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Rewriting Sexual Violence Prevention: A Comparative Rhetorical
Analysis of Online Prevention Courses in the United States and New Zealand

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Rewriting Sexual Violence Prevention: A Comparative Rhetorical Analysis of Online Prevention Courses in the United States and New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

As part of a larger research project on the rhetoric of sexual violence prevention in online university courses, the researcher conducted rhetorical analyses of two prevention courses from the United States and New Zealand. This study analyzed the rhetorical strategies used in two courses with attention to five subcategories: content genres, ways the content addresses the audience, messaging strategies, levels of prevention, and sentence-level choices. From the analyses, the researcher recommends rhetorical considerations for prevention courses. While the New Zealand course had more effective language choices, the US course had a better overall narrative structure.

CCS Concepts

CCS → Human-centered computing → Interaction design → Interaction design process and methods → User interface design

Keywords

sexual violence prevention, rhetorical analysis, online training courses

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INTRODUCTION

This project examines which rhetorical strategies in online sexual assault prevention courses for college students best promote prevention. In the past, few researchers have studied which rhetorical elements make online prevention courses more effective, and this study intends to fill the gap through a multi-cultural comparative analysis of courses from New Zealand and the United States.

I compared a popular US course to a New Zealand course because New Zealand has some of the best sexual violence prevention programs in the world (Julich et. al, 2015). Julich et. al (2015) discusses how, because New Zealand has higher reporting rates than other countries, people feel confident to report incidents of sexual violence, demonstrating their prevention efforts are more effective than countries such as the US, which has lower reporting rates. However, little research has been done comparing specific prevention courses between the two countries.

Online courses, such as these two online prevention courses, have transformed learning instruction. Croom et. al (2009) discusses how these courses make topics such as alcohol prevention accessible to a larger population and allow students to digest the information at their own pace. A study from Jaggars and Xu (2016) suggests the most important variable for students' learning in online courses was interpersonal interaction. While many of their interpersonal interaction suggestions couldn't be built into a one-time prevention course, some— such as showing empathy by appealing to shared values, constructing a narrative with the student in it, and using multiple genres of content—could be implemented in prevention course design. While online courses are more accessible, course designers need to try to create content that resonates with the user.

Little research exists about the rhetorical aspects of sexual violence prevention courses. Studies have concluded that even programs with the exact same information will vary in effectiveness (Breitenbecher & Scarce, 2001; Rich et al., 2010; Orchowski et al., 2016; Choate, 2003). Scholars have suggested that areas such as content delivery, usability and organization of programs, and

length of course are under-examined, and more research on how to effectively deliver these programs is needed (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Kleinsasser et al., 2015; Vladutiu et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, there are some established best practices for prevention training. When it comes to the organization and genre of prevention courses, scholars have determined online courses can be more accessible than face-to-face courses, especially if they are well designed and include videos and examples. Orchowski et al. (2016) found that online sexual assault prevention courses are more effective than in-person programs because they are accessible to more individuals and can be taken at the convenience of the user. Scholars also have established that treating the audience as bystanders instead of potential perpetrators or victims is the best audience approach (Choate, 2003; Kleinsasser et al., 2015). Some scholars have found that perpetrator prevention can create hostility in men, while others have found victim-based prevention can increase anxiety and fear in participants (Rich et al., 2010; Breitenbecher & Scarce, 2001). Most people can recognize themselves as bystanders, but it's hard for many to picture themselves as a potential perpetrator or victim. However, some believe perpetrator prevention can work too (Choate, 2003).

Along with how the audience is treated, it is also best to address prevention on an individual, communal, and societal level while appealing to shared values (Dills & Brown, 2019). Addressing sexual violence on the individual level focuses on what the individual can do to prevent or respond to sexual violence. Community-focused content looks at what the local community, including university administration and on-campus groups, can do to prevent or respond to sexual violence. Society-focused content is geared towards creating a culture that supports sexual violence prevention or content about the actions of legal and governmental institutions.

There are also considerations around building a narrative and creating empowering messaging around prevention. Productive courses create a narrative around the issue, and show specific, anecdotal ways in which prevention is possible (Svejkar, 2019). It also is important for the narrative to not only address heteronormative relationships and normative bodies, but to also address the larger spectrum of sexual violence issues outside of straight relationships (Edenfield, 2019). Baker, Henriquez, and Hostler (2018) also recommend evoking shared values, acknowledging negative feelings, and illustrating past prevention successes through examples to strengthen the messaging of prevention courses.

