

The YouthBuild USA Evaluation Study of Love Notes....Making Relationships Work for Young Adults and Young Parents

Evaluator: Jennifer Kerpelman, Ph. D., Auburn University
July 12, 2010

Executive Summary

Evaluation of the YouthBuild USA Love Notes project showed that the Love Notes participants improved in their attitudes, knowledge, perceived skills, and behaviors associated with healthy relationships. Specifically, participants showed increases in: perceived knowledge gained across the different topics addressed in the curriculum (self-knowledge, decision making, relationship development, understanding and promoting relationship health, conflict management/avoiding relationship violence, and knowledge about sexual health/preventing STIs and pregnancy). When compared with the control group, the Love Notes group was higher at post program in their perceived capacity to pace a relationship and set appropriate boundaries, their knowledge of healthy relationships, and their perceived capacity to engage in relationship planning. They also were lower than the control group at post program in their endorsement of aggression in dating relationships and in their endorsements of negative parenting beliefs. Those currently in romantic relationships were lower in their use of emotional and physical/verbal aggression in these relationships. Overall, the results indicate that the Love Notes program is effective in facilitating understanding of healthy relationship beliefs and processes.

Table of Contents

- I. Comparisons of the Retained and nonRetained Groups
- II. Demographic Comparisons between the Retained Love Notes and Control Groups
- III. Post-Test with Retrospective Pre-Test Measure of Change
- IV. Pre/Post Measures
- V. Pre and Post Comparisons of Love Notes and Control Groups
- VI. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

I. Comparisons of the Retained and nonRetained Groups

A total of 486 Love Notes participants and 153 Control participants returned completed pre-surveys. Of these participants, 201 Love Notes participants and 85 Control participants also returned completed post-surveys. This evaluation report focuses on the participants who returned both pre- and post-surveys.

The Love Notes participants who did (retained group; n=201) and did not (nonretained group; n=285) complete post-surveys were compared using independent samples t-tests on age, amount of schooling prior to starting the YouthBuild program, amount of schooling desired, mother's education, father's education, and for those currently in romantic relationships, the length of time involved; no differences were found between the groups. Chi-square tests were used to compare the groups on the categorical variables of gender, race, marital status, relationships status, and parental status. The only difference found was for race. The retained group had slightly fewer African American participants than the group that was not retained (54% and 67%, respectively), and slightly more European American participants than the group that was not retained (20% and 10%, respectively). The groups were similar for the percent of participants representing other ethnicities. Overall, the comparisons suggest that the retained group was quite similar to the nonretained group and the findings can be generalized to the full group of Love Notes participants.

Similar comparisons were made for participants in the control group that were and were not retained. Results of the independent samples t-tests indicated no differences for age, schooling obtained prior to YouthBuild, amount of schooling desired, mother's education, father's education, or length of time in a current romantic relationship. The chi-square tests indicated a number of minor differences between the retained and nonretained control group participants. The retained group showed a better gender balance (69% males, 31% females) than the nonretained group (83% males, 17% females). The group that was not retained had 8% European American participants, whereas the retained group had 1% European Americans. The groups were similar for the other racial categories. Finally for relationship status, the retained group had no "engaged to be married" individuals, where the group that was not retained had 11% who reported that status. The group that was not retained also had 7% who were married, whereas the retained group had 1% indicating they were married. These small differences between the retained and nonretained control groups suggest that the findings for the retained group can be considered generalizable to the full group of control participants, with some caution regarding the minor differences in gender, racial, and relationship status between the groups. Confidence in the generalizability of the findings will be strengthened through replication.

II. Demographic Comparisons of Retained Love Notes and Control Groups

Table 1: Age, Gender and Race/Ethnicity

	Love Notes Group (N=201)	Control Group (N=85)
Age	19.6 (2.10)	19.5 (1.66)
Gender	68% male/32% female	69% male/31% female
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	54%	80%
European American	10%	12%
Hispanic/Latino	22%	1%
Other ethnicities	16%	6%

Participants in both groups ranged in age from 16-24; they were similar in their mean ages. Both group contained more male than female participants. A chi square test ($p < .01$) indicated that the Love Notes and control groups differed in their racial composition. The Control group contained a larger percentage of African American participants; the Love Notes group contained a larger percentage of Hispanic/Latino participants and participants of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Table 2: Education

