

Are Foubert's Claims About "The Men's Program" Overstated?

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The movement to foster men's responsibility for sexual assault prevention has grown dramatically. It has been gratifying to note the increase in attention to men's responsibility and the development of new programs directed at men. Along with this growth has come inevitable growing pains and problems. Two critical questions for the field are the evaluation of program effectiveness and the selection of appropriate interventions for men. These questions are important for all programs, but they come to mind in particular with respect to "The Men's Program." This program, developed by Dr. John Foubert, is the most extensively researched rape prevention program for men and it has received considerable attention. When considering "The Men's Program" or similar efforts, it is important to: 1) think critically about program effectiveness, 2) understand the different philosophical approaches in working with men, and 3) avoid unnecessary competition between programs. It is with these concerns in mind and the hope of advancing our collective efforts that I have decided to write this constructive critique of "The Men's Program."

Dr. John Foubert has made a number of very strong claims on behalf of his program that in my opinion do not stand up under scrutiny. These include statements about the uniqueness of the program, the duration of its effects, the changes it produces in men, and its overall effectiveness. While "The Men's Program" is a well-designed, carefully evaluated program that has shown promise, I believe that there are also other programs for men that are promising and effective. In fact, there are many theoretical and methodological problems involved in evaluating rape prevention programs that make it difficult to make claims on behalf of any rape prevention program for men. These include the difficulty in evaluating outcomes, the weakness of attitudinal measures of change, the "rebound" effect, and problems identifying critical ingredients associated with change (Berkowitz, in-press). Despite these areas of concern, which are a problem in the evaluation of all programs, I believe that there is a clear pattern of overstated and unsubstantiated claims on behalf of "The Men's Program."

Dr. Foubert must be congratulated and acknowledged for his persistence in pursuing a research agenda on behalf of developing effective rape prevention programs for men. To date, his program has been more thoroughly evaluated than any comparable rape prevention program, and more is known about its effects. He has developed an excellent training manual that is a valuable resource for practitioners. In addition, he has been willing to make changes in his program based on the criticisms of others and has attempted to evaluate these criticisms empirically. All of this is a testimony to Dr. Foubert's passionate commitment to ending violence against women. However, these positive elements do not justify the pattern of overstated claims and self-promotion that are outlined below.

Uniqueness. Dr. Foubert claims that "to date, no other treatment has included the combination of techniques used by this program" (Foubert, 1998, p.4). In fact, the Ohio State University Rape Prevention Program, which was one of the earliest rape prevention programs for men, used nearly identical elements in their all-male peer educator programs, with the exception of using a guided, mental imagery exercise rather than a video describing a male-on-male rape, and many other rape prevention programs for men have similar critical ingredients. The "Men's Program" is unique, however, in its explicit focus on helping a victim.

2- “The Men’s Program”

Men’s Likelihood of Raping. In pre and post-tests of “The Men’s Program”, participants are asked the question “If you could be assured of not being caught or punished, how likely would you be to rape?” (Foubert, 2000A). Participants in “The Men’s Program” say that they are less likely to rape after taking the program. There is an important distinction here that is overlooked in the representation of this data, however. Self-reported likelihood of raping is very different from an actual reduction in rapes by men. Dr. Foubert’s book is titled: “The Men’s Program: How to Successfully Lower Men’s Likelihood of Raping” (Foubert, 2000). These and other similar claims imply that “The Men’s Program” can reduce the actual incidence of rape. In fact, in a recent study by Foubert (2000B), decreases in men’s self-reported likelihood of raping were not associated with any reduction in men’s actual coercive behavior. These results raise questions about the value of this measure in general, in addition to concerns about the ways in which Dr. Foubert represents his program in particular

Duration of Change. The most common measure used in evaluating rape prevention programs are measures of attitude change. Programs have been evaluated immediately following a workshop and at intervals ranging from a few weeks to seven months. The longest follow-up study in the literature has been conducted by Foubert using a seven-month follow-up evaluation. Based on this study, Dr. Foubert claims that:

Unlike other programs, the impact of “The Men’s Program” on rape myth acceptance and likelihood of raping lasts for an entire academic year. This effect is over three times longer than any other evaluated program in the research literature (Foubert, handout).

(“The Men’s Program”) Significantly lowers men’s rape acceptance and likelihood of raping for an entire academic year – longer than any other program in use today (Quick Facts about “The Men’s Program”)

While it is correct to say that changes resulting from “The Men’s Program” have been shown to last for “an entire academic year” there is no basis for implying that other program effects do not have a similar duration, because these other programs have not been evaluated for the same length of time. If a program is evaluated at a two or three month interval and found to successfully impact men’s attitudes or self-reported likelihood of raping we simply do not know if these changes would persist for a greater length of time. Thus, while it would be correct for Dr. Foubert to claim that the time lapse between pre- and post tests is greater for his study than for any other program, it is misleading and inaccurate to claim that “The Men’s Program” “effect is over three times longer than any other evaluated program...”