From a language perspective, scholars recommend using people-first language, active voice, examples and analogies, and to not hide verbs (Baker, Henriquez & Hostler, 2018). People-first language emphasizes the humanity of the person instead of the label. For example, in the context of the research, "a person who is a survivor of sexual assault" instead of "a survivor of sexual assault." Scholars also have determined that it's best to use active voice over passive voice (Choate, 2003; Kleinsasser, et al., 2015). Other scholars have expanded those language guidelines to include using plain language, emphasizing the importance of prevention, and conveying what prevention looks like in "concrete, measurable terms" (Dills & Brown, 2019). Overall, using plain language and having cohesive, empowering messaging might lead to more effective prevention courses, though few have studied all these variables together from the rhetorical perspective. This study

attempts to address this gap so that professional writers and other communication specialists are better prepared to contribute to the (re)design of online prevention courses.

ONLINE PREVENTION COURSES STUDIED

With this prior research in mind, the current study examined the rhetorical choices enacted in two online prevention courses. The US course was created by a company contracted by universities across the country. The company claims their course is the most widely used in the United States. At the time of analysis, the course was organized into modules with a quiz before each module and two quizzes (a survey of attitude and a content-based quiz) after each. The modules were:

- Introduction
- Presurvey
- Quiz
- Values
- Identity and relationships
- Gender identities and stereotypes
- Sexual harassment and stalking
- Consent, coercion and stepping in
- Reporting and responding
- Exam
- Conclusion

The New Zealand course was created by a company that distributes sexual violence prevention courses to residential halls and campus-owned apartments in New Zealand and Australia. It included a couple significant sections and a content-based quiz at the end. The course was significantly shorter than the US course and did not have official modules, though sections covered were:

- Sexual assault
- Sexual harassment
- Consent

With the best practices derived from past literature in mind, I designed a comparative rhetorical analysis to measure the effectiveness of these courses. Through the rhetorical analysis of these two online courses, I addressed the following questions: What are the most effective rhetorical techniques in online sexual assault prevention programs? What is the best rhetorical model for these courses? Are there any differences in the rhetorical strategies between the New Zealand and US courses? If so, how do these differences impact the effectiveness of these programs?

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Even though this comparative rhetorical analysis is focused on a text-based analysis, my work is guided by a user-centered methodology. Writing about user-centered methodology, Michael J. Salvo (2001) argues, "the development of effective collaborative methods requires meaningful communication between users and designers" (p. 273). User-centered research and design treats users

as partners and is a good framework to consider when studying online communication because online mediums allow for more opportunities for users to interact with texts (Potts, 2009). In order to ensure these rhetorical analyses were user centered, I paired them with a literature review on the culture around sexual violence prevention in the United States and New Zealand. By pairing these methods with secondary research on the cultural context of prevention in both countries, I could ground the research in the rhetorical context to make my analysis and recommendations more useful.

The rhetorical analyses of the two courses focused on the organization and language of each course. These two categories were determined based on the emphasis of higher order and lower order concerns in the field of rhetoric. The individual practices (some of which were recommended from past literature and are marked with an asterisk in Tables 1-5) within each category were based on recommendations from past literature on the topic and are outlined in depth in the discussion of each subcategory.

Both courses had multiple pages or screen views, with buttons to click to go from one slide to the next, and one screen capture was taken every time the user clicked onto a new screen. In order to see how often, and the quality of, best practices in these courses, I utilized a mixed methods approach. Mixed methods research provides more insight into the overall effectiveness through providing quantitative and qualitative data. While mixed method research is less common than qualitative analysis in the field of rhetoric and communication, it can provide a more holistic picture, such as how often best practices were used in this particular study.

My quantitative data was collected through counting how often each variable (shown below in Tables 1-5) occurred in each screen capture and was recorded on a spreadsheet. Each time a best practice was found in a screen capture, I made note of that in the spreadsheet and totaled up how often each best practice occurred. For qualitative data, I wrote down in a separate Word file every example of each best practice to provide more context to the quantitative data. While I based the majority of my results off of the quantitative data and how often best practices occurred, the qualitative data gave examples of how they were being used and could be insightful to future, more specific analyses of how the best practices were used in each course.

Genre of Course Content (Subcategory 1)

The first subcategory was the genre of the instructional material in the screen capture, whether an interactive activity, a video, a text only screen capture, a reflective question, or policy/legal content (see Table 1). The genres were determined based on the content found in both of the courses; however, the “text only” and “contains a reflective question” were added to discern when a screen capture contained only a body of text. Vladutiu et. al. (2011) found programs with more opportunities for interaction led to larger content retention rates; thus, interactive content was an important variable to research when addressing genre.

