2024

Latinx RESPECTs: Using Theatre to Prevent Dating Violence

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A special thank you to Master of Social Work Graduate Student Dylan Lemke for their help in creating this report.

Significance

Teen dating violence is a serious health issue facing youth in the United States. A nationally representative survey found that 8.0% percent of youth who had dated within the past year had been physically hurt on purpose by a dating partner and another 6.9% had experienced sexual violence (Kann et al., 2018). Latinx females experience physical and sexual violence at higher rates compared to national averages (i.e., 9.2% and 11.1%, respectively; Kann et al., 2018). Further, nearly 30% of romantically involved youth have been victims of digital dating abuse within the past year (Hinduja & Patchin, 2021).

Without intervention, dating violence often continues over time (Exner-Cortens et al., 2017). Despite high rates of dating violence among Latinx youth, few programs are designed for this population. Several cultural aspects can impact Latinx adolescents' perceptions of prevention programming, including factors related to acculturation, familism, gender roles and expectations, and help-seeking stigma (Knight et al., 2010; Malhotra et al., 2015; Rueda et al., 2015).

Research supports that brief dating violence interventions, as little as one hour, can have lasting impacts on dating violence behaviors (Fernández-González et al., 2020). Theatre offers a platform for brief intervention that embodies youth's lived experiences through portrayal by similarly aged actor educators, thereby capturing youth's attention and encouraging meaningful insights (Christensen, 2014). Specifically, theatre has been effective at changing attitudes about dating violence and increasing youth's perceived ability to resolve conflicts nonviolently (Belknap et al., 2013). However, there are few theatre interventions for dating violence, and none to our knowledge have included Latinx youth voices in the creation of the play or as actors in it.

The purposes of this study were to: 1.) gather baseline data on cultural values that may influence the dating experiences of Latinx youth across rural and urban areas of Nebraska, as well as data concerning the prevalence of both in-person and digital dating abuse victimization and perpetration; 2.) to assess the acceptability of a play on dating violence for Latinx youth audiences; and 3.) to gather input from Latinx youth on how the play may be adapted to fit their culturally-influenced dating experiences and values.

Methods

This was a mixed-methods study whereby self-identified Latinx youth were recruited from rural (*n*=2 sites; 23 participants) and urban areas (*n* =3 sites; 70 participants) of Nebraska through community agencies (e.g. Boys and Girls Clubs) and community advertisements (e.g., flyers, radio). Following parental consent and youth assent, participants took a written survey, and then were invited to view the 20-minute play entitled "Cracked, but not Broken". The play depicts common dating violence scenarios including digital dating abuse (e.g., control through the use of one's cell phone), escalating conflict and excessive jealousy, emotional and physical violence perpetration/victimization, bystander intervention, and help-seeking. Following the play, youth took a second survey which offered the opportunity to share individual thoughts and learnings from the play. Youth then participated in small groups where they were the "playwright"; that is, they provided feedback on each section of the play and also recommended how cultural values (e.g., familism, gender norms, cultural traditions) may be infused. Finally, the research ended with a large focus group whereby youth were asked about what it's like to date as Latinx teens (e.g., family rules, dating norms), about their or a friend's dating violence experiences, help-seeking, and bystander behaviors.

Quantitative data were analyzed using basic descriptives, frequency counts, and Pearson correlation coefficients. Qualitative data were analyzed using basic thematic analysis.

Table 1. *Participants' Demographics*

Descriptive Information	*Frequency*
Age	
15	20.0%
16	33.3%
17	46.7%
Grade	
7	1.2%
8	13.1%
9	28.6%
10	16.7%
11	25%
12	15.5%
Gender	
Males	46.8%
Females	51.1%
Other*	2.1%
Sexuality	
Heterosexual	82.2%
Lesbian or gay	2.2%
Bisexual	8.9%
Questioning or other	4.4%
Not comfortable answering	2.2%
Current Relationship Status	
Going out	16.1%
Casual dating**	29.1%
Single	48.4%
Other	6.5%
Pregnant/Parenting	4.2%
Immigration Status* **	
First	9.5%
Second	73.3%
Third	16.8%

Note. N = 95 youth. Valid percentages were used when there was missing data.