Data Analysis. In a recent review of Dr. Foubert’s manual Davis (1999) concluded that “Overstating the effectiveness of the intervention and failing to carefully qualify even tenuous findings, however, raises concern about this book.” In his review Davis outlines numerous questions about claims made by Dr. Foubert on behalf of his program. In one study, for example, Foubert (1998) reported that male participants experienced a 50% drop in rape myths that remained two months later. Yet he failed to mention until the Appendix of his book is that “the control group at the follow-up posttest did not differ significantly from the follow-up posttest of program participants.”

In an analysis of a second study Foubert repeats this pattern.

Once again Foubert does not mention until the Appendix that results of the study also indicated that “long-term change did not significantly differ from an untreated control group.” This raises questions about the confidence with which effectiveness of the intervention is articulated. (Davis, 1999).

3- "The Men's Program"

These comparisons led Davis (1999) to the following conclusion: "since the control group 'did as good' as the experimental group, it might even be suggested that The Men's Program had no impact at all." In a more recent study with stronger results, Foubert (2000B) did find significant attitudinal changes as a result of his workshop, however.

Finally, Davis (1999) noted that "Foubert does not pay close enough attention to the methodological limitations of his research. Thus, while his research population consisted of college fraternity men Foubert claims that "The Men's Program" "is appropriate for local rape crisis centers, the military, and high schools (with appropriate modifications)." While "The Men's Program" may be appropriate in these settings, the research cited in support of these claims do not support them."

What will work? In a recent book chapter (Berkowitz, in-press) I summarized six comprehensive reviews of the literature on the effectiveness of rape prevention programs. All six reviews came to the conclusion that separate gender programs are more effective than coeducational programs. Evaluations show that both men and women benefit more in separate gender programs than in mixed programs. Almost all of the effective programs reviewed use peer educators as facilitators. The second characteristic of effective programs has to do with "program process" (Davis, 2000). The literature suggests that highly interactive programs that allow for participant discussion are more effective than non-interactive ones, and that programs with different content and format are equally effective. Thus, what is most desirable is that programs for men are peer facilitated, all-male, and interactive in nature. Variations in format (video, interactive theatre, role plays, etc) and content do not seem to make as much of a difference. How a workshop is conducted seems to be more important than what material is covered in the workshop. In this light, I believe that the effectiveness of "The Men's Program" is probably due to the fact that it is all-male, peer facilitated, and interactive and not to the use of a male-on-male rape scenario.

Given these findings it would seem that "The Men's Program" is on the right track. Yet the program has also been criticized for its content and approach. Davis (1999) and Scarce (1999) objected to the absence of women's voices in the workshop and its appeal to traditional models of masculinity (i.e., men's helper persona). These concerns call to mind important philosophical differences among rape prevention programs for men (Berkowitz, in-press). Should programs emphasize men's desire to help women, men's need to change our own behavior, and/or men's responsibility to intervene in the behavior of other men and engage in social action to end violence against women? My personal opinion is that rape prevention should not be limited to victim-empathy and personal change strategies and should pursue an activist, pro-feminist agenda requiring individual and collective change on the part of men. In any case, it would be beneficial for the "Men's Program" to include and explicitly acknowledge examples of women's experiences, such as victim testimonies and stories of survivors. Changing the title from "How to Help a Survivor" to "How to Support a Survivor" would also create a message that is more empowering of women.

There are important issues as well regarding what type of empathy induction approach is appropriate. Programs with scenarios of female victims seem to be less effective (this in part provides a scientific rationale for "The Men's Program.") Yet other research suggests that victim empathy programs are most effective when they offer scenarios of both male and female victims (Berkowitz, in-press), an approach which would address other concerns about "The Men's Program." For example, Scarce (1999) argued that the workshop is offensive for social justice reasons and may stimulate men's latent homophobia by portraying the rape of a man by a man. In light of these criticisms and research suggesting that program content is not as important as program process, it would make sense to adopt a program that is less politically controversial and offensive to others.

4- "The Men's Program"

Summary. I believe that there is a clear pattern of overstated claims and problematic interpretation of data that have been used to promote "The Men's Program." A national organization entitled NO MORE (Men's Outreach for Rape Education) has been founded which promotes the "Men's Program" without acknowledging the contribution of other programs. Yet a careful analysis of the rape prevention program evaluation literature suggests no reason to believe that other rape prevention programs for men are not worthy of consideration. We simply don't know the answer to this question at this point. Other criticisms aside, "The Men's Program" is one of a number of carefully designed rape prevention programs for men, including those by myself (Berkowitz 1994), Mahlstedt and Corcoran (1999), Katz (1995), and the Men's Rape Prevention Project (2000) that should be considered for their usefulness and appropriateness for a particular campus. The process of selecting the best program for a particular campus and audience is an important one. Dr. Foubert's tendency to overstate the results of his program relative to others can only serve to cloud this process. It may also reinforce unnecessary patterns of competition that can delay the resolution of important philosophical and methodological issues.

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