incredibly valuable in the greater scheme of sexual assault prevention programming. After all, empowerment is critical to ending trends of injustice that are rooted in the dissolution of power (Foshee et al., 1996).

Battle of the Sexes: A Look at Empowerment

This theme reflects one of the major tensions that have surfaced over the course of this research project. Interestingly enough, this study has confirmed the tendency for sexual violence prevention programs to target men more frequently than women. In fact, two out of the three programs analyzed either implicitly or explicitly place the responsibility for taking action against sexual violence in the hands of men, much like Berkowitz (2005). Through single-gender instruction, socio-drama, peer empowerment, and reflective practice, both MVP's playbook and

the Safe Dates curricula seek to engage men in proactive and pro-social conversations about sexual violence. Building upon Berkowitz's perspective, Clinton-Sherrod et al. (2008) advocates for sexual violence programs that are geared toward men specifically because they provide a space for men to rethink the notions of masculinity that have perpetuated patriarchy and rape culture with less judgment than mixed-gender approaches would allow.

Many scholars call into question the effectiveness of programs that single men out as the primary means of ending sexual violence. In an evaluation of such programs, Choate (2003) argues that while men are an important piece of the puzzle, training men to leave women out of a conversation that very clearly involves their safety and well being may perpetuate the highly problematic societal structures that have led to the pervasiveness of rape culture. Other scholars, such as Yeater and O'Donahue (1999) have looked at specifically engaging women as the most vocal opponents of sexual violence, since they are the population that is most adversely impacted by the phenomenon. The authors bring to light the importance of empowering women and ensuring that their voices are heard and heeded in the forum of sexual violence prevention programming as a means of modeling what it looks like to engage women in conversations about their bodies and their rights to those bodies for their male peers.

Both sides of the debate make clear and justifiable claims that address a question that is central to the research—the matter of whom sexual violence prevention programs target. Moreover, I believe that this theme speaks to the more vital question of whom exactly these programs *should* be targeting. Research

ultimately suggests that programs that reach out to men and women are the most effective, as they allow organizations to engage a larger group in the movement to end sexual violence. However, as this analysis has shown, even programs that market themselves as mixed gender programs have the tendency to rely upon conceptual frameworks that perpetuate harmful perspectives on sexual violence and where responsibility falls for breaking the complex cycle of sexual violence in which modern society has become trapped. Perhaps further investigation of this area of tension will provide some much needed answers to the questions implied by this data and open the door for a stronger, authentic gender balance in sexual violence prevention programs.

The Ambiguous Yet Vital Role of Youth

Another central point of tension that thematic analysis of program materials revealed relates to the role of youth in sexual violence prevention. As Cook-Craig and Ciarlante (2012) discuss, there is an enormous need to connect with younger generations and empower them to take a stand against sexual violence among their peers. After all, the age group with the highest number of reported acts of sexual violence are those aged sixteen to twenty-four (CDC 2004; RAINN 2009). In their longitudinal study of sexual violence among adolescent and college-aged women, Smith, White, and Holland (2003) reveal that the likelihood of women in this age range becoming a victim of sexual violence is more than three times the national average. Furthermore, what makes these data more alarming is the fact that men in this age range are five times as likely to perpetrate an act of sexual violence against women and a stunning twenty-five percent of men in this demographic have

admitted to actually committing or attempting to commit at least one act of sexual violence in their lives thus far (Yeater and O'Donahue, 1999).

The examination of the Mentors in Violence Prevention, Safe Dates, and Branching Seedz of Resistance programs indicates that these organizations are meeting the goal of increasing youth involvement in sexual violence prevention. However, this theme raises the question of whether or not it matters if these programs are youth-generated or just youth-led, as well as what the criteria for an authentic claim of youth-involvement should be. Although all three programs specifically target youth and tap into their potential to motivate peers to take action and all three claim to be youth-led programs, not all of them involved youth in the development of their approaches to prevention. In spite of the youth involvement claims made by these three organizations, only one of them seems to truly empowers youth to develop and lead meaningful conversations about sexual violence and what can be done to put it to an end.