Analysis of genre in the US and New Zealand

The organization for the US course emphasized the quiz and survey portion with less time devoted to teaching course materials. There were 43 screen captures (or 33% of the course) devoted towards the pre-survey, quiz, and exam. While reflection on behaviors and

Table 1: Genre of content addressed in both courses

Variable	Definition	Example
Interactive*	Screen captures where the user must interact with the online course in some capacity	Activity where the user defines their values in US course
Policy/Legal Question	Screen captures that have links to legal and university policies and ask the user to acknowledge that they read those policies	Certain parts of the US course take users to a separate page with their state’s domestic abuse laws
Reflective Questions	Screen captures that contain reflective questions, but don’t ask the user to interact with those questions	“Have you ever thought about what you would do if you saw someone in an unsafe or problematic situation?” from the US course
Text only	Screen captures that contain only text	The New Zealand course discussed types of sexual harassment in a text-only screen capture
Video	Screen captures of video content	Different people talking about how they are a part of the <i>It’s On Us</i> movement in a video from the New Zealand course

course content is effective, 33% is more than a third of the course and over half of that material was before the modules began. This is not an effective strategy to keep the users interested in the course as the pre-survey and quiz were lengthy. Further, the pre-survey and quiz delayed the narrative building until users were 24% through the course.

While the quizzes covered 33% of the content, the rest of the course was divided into five genres: text only, interactive content, reflective questions, policy content, and videos. The most common course genre was text only screen captures with 87 of the 175 screen captures falling into this category. For over 50% of the course, students were reading without being asked to interact or reflect. For example, screen capture 128 presents only a long block of text (100 words or more) about reporting and responding to sexual violence.

The second most common category asked the students to interact with the course content. Thirty-one screen captures (18%) fell into this category, with most centering around real-world examples to apply the course content. While examples are effective, many of these examples did not provide outcomes, something that might make students believe prevention isn’t possible.

The third most common genre was policy content, with 15 screen captures (9%) including information on the legal and administrative consequences of sexual violence. Screen capture 49 outlined the sexual violence and interpersonal violence policy for users. It used legal jargon which might be difficult for users in the target age

group (those entering university) to understand. This content might be more helpful if broken down into more common language along with the legal terminology.

The last two genres were reflective questions and videos. Reflective questions asked users to consider how the course material related to them; only six screen captures fell into this category. Screen capture 120, for example, asked students to consider, “Have you ever thought about what you would do if you saw someone in an unsafe or problematic situation?” Another example is screen captures 44 and 45, which contain identity prompts where users can reflect on their identity, but there is nowhere for students to answer these questions. More video content also might have better engaged students. There were 10 videos in total and many contained real-world examples, which is a rhetorically strong way to reinforce course material. For example, a video in the “Consent, Coercion, and Stepping In” module dealt with the importance of consent when on a date. This video walked users through how a fictional character asked for consent on a date. Allowing users to see characters act on principles from the course can be a great way to engage users and reinforce content at the same time.

The New Zealand course was significantly shorter with only 16 screen captures. Six of the screen captures (or 37%) were of quizzes, which is a significant portion focused on quizzing instead of educating. However, the course was organized so the education and narrative came before the quiz. While there were no official modules due to how short the course was, the names of the different sections were clearly labeled.

For subcategory one, the New Zealand course included a lot of interactive screen captures. Six of the screen captures were interactive, with eleven true or false questions that users interacted with. Half of the screen captures were text only. An example of this was the first screen capture, which included a large block of text. Zero screen captures had reflective questions; one had an outline of policy, the sexual discrimination act in New Zealand; and two included videos. Neither video was produced by the course creators, nor in New Zealand; one was from the United Kingdom, and the other was part of the US campaign, *It’s On Us*.

The biggest organizational difference between the courses was the length of each. The US course had over 175 screen captures, including 10 videos, and took the user a couple hours to complete. The New Zealand course had 16 screen captures and 1 video. The length of the course influenced how likely students were to stay engaged. Because the New Zealand course is shorter, past research suggests students might be more engaged during the course (Vladutiu et al., 2011). However, length of course is only one differing variable between the two courses.

The genre of content differed, as well. While the New Zealand course did require the user to take a quiz at the end, there was little interaction throughout the course. In the New Zealand course, the user could click through slides without having to stop and read them until the quiz, which had some questions that didn’t correspond to the course, such as a question on bystander intervention even though the course didn’t cover that topic. In the US course, although individual screens might be text only, the student had to interact with the content at some point in every module through activities or selecting next steps for characters in role playing situations. However, both courses seldom asked the students to stop and reflect on what they were learning. Reflection is a key step to the learning process; it’s hard to retain information without space to

reflect (Ambrose et. al, 2010).