**Other denotes that a % of the sample identified as transmale.*

***Casual dating included youth who indicated that they were dating casually, hooking up, or in a friends-with-benefits relationship. Four youth identified "other" as their relationship category. Two additional youth denoted that they were married.*

****First generation denotes that the adolescent was born in a Spanish-speaking country. Second generation denotes that the adolescent was born in the United States, but that one or both parent(s) were born in a Spanish-speaking country. Third generation denotes that both the adolescent and their parents were born in the United States.*

Cultural Considerations: Measures and Findings

Acculturation: This measure assessed the extent to which adolescents read, think, speak, and consume media in Spanish as well as whether they socialize with Spanish-speaking peers (Cuellar et al., 1995). Adolescents responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (none) to 5 (very much or all of the time). See Table 1 for findings.

Machismo: This measure assessed both positive and negative aspects of male masculinity (Neff, 2001). These are separate, but also overlapping constructs and both can be present within the individual. Although this measure relates to males' attitudes and behaviors, it is also useful to determining how females feel about gender expectations related to males. Youth rated the extent to which they agreed on a 4-point scale (1=strongly disagree; 4= strongly agree). Higher scores indicate higher levels of machismo. See Table 1 for findings.

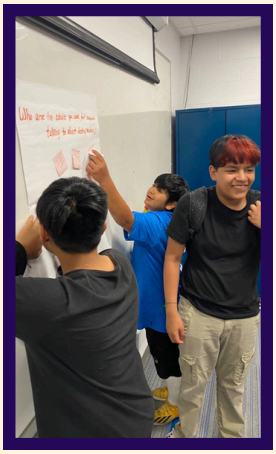
Marianismo: As the counterpart to machismo, this construct measures the endorsement of statements related to how Latinx women should think and behave (Castillo et al., 2010). Males were also assessed on this measure to indicate their endorsement of female gender expectations. Youth rated the extent to which they agreed on a 4-point scale (1=strongly disagree; 4= strongly agree). Therefore, higher scores indicate higher levels of marianismo. This measure also includes subscales, which measure the extent to which Latinx females should be family-oriented, virtuous, subordinate to males, self-silencing, and a spiritual pillar for their families. See Table 1 for findings.

Religiosity: Youth were asked to rate how important religion or religious beliefs are to them on a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important). Youth, on average, reported that religious beliefs were between somewhat (3) and pretty (4) important (M=3.49; SD=1.14). Most youth were Catholic (37.2%) or Christian (22.1%) although many youth (33.7%) did not provide a religious affiliation. They were also asked to rate how often they attend a religious service, ranging from 1 (nearly every day) to 5 (never). Most reported that they attended a religious service a few times a year (M=3.12; SD=1.21).

Table 2. *Cultural Considerations*

Descriptive Information	*Mean (SD)*
Acculturation	
Anglo-orientation	3.73 (.83)
Latinx-orientation	3.45 (1.07)
Overall acculturation*	0.28 (1.50)
Machismo	
Positive	3.22 (.38)
Males only	3.20 (.39)
Females only	3.25 (.37)
Negative	1.87 (.42)
Males only	2.11 (.39)
Females only	1.65 (.38)
Marianismo	
Familism	2.94 (0.50)
Males only	3.01 (0.46)
Females only	2.89 (0.54)
Virtuous	2.63 (0.64)
Males only	2.71 (0.52)
Females only	2.57 (0.74)
Subordinate	1.81 (0.56)
Males only	2.10 (0.53)
Females only	1.56 (0.46)
Silencing	1.87 (0.64)
Males only	2.05 (0.47)
Females only	1.75 (0.46)
Spiritual	3.32 (0.46)
Males only	2.37 (0.71)
Females only	2.30 (0.59)

Note. Overall acculturation - the closer to "0", the more biculturated the sample is. This sample is, on average, bicultural.



Dating Violence

Escalating Arguments: Youth who had ever dated were asked to rate whether they experienced 'out of control' arguments with their partner (termed "flooding"; Gottman, 1999). These 15 statements were rated as either 'true' or 'false' and a total score was computed. The average number of statements endorsed as 'true' was 4.78 (SD=3.85). The highest number of statements endorsed was 14. Total flooding scores were significantly correlated with total dating violence victimization ($r=.30$; $p<.01$), and specifically with both perpetrating ($r=.31$; $p<.01$) and being victim to emotional violence ($r=.39$; $p<.01$) as well as perpetrating ($r=.33$; $p<.01$) and being victim ($r=.35$; $p<.01$) to physical violence perpetration.