	Love Notes Group (N=201)	Control Group (N=85)
Education Prior to YouthBuild		
<8 th	2%	3%
8 th	5%	5%
9 th	20%	20%
10 th	25%	27%
11 th	35%	33%
12 th	13%	12%
Education Expected		
<High School	1%	1%
High School	9%	12%
Trade/Voc.	16%	21%
Community Col.	19%	21%
4-year College	43%	40%
Graduate School	12%	3%
No response	1%	2%

The Love Notes and Control groups were relatively similar in their education completed prior to beginning the YouthBuild program. The students' anticipated educational attainments also appeared similar. The majority expected some education post high school.

Table 3: Relationship/Family Status/Parental Education

	Love Notes Group (N=201)	Control Group (N=85)
Single, Never Married	97%	95%
Currently Married	1%	1%
Previously Married	2%	2%
No response	0%	2%
Relationship Status		
Not dating	37%	37%
Casually Dating	26%	13%
Seriously Dating	26%	39%
Engaged	2%	1%
Married	1%	3%
Cohabiting	7%	7%
Parental Status		
Expecting child	10%	11%
One child	20%	17%
Two children	7%	5%
Three children	3%	3%
Partner has children	24%	17%
Caring for other children	11%	8%
Residential Status –live with:		
Both parents	16%	13%
One parent	36%	31%
Parent and Stepparent	12%	8%
Grandparent(s)	9%	10%
Foster family	1%	0%
Partner/Spouse	6%	6%
Roommates	3%	4%
Alone	7%	9%
Other	10%	19%

Table Continues

Table 3 (contd.)