How the Courses Treated the Audience (Subcategory 2)

The second subcategory was the audience focus, analyzing if each screen capture treated the audience as a bystander, potential perpetrator, potential victim, person responding to sexual violence, or person creating an identity (see Table 2). Breitenbecher and Scarce (2001) studied prevention programming targeted at females which treated the audience as potential victims and found participants had negative emotional responses. Choate (2003) created a Men Against Violence model wherein prevention programming addressed men as potential bystanders. Bystander-focused prevention increases confidence in intervening (Choate, 2003; Kleinsasser et. al., 2015). Those who identify as male can sometimes be hostile towards prevention programming, which treats the audience as potential perpetrators (Rich et. al., 2010). Identity building and response-focused content were added as categories due to the appearance of both in the courses, though little research supports either as a best practice. Thus, bystander prevention is the most effective overall.

How the Audience is Addressed in Both Courses

Forty-two screen captures (24%) in the US course treated the users as potential responders, an interesting audience lens for a course on sexual violence prevention. Screen capture 148 treated the users as those responding to sexual violence prevention as a victim, “even if you are undecided about filing a report, it’s important to consider preserving evidence in case you decide to report in the future.”

While bystander intervention is seen as the most effective audience focus, the course only had 12 screen captures (6%) that treated the audience as potential bystanders. Screen capture 93 provides users with “what you can do to step in if you see a potentially problematic situation.” Screen capture 120 outlines how the next few screen captures will go over what to “do if you saw someone in an unsafe or problematic situation.” Screen captures 121-124 focused on how users can distract, delegate, and direct, and each includes a video of what the respective strategy looks like at a party.

More of the screen captures addressed the audience as potential perpetrators instead of bystanders. Fifteen screen captures (8%) took this approach with some practical examples. On screen captures 109 and 110, the user is presented with an example where Kim has said “no” to Jameel multiple times and the user has to decide what Jameel should do. On screen capture 111, the course advises, “When we think about interacting with people sexually or otherwise, our values should be our guide.” In contrast, zero of the screen captures dealt with the students as potential victims.

The course also treated the audience as builders of identity. One of the larger modules also covered identity building, and the course focused on how we can uphold our values through respecting others’ identities. Screen capture 42 states, “Values and identities are central to our relationships.” Other parts of the course touched on how to show up authentically, as one of the characters in Video 5 stated, “Just be who you want to be, but also let people know that this is who I am and it’s OK to be who I am.” This sentiment weaved throughout the course with equal emphasis on forming one’s own identity and respecting the identities of others.

The New Zealand course primarily used potential perpetrator prevention and focused on how the audience could respect others’

Table 2: How the audience is addressed in both courses

Variable	Definition	Example
Bystander focused*	Focuses on the audience as bystanders who can intervene in instances of sexual violence	The example titled A Prank or a Problem? Preventing your friend Brody from stalking his ex from the US course
Victim focused	Focuses on the audience as potential victims and gives advice on how to prevent victimization	“Sexual assault is when a person touches you inappropriately” from the New Zealand course
Perpetrator focused	Focuses on potential perpetrators and gives tactics to prevent the audience from committing acts of sexual violence	An example asking “What should Ian do?” in the US course. Maria falls asleep and you have to decide what Ian should do
Response focused	Focuses on the audience as those who are responding to instances of sexual violence	“You’ll learn how to recognize and address sexual harassment and stalking and what you can do if you or someone you care about is affected by these issues” from a screen capture in the US course
Identity focused	Focuses on the audience as individuals who form identities and values for themselves	“In part, your values represent what you stand for. They influence your identity and how you relate to others” from a screen capture in the US course

rights by not acting in a harmful way. Eleven (68%) of the screen captures treated the audience as a potential perpetrator, such as screen capture 7 which read, “It (consent) also means taking responsibility to ensure that the person you are attracted to is comfortable and agrees to go further.” In contrast, two screen captures treated the audience as potential victims, using sentences such as “Sexual assault is when a person touches you inappropriately.”

Only one screen capture treated the audience as a bystander, though it did include a question on bystander intervention and gave a couple bystander intervention strategies. Screen capture 13 dealt with response to sexual violence prevention and gave the users location specific contact information. Zero questions treated the audience as creators of an identity. Overall, the course didn’t enact research that showed bystander intervention as the most effective perspective for a course, though research out of New Zealand and Australia suggests perpetrator prevention to be the most effective within those cultures (Svejkar et al., 2019).

The majority of the New Zealand screen captures focused on the audience as potential perpetrators while the US course focused on

how the audience could act as bystanders. Past evidence shows bystander intervention as the most effective approach, yet some research points to perpetrator intervention being effective when it is employed in the right social environment (Choate, 2003; Svejkar et. al., 2019). The differences in how the courses treat the audience could be a reflection of different cultures, especially paying attention to the aversion of some Americans to perpetrator-based prevention (Rich et. al, 2010).