Acceptance of Dating Violence Norms: This measure assessed the extent to which adolescents endorsed acceptance of dating violence behaviors (Foshee et al., 1998). It uses a 4-point Likert scale where 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree. On average, adolescents reported strong disagreement that dating violence is acceptable ($M=1.37$; $SD=.44$).

Dating Violence: This measure assessed whether and the extent to which adolescents had enacted violence against a dating partner or had been victim to violence by a dating partner in the past year (Fernández-González et al., 2012). Youth were asked to respond whether each type of violence (physical, sexual, emotional) happened never (1), seldom (2; 1-2 times), sometimes (3; 3-5 times), or often (4; 6+ times). If they had enacted or been victim to dating violence at least one time in the past year, this was counted as having experienced "any" violence.

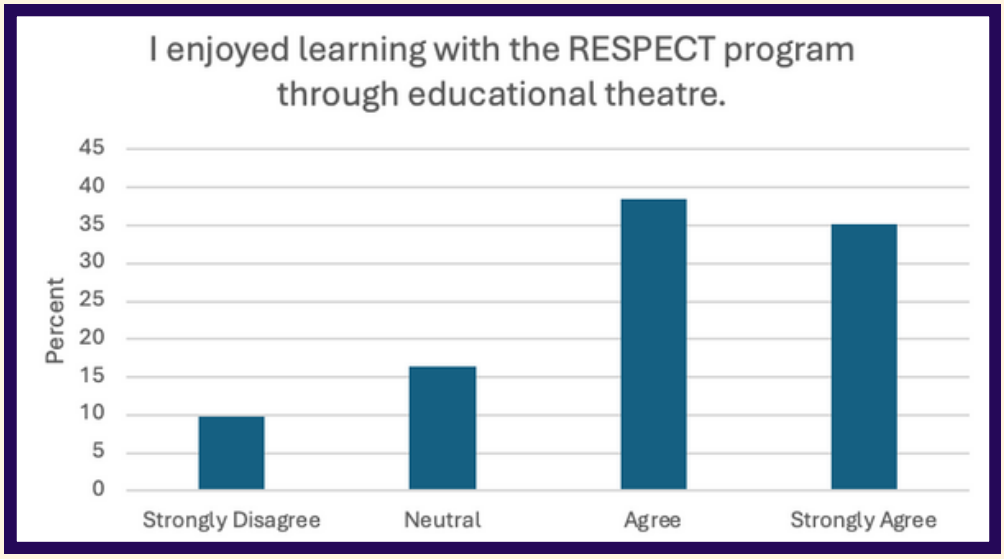
Cyber abuse: This measure assessed whether and the extent to which adolescents had enacted cyber abuse (a.k.a. digital dating abuse) against a partner or been victim to cyber abuse by a partner in the past year (Borrajo et al., 2015). Youth were asked to respond on a 6 point Likert scale as to whether abuse had happened never (1) to usually (6). Types of abuse included direct aggression (e.g., spreading rumors via technology, sending sexual photos without permission) and controlling violence (e.g., using technology to control a partner, and/or using technology to excessively control a partner's whereabouts or who they were spending time with). If they had enacted or been victim to cyber abuse at least one time in the past year, this was counted as having experienced "any" violence.