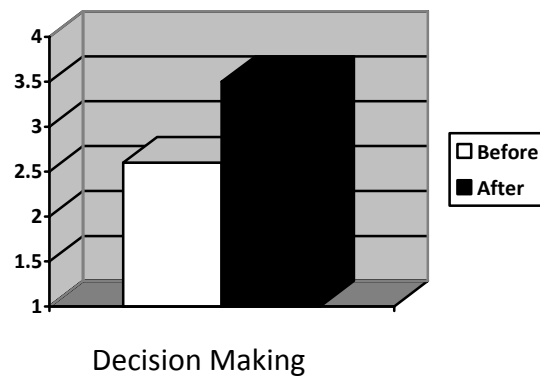
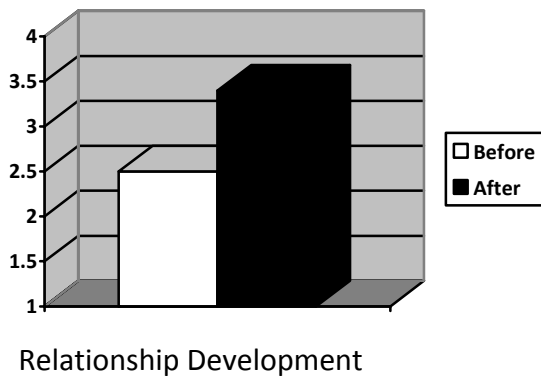
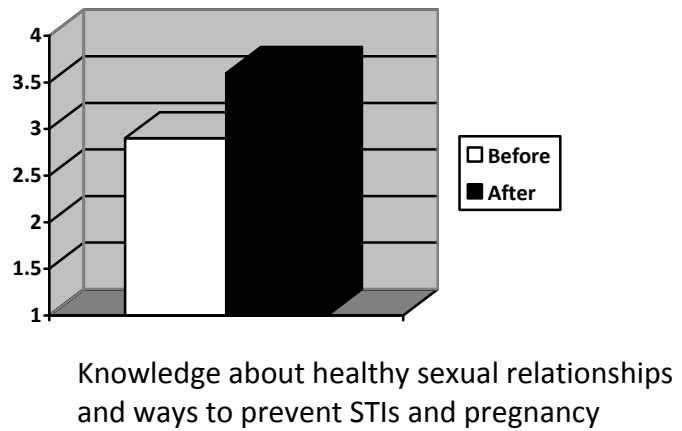
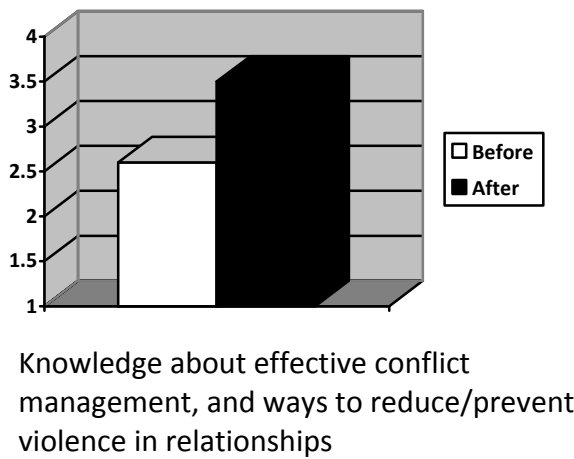
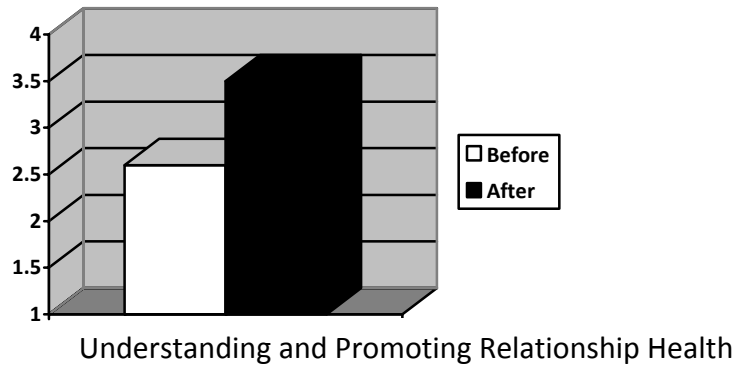
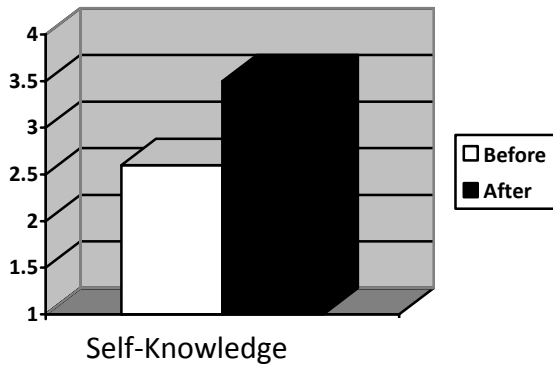
	Love Notes Group	Control Group
Mother's Education		
< High School	21%	16%
High School/GED	45%	39%
Trade/Vocational	2%	3%
Some College	14%	16%
2-year Degree	5%	11%
4-year Degree	4%	8%
Graduate School	1%	3%
N/A	4%	4%
Father's Education		
< High School	21%	21%
High School/GED	25%	28%
Trade/Vocational	5%	1%
Some College	5%	7%
2-year Degree	2%	3%
4-year Degree	4%	3%
Graduate School	2%	3%
N/A	36%	34%

The relationship status for both the Love Notes and Control groups indicated that about a third were not currently in dating relationships, but approximately half were either in casual or serious dating relationships. An additional small percentage was either married or cohabiting. A noteworthy minority of the YouthBuild students, especially in the Love Notes group, was expecting a child or currently caring for a child. Responses to the question about residential status indicated, for both groups, that a substantial portion of the youth lived with one of their biological/adoptive parents (single parent family household). The rest of the students were living in a wide range of family structures.

III. Post-Test with Retrospective Pre-Test Measure of Change

The Love Notes participants completed a post-test with retrospective pre-test that had them assess their knowledge about different topics covered in the Love Notes Curriculum, BEFORE having the course and AFTER having the course. This approach is useful for ascertaining participant perceptions of the knowledge they have gained as a result of taking the course. This form of self-report measure avoids pretest sensitivity and response shift bias that may result from pretest overestimation or underestimation (Pratt, McGuigan, & Katzev, 2000). Participation in the program may shift participants' frame of knowledge about what they knew before receiving the program that would not have been captured using the traditional pre/post evaluation method. Thus, traditional methods alone may fail to capture the change that has occurred as the result of an intervention.