Messaging Strategies (Subcategory 3)

Messaging, the third subcategory, covered empowering messaging, negative messaging, value appeals, providing measurable goals, and constructing a narrative around course content (see Table 3). Baker, Henriquez, and Hostler (2018) found prevention programming that has measurable goals and appeals to shared values is more successful. They also stressed the importance of empowering messaging over negative messaging. The CDC guide on sexual violence prevention also emphasizes the importance of conveying what prevention looks like in measurable terms (Dills & Brown, 2019). Gold et. al (2010) also highlighted the importance in empowering and promotional messaging for public health concerns as people are more likely to take action if they feel empowered.

Messaging Strategies in the US and New Zealand Courses

The first variable in subcategory three, narrative construction, occurred around the content that treated the audience as identity-creators. For example, screen captures 54, 55, and 56 relate different forms of abuse back to violated values to create cohesion with the personal values activity in the same module. In the Consent, Coercion, and Stepping In module, screen capture 111 relates back to the identity module when it states, “our values should be our guide” to not coercing others. However, only seven screen captures created a narrative, meaning it did not run throughout the entire course.

Another messaging strategy underutilized by the US course was appealing to shared values, which the course did only ten times (5%). Screen capture 128 appeals to shared values in a college community: “Everyone wants to live, learn, and work in a safe and supportive environment.” However, other screen captures focus on the contrast in values instead of similarities. Screen capture 42 advocates, “It’s important to be aware of what we value” but adds “and what others value.” This creates an interesting dynamic that places our values at odds with others’ values instead of appealing to commonalities. Overall, the course could have appealed to shared values more often, perhaps even connecting them to an overarching narrative.

Another successful messaging technique is to include measurable goals. Fifteen screen captures (8%) included measurable goals or specific actions the users could take. In videos 6, 7, and 8, the narrators give specific examples of wording to shut down harmful language. This would allow students to measure prevention and to have action steps towards preventing sexual violence. It is worth noting, however, that some of the screen captures and videos which fell under this category, such as video 8, provided indirect goals. Video 8 provided students with the goal of non-confrontational intervention when a video character called out his friend for an insult against someone’s sexuality, but it didn’t give tangible strategies for intervening or a strong outcome other than the person apologizing with no change in future actions and words. The course

Table 3: Messaging strategies in both courses

Variable	Definition	Example
Constructs narrative for course*	Refers back to previous materials or themes to connect two or more modules together in one cohesive narrative about prevention	A screen capture in the US course connects survivors' experiences to their identities, as referenced earlier in the Gender Identities and Stereotypes module
Appeals to values*	Discusses values shared by the presenter and audience and how those values could be implemented in prevention	"If you ever thought 'I want to help', you're not alone" from the US course
Measurable goal*	An instance where a specific strategy to deal with prevention is given and serves as an accessible example the user could utilize in their own life	A video in the New Zealand course defines consent and gives strategies so the user
Empowering messaging*	Content which inspires the user to take action	"We encourage you to use your experiences, your perspective, and your values to make a positive impact on your community" from the US course
Negative messaging	Content which warns the user against a certain action	The US course discusses the negative effects of alcohol consumption and warns users against intoxication

gave tactics but didn't have a strong call to action for students to implement these steps in their own lives.

The last two messaging variables analyzed if the messaging was empowering or negative. Empowering messaging on screen capture 137 stated, "If a friend discloses a harmful situation to you, you're in a position to make a significant, positive impact on their recovery process." Other screen captures included negative messaging that didn't empower the user to act, such as on screen capture 70, which gave stereotypes people sometimes use but didn't include positive language choices. By not including positive language choices, this screen capture focused on what users should not do without empowering them to speak in a more positive manner.

Overall, there were 26 screen captures (14%) with empowering messaging and 16 (9%) with negative messaging. While there was less negative messaging, an overwhelming number of screen captures fell into the neutral messaging category instead of negative messaging or the more effective empowering messaging.

In contrast, the New Zealand course did not use a lot of best

messaging practices. Zero screen captures constructed a narrative and zero provided the audience with measurable prevention goals. Two screen captures did appeal to shared values; screen capture 1 highlighted the value of a safe community, and screen capture 7 referred to the value of responsibility. The course only had two screen captures that included empowering messaging, but six screen captures with negative messaging. An example of positive messaging was on screen capture seven: "Consent means to freely and voluntarily agree to a sexual activity." On screen capture 8, there was an example of negative messaging, or telling the audience what not to do, "If someone is manipulated, threatened, or forced into sex, then they are not consenting." While empowering messaging can help motivate the user to act, more negative messaging correlates to the audience focus on perpetrator prevention as it focuses on what users shouldn't do to avoid violating someone's rights or safety.