Table 3. *In-Person and Cyber Dating Violence*

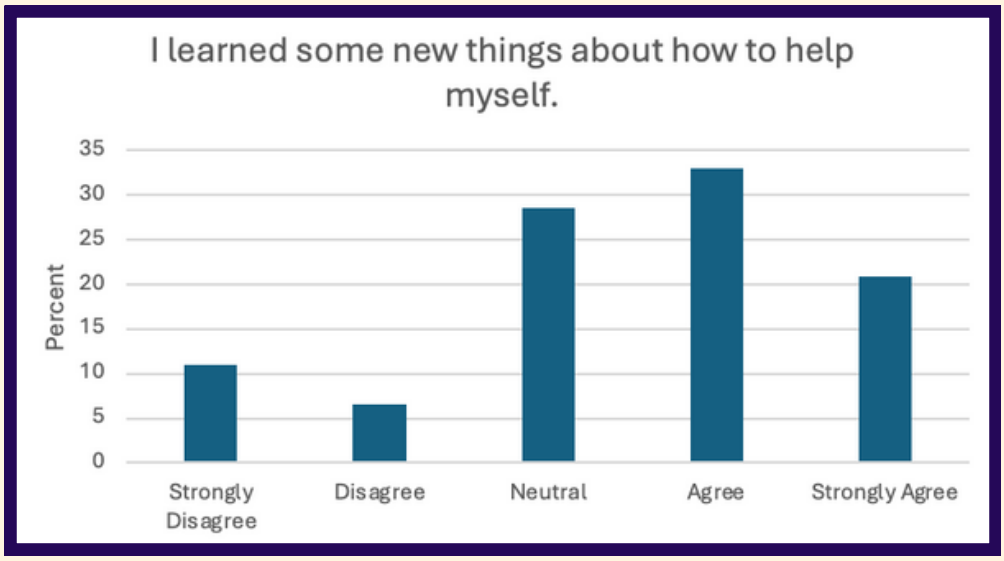
Descriptive Information	*Frequency*
Ever Dated	78.9%
Perpetrated Any Physical Violence	22.7%
Males	20.7%
Females	25.0%
Victim of Any Physical Violence	25.0%
Males	33.3%
Females	20.5%
Perpetrated Any Sexual Violence	9.2%
Males	13.3%
Females	6.8%
Victim of Any Sexual Violence	18.4%
Males	13.3%
Females	22.7%
Perpetrated Any Emotional Violence	64.5%
Males	53.3%
Females	75.0%
Victim of Any Emotional Violence	61.3%
Males	58.6%
Females	65.9%
Perpetrated Any Direct Cyber Abuse	19.2%
Males	25.0%
Females	16.3%
Victim of Any Direct Cyber Abuse	24.7%
Males	35.7%
Females	18.6%
Perpetrated Any Controlling Cyber Abuse	35.6%
Males	35.7%
Females	37.2%
Victim of Any Controlling Cyber Abuse	42.5%
Males	39.3%
Females	46.5%

Note. Valid percentages were used when there was missing data.

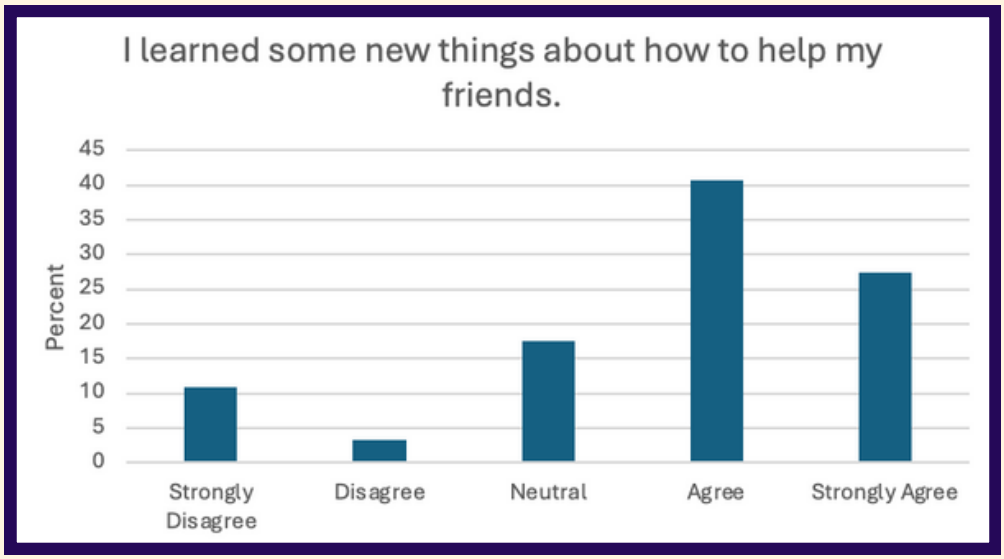
RESPECT Program:
"Cracked, but not Broken"