Perceived Knowledge Gains: Mean Changes from Pre to Post Program



The above graphs depict a consistent pattern observed in Love Notes participants' perceived gains in knowledge. Across all the key areas addressed in the curriculum (each area is assessed by multiple items), the participants indicated that they knew significantly less before (knowledge was fair to good) the Love Notes program, and significantly more after (knowledge as good to excellent) the program as a result of receiving the Love Notes program.

V. Pre and Post Comparisons of Love Notes and Control Groups: Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills and Behaviors

True pre/post measures also were administered to both the Love Notes and Control groups. The pre and post surveys used standard measures, as well as measures created specifically for this evaluation to assess knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors relevant to romantic/close relationships. The measures assessing relationship behaviors were answered only by those currently in dating relationships; the rest of the items were answered by all participants. Areas addressed in the evaluation analyses included: relationship aggression, the role of sex in relationships, building healthy relationships, social skills, and general relationship skill. Behaviors occurring within couple relationships that were assessed include: use of emotional aggression, use of verbal/physical aggression, and efforts to provide support to one's partner (see Table 4).

Table 4. Example items and Internal Consistency of Scales Used

Scale	Example Item	Internal Consistency at Pre (Post)
Pacing/Boundary Setting (5-items; 1-4 scale)	<i>"I plan to pace the physical part of my future relationships slowly."</i>	$\alpha=.90 (.92)$
Knowledge about Healthy Relationship Building (7-items; 1-5 scale)	<i>"I know about the other kinds of connections that build intimacy aside from sex."</i>	$\alpha=.82 (.85)$
Relationship Planning	<i>"I am able to take the steps needed to make a relationship work. "</i>	$\alpha=.75(.88)$
Attitudes about Sex (9-items; 1-5 scale)	<i>"Having sex is a good way to build a new relationship."</i>	$\alpha=.72 (.75)$
Endorsement of Aggression in Dating Relationships (4-items; 1-5 scale)	<i>"I think pushing, grabbing or shoving is a good way to end a conflict."(reverse-scored)</i>	$\alpha=.70 (.81)$
Emotional Aggression (5-items; 0-3 scale)	<i>"I threatened to break up with my partner to get him or her to do what I wanted."</i>	$\alpha=.81 (.89)$

Table Continues

Table 4 (contd.)

Scale	Example Item	Internal Consistency at Pre (Post)
Physical/Verbal Aggression (6-items; 0-3 scale)	<i>"I insulted or swore at my partner."</i>	$\alpha=.79$ (.86)
Negative Parenting Beliefs (7-items; 1-4 scale)	<i>"I can do whatever I want as long as I provide for my baby."</i>	$\alpha=.74$ (.73)
Social Skills	<i>"I am good at telling a partner or close friend she or he has done something to hurt my feelings."</i>	$\alpha=.90$ (.91)
Relationship Confidence	<i>"I have the skills a person needs to make a relationship last."</i>	$\alpha=.60$ (.66)
Partner Support	<i>"To what extent can your partner turn to you for advice about problems?"</i>	$\alpha=.93$ (.91)

Scale reliabilities ranged from .60 to .92, with only one scale having a reliability score less than .70 (it is desirable to have reliability scores that are .70 and greater).

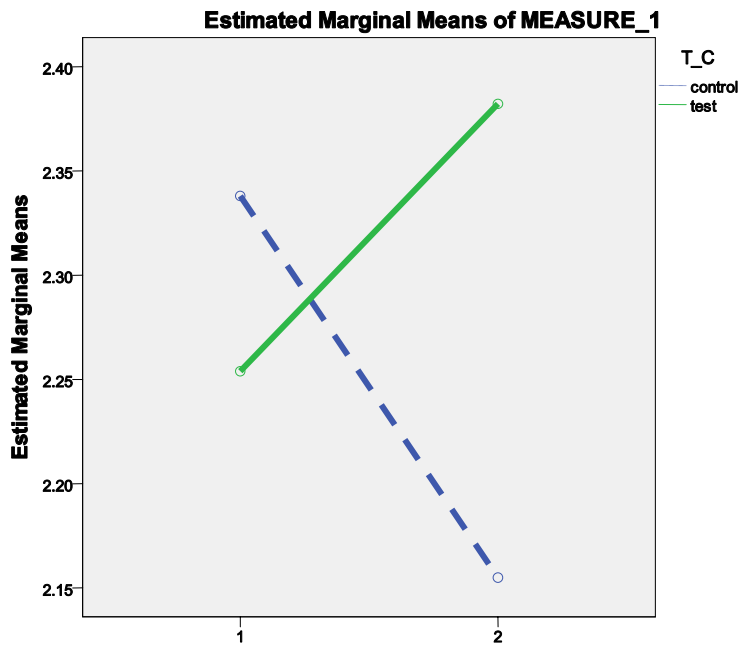
All repeated measures tests are 1-tailed (using a $p < .05$ significance level) since the direction of effects was hypothesized for all changes. That is, it was hypothesized that Love Notes participants would increase positive knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviors, and decrease negative attitudes and behaviors.