Because the New Zealand course focused on perpetrator prevention, there was more messaging that told users what not to do, or negative messaging. In contrast, bystander intervention tends to promote what users should do, so the US course had a lot more empowering or positive messaging—though both courses could have included more empowering messaging. Both courses lacked narrative construction, measurable goals around prevention, and appeals to shared values.

Addressed Levels of Prevention (Subcategory 4)

The fourth subcategory, levels of prevention, addressed if the specific language was geared as prevention on the individual, communal, or societal level (see Table 4). This category was determined based on the CDC's levels of prevention recommendation (Dills & Brown, 2019). Researchers at the CDC recommend courses and materials that address sexual violence on all three levels. Svejkar et al. (2019) researched prevention programming at the different levels in Australia, as well, and found programs with more focus on the community and individual level were effective.

Levels of Prevention Addressed in Both Courses

One-hundred-and-fifty-nine screen captures (90%) dealt with prevention on the individual level. For example, screen capture 46 focused on respect on the individual level: "We all want others to accept who we are and to treat us with respect. That's why it's so important to be respectful of other people's values and uniqueness." Screen capture 95 also dealt with preventing on the individual level, as it outlined consent as, "communicating what you do and what you don't want, what is right for you, and what might make you feel comfortable is a normal, natural, and expected part of healthy communication."

While the course focused on the individual level for the majority of the course, it also had significant chunks devoted to prevention on the community and societal level, with 99 (56%) and 44 (25%) screen captures respectively (note some screen captures dealt with prevention on multiple levels). Screen capture 150 stated, "It's important to understand options for reporting incidents of violence, harassment, abuse, or sexual assault to our school." This example, as well as many of the 99 community-focused screen captures, highlighted a school as a community. The course also focused on larger societal actions. Screen capture 47 discussed a similar topic to screen capture 150, but from the societal standpoint, "one of the ways that society or an institution promotes certain values is

through laws and policies.” Overall, there was good representation

Table 4: Focus on different levels of prevention addressed in both courses

Variable	Definition	Example
Individual focused*	Content that focuses on what the individual can do to prevent or respond to sexual violence	The US course says, “you make decisions, set boundaries, and respect other people’s choices all the time”
Community focused*	Content geared towards what the local community, including university administration and groups of bystanders, can do to prevent or respond to sexual violence	The New Zealand course discusses how all members of the residential hall deserve to feel safe from sexual harassment and violence
Society focused*	Content geared towards creating a culture that supports sexual violence prevention or content about the actions of legal and governmental institutions	“Sometimes the media depicts romantic relationships as one person pursuing and finally convincing the other to engage in sexual activity” (from the US course)

of all three levels.

The New Zealand course overwhelmingly focused on prevention at the individual level. Twenty-one sentences across the 16 screen captures in the course dealt with prevention on the individual level, such as screen capture 2 which included this statement: “Sexual assault is when a person: forces you against your will to commit an act of indecency.” One screen capture included a community specific prevention, highlighting the residence halls: “All residents of Campus Living Villages are committed to providing a safe and inclusive environment.” Zero screen captures focused on society-focused prevention. Despite the uneven distribution, users might feel the most empowered to address sexual violence on the individual level.

The New Zealand course focused on the individual, ignoring the communal and societal level of prevention while the US course encompassed all levels of prevention, although over 150 screen captures did focus on individual prevention. While both courses could better adopt the CDC recommended model of confronting prevention at multiple levels, these courses are working in tandem with other measures. The CDC recommends in that same report that prevention should be scaffolded within a community; the communication design and rhetoric of prevention throughout the community instead of in one course could be a topic for future research.

Sentence Level Variables (Subcategory 5)

The fifth subcategory focused on syntax-level considerations, such as active voice, passive voice, hides verbs, doesn’t hide verbs, people-first language, not-people-first language, gives examples, gives analogies, and uses us vs. them language (see Table 5). Baker, Henriquez, and Hostler (2018) stress the importance of

plain language that does not hide verbs and uses active voice for prevention programming.

Sentence-Level Choices in the US and New Zealand Courses

Two contrasting variables in this subcategory were people-first and not-people-first language. There were 19 examples of not-people-first language and 22 examples of people-first language. On screen capture 134, the course referred to LGBTQ survivors, which was not people-first as it stressed their identity within the LGBTQ community and role as a survivor instead of saying people who are LGBTQ survivors. On the other hand, screen capture 73 discussed “people who experience sexual harassment”, which is people-first language. While there were more examples of people-first language, the number of screen captures that used people-first language and the ones which didn’t were close, signaling the course could have worked on being more consistent in the use of people-first language.

