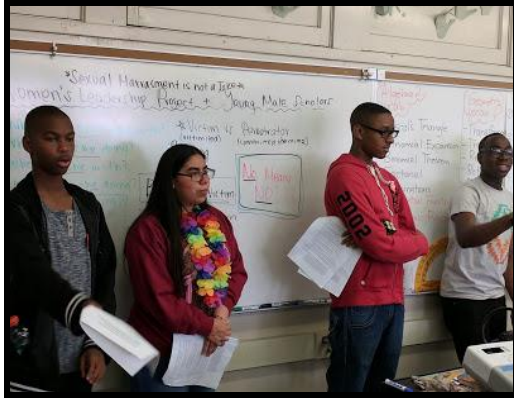


Denim Day: Women's Leadership Project and Young Male Scholars' Leaders Challenge Sexual Violence, Sexual Harassment and Rape Culture

By: Sikivu Hutchinson



YMS/WLP leaders facilitate a peer education session concerning the significance of Denim Day



YMS/WLP engage students in dialogue regarding LGBTQI youth & sexual assault awareness

On [Denim Day](#), April 26, 2017, 10th, 11th and 12th grade students from the Women's Leadership Project (WLP) and Young Male Scholars' (YMS) programs at Gardena High School and King Drew Magnet of Medicine and Science conducted sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention workshops with over one hundred and twenty students in health, math, social studies and Advisory classes. The WLP and YMS programs are part of the L.A. County Human Relations Commission's violence prevention and education initiatives for youth. During the presentations, students discussed the prevalence of sexual violence and harassment on school campuses and communities, the stereotypes associated with rape and sexual assault victims, and the normalization of violence against women and girls of color in mainstream society. Despite being marginalized in mainstream media representations of sexual violence victimization (which tend to foreground the experiences and lives of white victims), African American women have some of the highest rates of rape and sexual assault. Nearly 60% of black girls have reported sexual abuse victimization by the age of eighteen. The pervasiveness of rape and sexual violence in the U.S. has been [characterized](#) as an example of "[rape culture](#)" by anti-violence activists.

Students engaged in debate about the implications of victim-blaming and victim-shaming for sexual violence victims and survivors, as well as the often fraught issue of giving consent in a relationship. Speaking as male allies, peer educator leaders from YMS stressed male responsibility for being aware that "no means no". Students discussed how sexual violence can

happen across gender identity and sexual orientation. They were also informed about the low rates of reporting among African American women violence victims, the prevalence of social media predation, cyberbullying and sex trafficking, as well as recent high profile examples of sexual harassment



WLP/YMS leaders engage their peers in an interactive to help understand and dispel misconceptions about sexual assault

cases in professional sports, entertainment and politics. Students also underscored the role homophobia and transphobia play in silencing male and LGBTQI sexual violence victims, and addressed the lack of safe spaces for male survivors in the dominant culture. The similarities, nuances and pervasiveness of marital rape, date rape, familial rape/incest and statutory rape were also addressed.

WLP and YMS did an outstanding job of debunking myths and misconceptions about rape culture, while educating fellow students on protecting themselves against sexual violence and sexual harassment. The students forged a male/female alliance to continue to advocate against sexual assault.

<http://wavenewspapers.com/cheers-103/>