V. Pre and Post Comparisons of Love Notes and Control Groups: Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills and Behaviors

The graphics on the following pages depict significant differences between Love Notes and Control Groups. Differences were found for the majority of variables, with the exceptions of attitudes about sex, social skills, and relationship confidence. For these variables both Love Notes and Control groups started relatively high and did not show significant changes or differences from each other from pre to post test. Preliminary examination of gender differences did not yield any significant findings; thus males and females appeared to respond similarly to the Love Notes program. However, given the small subsample of female participants, this will need to be replicated.

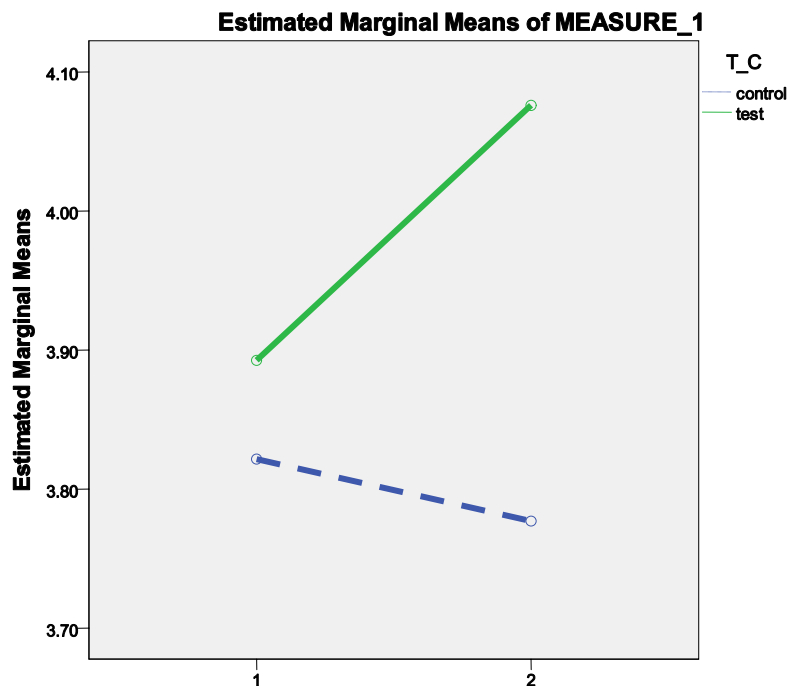
Comparisons of Love Notes and Control Groups (all significance tests are 1-tailed, $p < .05$)

Pacing/Boundary Setting



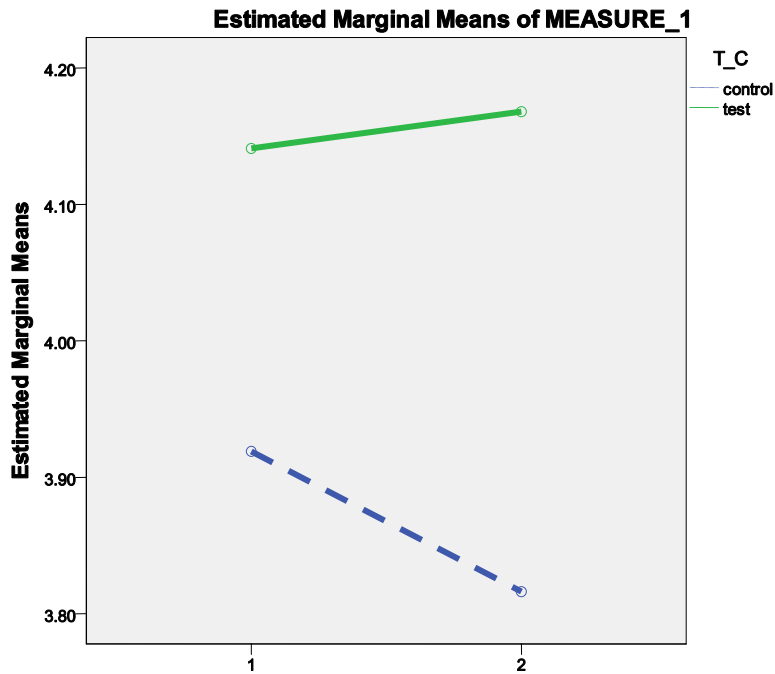
The Love Notes group was significantly higher in Pacing/Boundary Setting than the Control group at T2.