As discussed in the findings section of this paper, Branching Seedz offers an exceptional model for a youth-generated, youth-directed program to work against sexual violence, largely because the organization has not adopted a specific set of curricula or instructional practices to utilize in its work. Instead of mandating what information its members disseminate regarding sexual violence and determining exactly how content is delivered, the organizational framework requires members to develop these things on their own. Even though there are clear risks to embracing such an approach, there are rewards as well. This freedom allows the organization to change the conversation about sexual violence as research and understanding of

sexual violence evolves, and it provides youth with the power to lead a dialogue about something that is deeply personal and deeply troubling to their generation. It seems to be the contrast between this open, evolving approach and the structured approach to prevention that has resulted in this discrepancy regarding the specific role youth should play in these organizations. Nevertheless, what this theme ultimately reflects is the need for future research of this area of incongruity in order to move toward establishing a theoretical and practical resolution and securing the rights and responsibilities of young people to lead the efforts to end sexual violence.

Conclusions

All in all, examining the research on sexual violence and its prevention, as well as engaging in a content analysis of three dynamic, youth-focused prevention programs has revealed a complex landscape. While current literature and the programs analyzed do offer much promise as far as facilitating proactive measures rather than reactive measures and accommodating a variety of learning modalities and interests in their programming, there is still a long way to go as far as effectively addressing the diversity of youth in the United States and ensuring that programs avoid common sexual violence prevention pitfalls such as victim-blaming and hyper-reliance on male voices. Further reflection on the research and the issues has brought to light a number of implications for research and practice.

As it relates to considerations for future research, this analysis has indicated that further investigation of the observed gaps in the content of sexual violence prevention programs is needed in order to determine which populations are left underserved and how to strengthen these programs. For instance, given the noted emphasis that prevention literature places upon the key role of men in ending sexual violence, engaging in scholarship related to how women can be more meaningfully involved in the design, implementation, and orientation of prevention programming would help researchers and practitioners add a crucial dimension to prevention education. Similarly, investigating questions of race and ethnicity in sexual violence prevention would have a similar effect based upon the lack of representation this study brought to light.

Furthermore, there seems to be an almost complete absence of contemporary scholarship regarding sexual violence in the LGBTQ youth community and what measures are being taken to address the unique concerns this community in prevention education plans. While this content analysis shed light on one local program working to address this particular problem, it also brought to the surface the dearth of both statistical and academic information on this matter. For example, when searching for literature to frame my inclusion of the Branching Seedz program and discussing the elements of its agenda, there was not much literature for me to turn to that looked beyond the community of adult gay men. While there is more recent literature that begins to explore the experiences of the broader LGBTQ community, the field of study is so new that there is not much more to review aside from texts related to instances of sexual violence perpetrated against LGBTQ individuals by non-LGBTQ individuals, as well as the phenomenon of sexual coercion in LGBTQ romantic relationships.

These newer areas of scholarship beg the question of where the phenomenon of bullying fits into the discussion of sexual violence, as well as whether or not programs meant to address bullying in the LGBTQ community could be considered part of the effort to prevent sexual violence. However, considering the following definition of sexual violence utilized by the CDC, as well as the interpretations of sexual violence introduced in the review of the literature, I think that a clear distinction can be made between bullying and sexual violence. Per the CDC:

Sexual violence (SV) is any sexual act that is perpetrated against someone's will. SV encompasses a range of offenses, including a

completed nonconsensual sex act (i.e., rape), an attempted nonconsensual sex act, abusive sexual contact (i.e., unwanted touching), and non-contact sexual abuse (e.g., threatened sexual violence, exhibitionism, verbal sexual harassment)... All types involve victims who do not consent, or who are unable to consent or refuse to allow the act. (CDC, 2012)

Thus, upon taking this into consideration, it remains clear that further efforts to become familiar with and address sexual violence, specifically, in the LGBTQ community are still needed.

The most important implication of this particular discovery is the impact that this lack of information will have on the overall education of LGBTQ youth in the matter of sexual violence prevention. Without an adequate understanding of what sexual violence looks like within this community and a nuanced understanding of the impact it has on members of this community, prevention programs will not be able to appropriately prepare young people to protect themselves or to empower them to take a stand. As such, further research is needed in order to ensure that future prevention programming can be both truly comprehensive and far more effective for LGBTQ students and their peers.