Another interesting variable to look at is the use of active and passive voice. One-hundred-and-eighty-nine sentences of the 175 screen captures used active voice, and 157 sentences used passive voice (with some screen captures using both as this variable was counted on a sentence level). Active voice examples included the phrase “most of the time, we express ourselves naturally through a combination of words and actions...” on screen capture 96 and “everyone deserves to live, learn, and work in a safe environment” on screen capture 128. Passive voice examples were more likely to be related to heavier subjects, such as reporting sexual violence and abusive relationships. Examples include “However, it’s important to be able to recognize when relationships are abusive and conflict with our fundamental values...” on screen capture 66 and “It’s important to understand options for reporting incidents of violence, harassment, abuse, or sexual assault to our school” on screen capture 150.

The variables of hiding verbs or not hiding verbs related to active voice and passive voice as usually passive voice hides verbs and active voice doesn’t hide verbs. Two-hundred-and-nine sentences over all the screen captures hid verbs, and 129 sentences didn’t, signaling that sometimes even sentences which used active voice hid verbs. Screen capture 55 gives an example of a sentence which doesn’t hide verbs: “emotional abuse and isolation undermines the values of...” because the verbs are all clear and easy to find. When the course hid verbs, it clouded the meaning of the sentence. Screen capture 95 is a good example of this: “Communicating what you do and what you don’t want, what is right for you, and what might make you feel comfortable is a normal, natural, and expected part of healthy communication.” The sentence includes many hidden verbs, which creates a lack of focus on one particular action in the sentence. Hiding verbs was one of the biggest hindrances at the sentence level of the US course.

One of the most effective sentence types in prevention courses are those which give examples so the user can see how to apply course material to their own lives. There were 121 examples within the course, such as the example of someone catcalling a friend, Tiana, on screen captures 78 and 79. While the example is easy to follow and used “you” to include the user in the example, there was not a resolution. It ends by asking the user what they would do, but it didn’t give any options or say what ended up happening with Tiana or the boy who catcalled her. Most of the other examples in the course constructed potentially effective learning situations but

Table 5: Sentence level variables addressed in both courses

Variable	Definition	Example
People-first language*	Language that values the person over the descriptor	The US describes, “people who experience sexual harassment...”
Not-people-first language	Language that values the descriptor over the person	In a different screen capture, the US course says, “survivors who identify as male”
Hides verbs	Language that does not highlight all verbs--commonly verbs are hidden in the -ing form or masked as nouns	“Think about approaching a conversation about consent as a simple, informal way of “checking in” with someone to make sure everyone is OK with what may happen” from the US course.
Doesn't hide verbs*	Language where all verbs are identifiable as verbs in a sentence	“Most of the time, we express ourselves naturally through a combination of words and actions...” from the US course.
Active voice*	When the subject performs the action of the sentence	“The person makes an unwelcome sexual advance” from the New Zealand course.
Passive voice	When the action of the sentence is performed on the subject	“It also means taking responsibility to ensure the person you are attached to is comfortable and agrees to go further” from the New Zealand course.
Gives examples*	The use of real world scenarios to support a point	The US course had a scenario where your roommate has a stalker and you have to respond to situation
Gives analogies*	A comparison of two things that don't appear similar on the surface	Neither course did this
Uses us vs. them language	Language that otherizes a particular group	“We'll explore how to support survivors by listening, discussing reporting actions, connecting them with resources for additional support, and empowering them to make their own choices about their experience” from the US course.

didn't have resolutions or tangible steps users could take. Another useful sentence-level strategy for sexual violence prevention is analogies, but the course did not use any analogies.

One variable I wasn't expecting to find was us versus them language. This language can otherize populations and is not helpful in courses on sensitive topics, such as sexual violence. In the 22 screen captures that used this language, the us versus them language separated "us" from survivors, ostracizing survivors as a different category than the users. On screen capture 157 the course used this tactic, "understanding a survivor's experience can help you to be a more empathetic listener and friend." While there were only 22 examples of this, it can be harmful and should be avoided at all costs in similar courses.

The New Zealand course included more examples of active voice. Fourteen sentences over all screen captures included active voice, such as this sentence on screen capture one: "Sexual assault covers a range of different types of assault." Ten screen captures included passive voice, such as screen capture 3: "In circumstances in which a reasonable person, having regard to all circumstances, would have anticipated that the person harassed would have been offended, humiliated, or intimidated."