Knowledge about Healthy Relationship Building



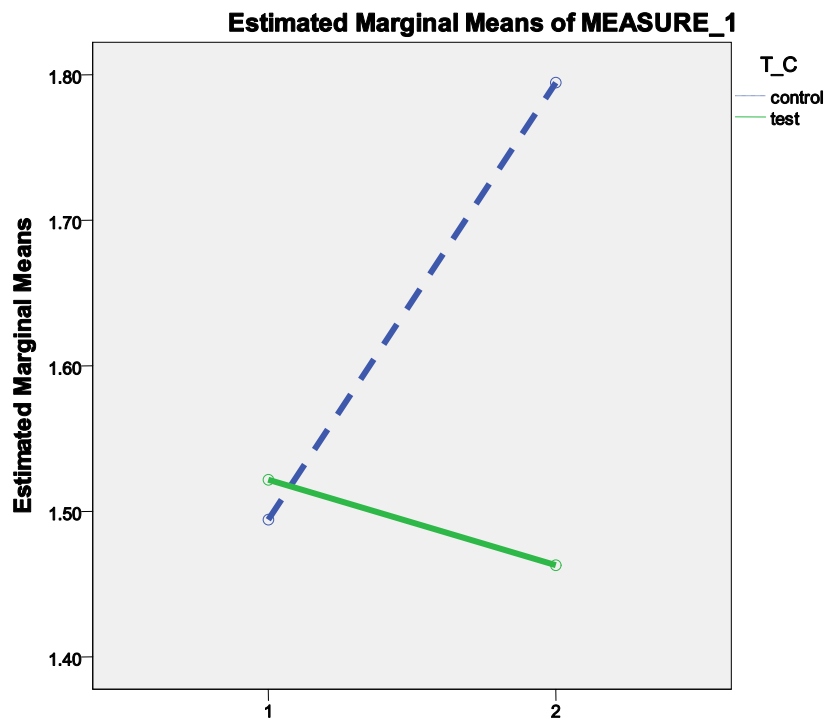
The Love Notes group shows an increasing pattern from T1 to T2, and was significantly higher than the Control group in knowledge about healthy relationship building at T2.