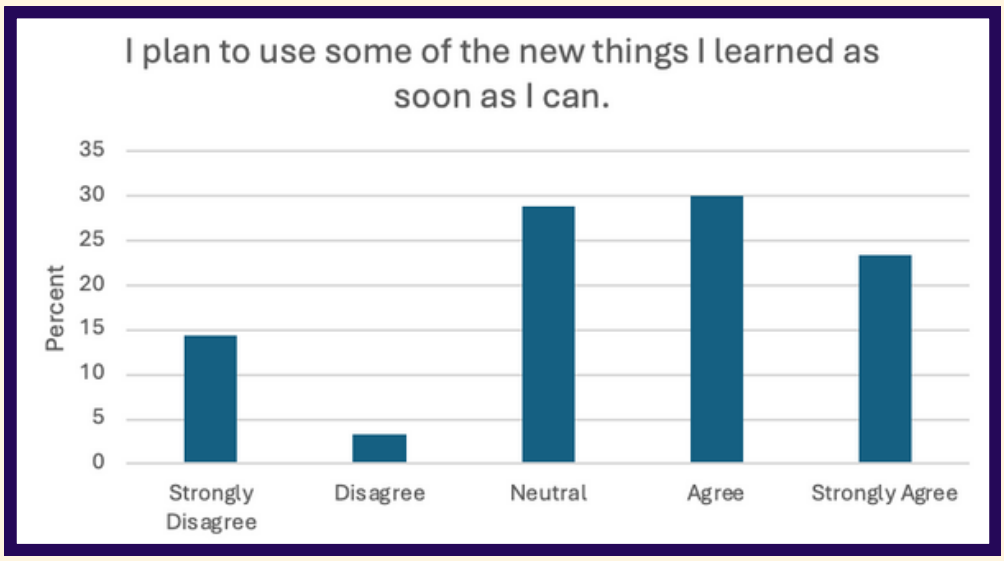
73.7% of teens either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they enjoyed learning with the RESPECT program through educational theatre.



53.9% of teens either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they learned some new things about how to help themselves.



68.2% of teens either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they learned some new things about how to help their friends.



53.3% of teens either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they planned to use some of the new things they’d learned as soon as they could.

Something I learned from the play was...

“to not let a relationship mess up my friendships”

“I learned how to recognize some signs of a toxic relationship”

“I learned it’s ok to ask for help when I need it”

“to stick up for my friends”

“to leave a toxic relationship”

“something I learned from this play is talk to your partner soft/calm”

“If you feel something is wrong, say something”

“violence is not okay”

Who are the adults you would feel comfortable talking to about dating violence?

my mom or my close cousin

after school club leader

my counselor

therapist, doctor, counselor, parents, friends

mentor

The staff at the [after-school program]

my sisters

parents; my student advisor

How did the play make you feel? Why?

"made me feel aware of how badly things could if you aren't careful with the people you choose to be around"

"it made me feel good; it was a really realistic play and I feel like it's relatable to so many people"

"it made me feel bad because people have to go through that and sometimes even worse than that"

"I learned how to recognize some signs of a toxic relationship"

"emotional"

"so good because now I can help people"

"de que la violencia nunca es una buena solucion; 'that violence is never a good solution'"

"I felt identified"

What else did teens say?

- Youth enjoyed the play and felt that it was highly applicable to their lives.
- Youth felt that, in addition to the one-sided male perpetration depicted in the play, bidirectional forms of violence are common. In this type of violence, both partners are perpetrators and victims. This process reflects escalating arguments or 'out of control' fights where emotional violence precedes physical violence. This was supported by the data finding that most youth (65%) who had dated had been emotionally violent with a partner; this was correlated with physical violence perpetration.
- Youth's suggestions for incorporating cultural norms included those related to gender-related expectations, religion, and family values.
- Youth suggested a number of ways in which the play could be contextualized culturally – for example, having youth meet for the first time at a quinceañera or having the boyfriend play soccer instead of baseball.
- Youth dialogue pertaining to help-seeking highlighted that most youth would speak to a parent (typically mom), extended family (e.g., cousins) or to a friend if they were experiencing dating violence. Few said that they would speak to a school counselor.
- Most youth reported that they learned how to better help a friend who is experiencing violence.

Questions about this report?
Contact Dr. Heidi Rueda at hrueda@unomaha.edu

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