Similarly, 10 examples hid verbs, while 12 didn't hide verbs with a correlation between active voice and not hiding verbs, as would be expected. Screen capture 7 hid verbs and used passive voice: "It (consent) also means taking responsibility to ensure that the person you are attracted to is comfortable and agrees to go further." In contrast, screen capture 3, did not hide verbs and used active voice: "A person sexually harasses another person if the person makes an unwelcome sexual advance, or an unwelcome request for sexual favours, to the person harassed or engages in other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature in relation to the person harassed." While more examples of active voice and not hiding verbs were present, more active voice or sentences that didn't hide verbs could be included.

The New Zealand course utilized only people-first language. Four screen captures included this sort of language, and there were zero with not-people-first language. An example of people-first language was this sentence on screen capture 1: "Sexual assault occurs when a person indecently assaults another person."

Over half of all screen captures included examples. Almost all were in comics included in the course, allowing the users to read and see a visual of the examples. This course included zero analogies, but it included three examples of us versus them language. The us versus them language in the course usually treated the "us" as potential perpetrators and the "them" as survivors, such as this sentence on screen capture 8: "If they are so intoxicated that they don't know what is going on, then they are not consenting." Overall, the New Zealand course paid attention to intentional, active, and people-first sentence level choices.

The courses relied on different language practices to get their messages across. The New Zealand course relied on active, people-first language that didn't hide verbs. It used language, such as, "Sexual assault occurs when a person indecently assaults another person." In contrast, the US course hid more verbs and tended to use passive language. This made some of the language of the course confusing and muddled. It's best to use active language with the verbs in plain sight. The US course also referred to people as victims and perpetrators instead of people who commit sexual

assault or people who are survivors. The language in the New Zealand course offered a more clear, humanistic view of prevention and was easier to read. This might be due to increased confidence around this topic within New Zealand society whereas in the US, sexual violence prevention is a more difficult topic to discuss. Regardless of the confidence levels in the larger societies, it would be better for courses in either culture to utilize language choices that reflect clarity, such as using active voice and not hiding verbs.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE DESIGN

The comparative rhetorical analysis points to two key differences between the New Zealand course and the US course. The first key difference is the language used, with New Zealand using more active voice and less hiding verbs; and the US using language that lacked clarity, such as passive voice and hiding verbs. New Zealand is known for more effective prevention than the US, and active voice and not hiding verbs are known to be more effective in general. This suggests that using clear language with an active, confident tone might improve the effectiveness of sexual violence prevention courses.

The second key difference between the courses was that the US course followed the basic recommendations for higher-level rhetorical concerns; it addressed the users as bystanders, included more empowering messaging, and addressed prevention at the individual-, community-, and societal- levels. On the other hand, the New Zealand course addressed the audience as potential perpetrators, included more negative messaging, and addressed prevention at the individual-level, with only one instance of community-level prevention. When paired with the knowledge that New Zealand's prevention is more effective, this might suggest that language-level concerns impact the effectiveness of courses more than higher level concerns focused on messaging and how prevention is addressed. However, it still is important to consider both higher-level and lower-level concerns around prevention communication.

- In order to incorporate both higher-level and lower-level best practices, the most effective rhetorical practices might be to:
- Use active voice and sentence structures that don't hide verbs.
- Make sure the language of courses is clear and confident.
- Pay attention to the language decisions, as they might determine the effectiveness of the course more than larger order rhetorical issues.
- Ensure that the tone of a prevention course conveys the importance of the topic.
- Address the audience as potential bystanders whenever possible.
- Integrate empowering messaging into prevention courses.
- Emphasize the feasibility of the prevention education, highlighting how prevention is possible.
- Integrate a narrative throughout the course to which students can connect.
- Be intentional with decisions made in all five subcategories, as all of them contribute to the feasibility and clarity of the course.

Future research might strengthen these findings by focusing on one or two specific subcategories of rhetorical considerations. It also could be interesting to compare and contrast data collected from New Zealand and US university students to see how students perceive prevention course material and maybe even prevention courses from the other country. A prevention course is only one part of a larger scaffolded prevention plan within a community; so, in the future, more research could be done to compare and contrast the rhetoric and communication in other facets of New Zealand and US prevention. While some research was done on the larger rhetorical context, it might be beneficial to dive deeper into the legal and public perception differences around sexual violence in both countries.

Overall, this research points to the need to focus on multiple rhetorical considerations instead of one category of considerations. To create an effective prevention course, developers must consider their audience and effective messaging strategies and approaches while also paying attention to sentence-level rhetorical choices. Paying attention to rhetorical considerations in sexual violence prevention courses could have a direct impact on the effectiveness not only of these courses, but on the safety of college campuses in the US, New Zealand, and beyond.

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