Relationship Planning

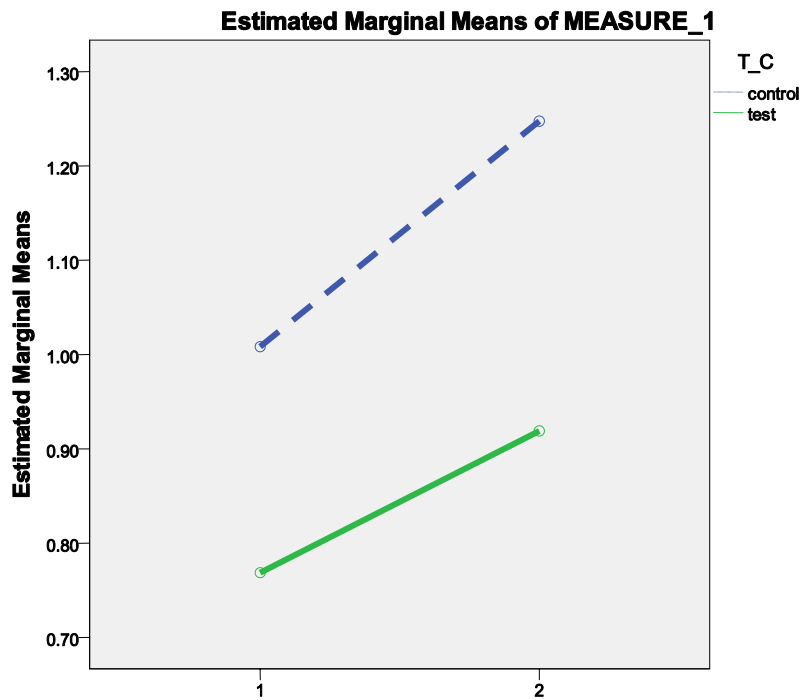


Both groups started relatively high in relationship planning at T1; the Love Notes group retained its high level of planning and was significantly higher than the Control group at T2

Endorsement of Aggression in Relationships

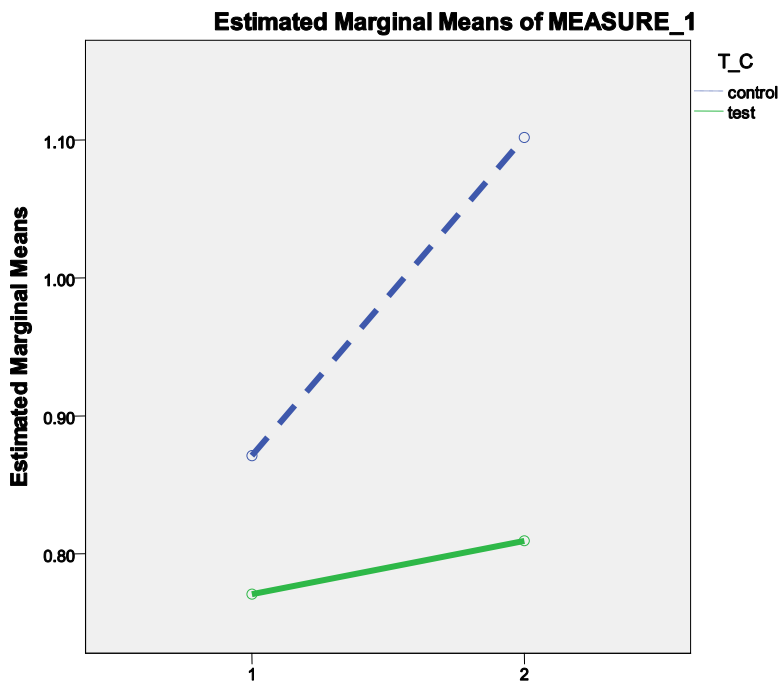


The Love Notes group stayed low in its endorsement of aggression, the Control group shows an increasing pattern and is significantly higher than the Love Note Group at T2.

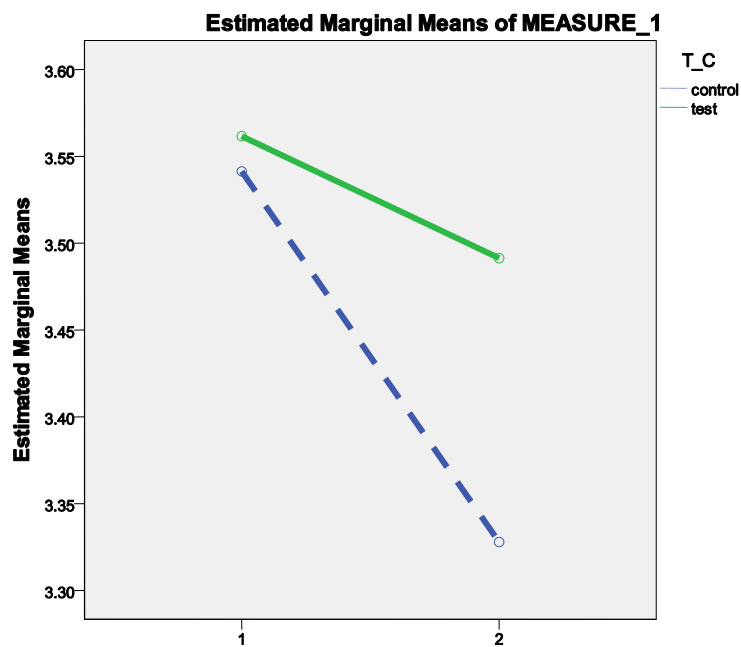


Although both groups are relatively low in their use of emotional aggression, the Control group shows more of an increase in its use from T1 to T2 and is higher than the Love Notes Group at T2.