Additionally, as it relates to practice, this content analysis reveals the need for a distinction between youth-focused and youth-driven sexual violence prevention programs and, perhaps, an increase in youth-driven initiatives. While all of the three programs reviewed are youth-focused, only one was youth-driven. This means that, ultimately, although the needs of youth lay at the heart of these

initiatives, the young people involved did not have the lion's share of control over what their experiences looked like. Instead, youth who participated in the MVP and Safe Dates programs were guided through a program that may or may not have addressed the issues that are most relevant to them even if people who looked like them led them. As such, there is the potential that the students who were involved with these initiatives were not affected as greatly as students who were able to design and implement their own programming in youth-driven programs like Branching Seedz of Resistance. Practitioners in the field should consider paying more attention to this distinction and take measures to ensure that there are elements in their curricula that empower youth to make these programs their own in a genuine way.

Also, this analysis brings to light the immense potential for practitioners to design programming that goes beyond classrooms or gymnasiums and extends to the broader communities in which their participants live. Examining the Branching Seedz model, which is situated in community organizing and empowerment in conjunction with more institution-based programs such as MVP and Safe Dates illuminated the potential of implementing hybrid institutional and community programs. For example, although Safe Dates offers an extension option, which takes their work beyond the classroom, the extracurricular program seemed to repeat the same information and activities introduced in the in-school program. However, should the program redesign the extension option as a general framework for continuing the conversation to include more member-led discussions and activities that would vary based upon the location, makeup, size, et cetera, of the group, the

impact of this program could be much stronger and enduring than it is currently. For any practitioners working in program development and design, taking the option of a blended program into consideration seems like an excellent opportunity for creating a powerful, successful program.

Moreover, the issue of access, which was introduced in the methods section of this paper and continued to surface throughout my study, is a particularly important area for practical consideration. As sexual violence disproportionately affects women from low-income communities and women of color—two groups of women who would greatly benefit from participating in youth sexual violence prevention programs, steps should be taken by those in practice to ensure that women from these communities are able to access the information and support that they may need (CDC, 2012). Taking into consideration the difficulty that I had accessing certain curricular materials for the organizations in my study, which claim to be available to all, as well as the fact that other organizations I had hoped to investigate would not grant me unpaid access to their materials, it is clear that there is room for improvement as it relates to access to curricula for individuals from low income communities.

Further still, even the materials that could be obtained for review would not necessarily be accessible for all people even if they were made available for the general public. For instance, only one program offered translations of materials, but even then it was only into Spanish. There were not often considerations for differences in physical or intellectual ability, literacy, or social-emotional stages either, which adds yet another dimension to the challenges that exist to access.

Moving forward, future researchers should continue to try to gain access to and evaluate those programs, in order to ensure that they are appropriate and effective. Given the prevalence of sexual violence in these communities, the need is both present and pressing. Additionally, practitioners should consider some of these barriers to access and understanding and think through how to eliminate or minimize them to ensure that these services and data are available to all.

Finally, with regard to curricula, the information gleaned from this preliminary investigation indicates a need for an updated approach to sexual violence prevention that is situated at the intersection of theory and best practices. While current options, such as the programs examined for this thesis, have some very strong elements, there are still some critical elements missing from each of these programs that ultimately serve to undermine their long-term effectiveness. Elements such as an examination of consent, discussion of troublesome gender norms, and greater exploration of the complexities of coercive behaviors in romantic relationships are just a few examples of the substantive content that could be added to current prevention programs to strengthen their impact.

Situating these programs in a more contemporary framework, such as the sex-positive, consent-centered framework that the *Yes Means Yes* anthology puts forth would provide the foundation for a much-needed shift toward a future of healthier sexualities in the United States. Thus, perhaps the greatest implication of this study is the call for a more expansive curriculum that takes these missing pieces into account and empowers youth to strive for a future free of sexual violence and rooted in positive, culturally relevant, theoretically informed best practices of

sexuality. The design and implementation of such programs would certainly be a welcome and much needed first-step in the direction of stronger, more comprehensive sexual violence prevention measures.

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