Use of Physical/Verbal Aggression in Current Dating Relationship

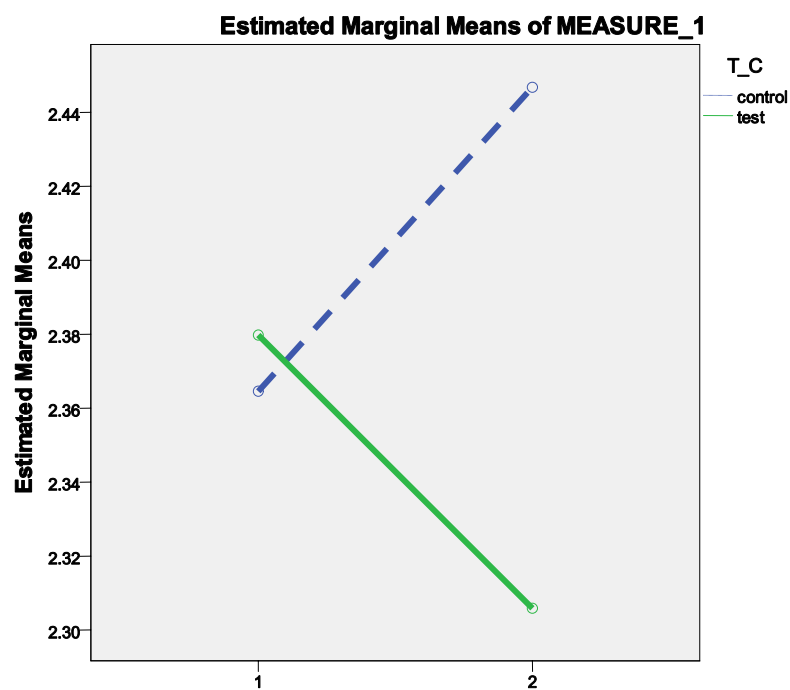


Although both groups are relatively low in their use of physical/verbal aggression, the Control group shows an increased T1 to T2 and is higher than the Love Notes Group at T2.



Although neither group increased in their reports of engaging in supportive behaviors toward a partner, the Control group showed a sharper decreasing pattern and was significantly lower than the Love Notes group at

Endorsement of Negative Parenting Beliefs



The Love Notes Group shows a decreasing pattern and the Control Group shows an increasing pattern of endorsing negative parenting beliefs; the Control group was higher than the Love Notes group at T2.

VI. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of the YouthBuild USA Love Notes evaluation indicate that the curriculum is effective in educating youth about healthy relationships. The retrospective knowledge gain measure showed that the Love Notes participants' perceived gains in knowledge in all areas assessed (i.e., self-knowledge, decision making, relationship development, understanding and promoting relationship health, understanding and reducing/prevention relationship aggression, and knowledge of ways to promote sexual health and reduce/prevent contraction of STIs and unwanted pregnancy).

Comparisons between the Love Notes and Control groups showed several areas where the Love Notes participants were holding more positive/healthy beliefs and engaging in more positive behaviors post curriculum than was the control group. It also was found that the Love Notes participants had lower negative/unhealthy beliefs and engaged in less negative behaviors post curriculum than did the control group. Specific areas that showed differences were: relationship pacing and boundary setting, knowledge about healthy relationship building, relationship planning, the value and use of aggression in relationships (emotional, physical, verbal), partner support and parenting beliefs.

The results of the analyses of the pre- and post-surveys suggest that the Love Notes program is effective in helping improve adolescents' and young adults' understanding of relationships and what makes relationships healthy and unhealthy. It also appears that the program enhances perceptions of knowledge and skills and has potential to influence behavior; especially behaviors such as use of emotional, physical and verbal aggression that damage relationships and put the well-being of one or both partners at risk. Future evaluation should include a larger control sample and better gender and racial balance in both the Love Notes and control samples. The addition of qualitative data that includes participant/teacher interviews or focus groups, as well as follow up assessments also would be of value.

Reference

Pratt, C., McGuigan, W., & Katzev, A. 2000. Measuring program outcomes using retrospective pre-test methodology. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 21, 341-350.