Shifting Boundaries:

Lessons on Relationships for Students in Middle School

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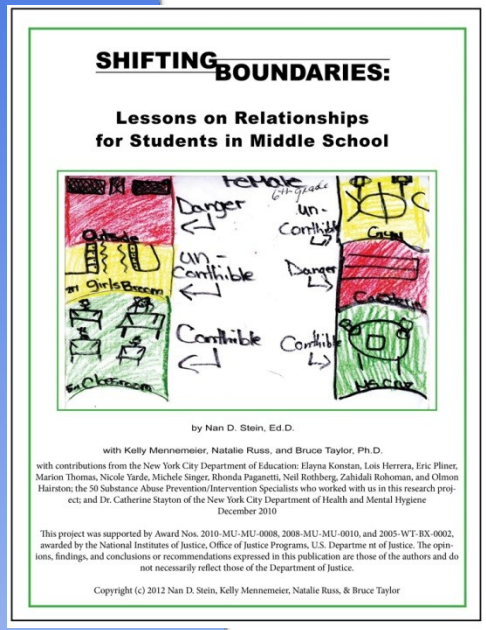

SHIFTING BOUNDARIES:

Lessons on Relationships for Students in Middle School

by Nan D. Stein, Ed.D.

with Kelly Mennemeier, Natalie Russ, and Bruce Taylor, Ph.D.

with contributions from the New York City Department of Education: Elayna Konstan, Lois Herrera, Eric Pliner, Marion Thomas, Nicole Yarde, Michele Singer, Rhonda Paganetti, Neil Rothberg, Zahidali Rohoman, and Olmon Hairston; the 50 Substance Abuse Prevention/Intervention Specialists who worked with us in this research project; and Dr. Catherine Stayton of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
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How is our Study Different?

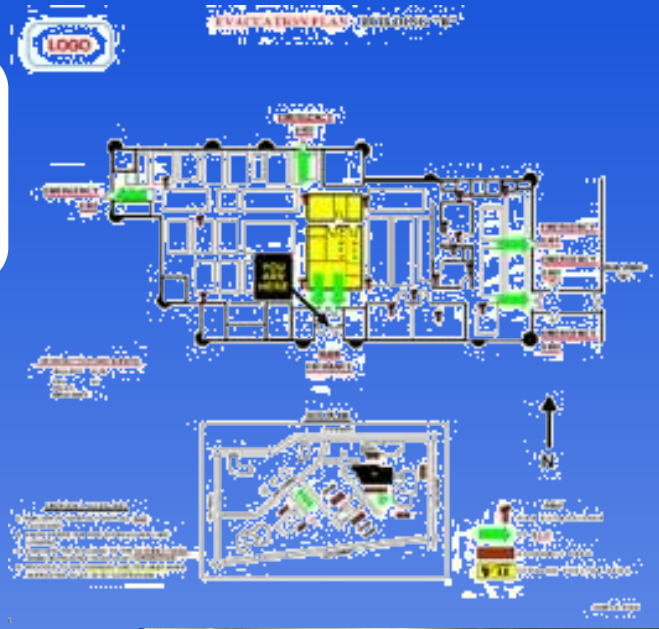
- **Peer sexual harassment as a precursor to teen dating violence**
  - Schools as training grounds for domestic violence
- **Emphasis on claiming one's boundaries and personal space**
  - Enables articulation of personal rights
  - Not focused on "healthy relationships"
- **Youngest sample in RCT on TDV (11-13 yrs old)**

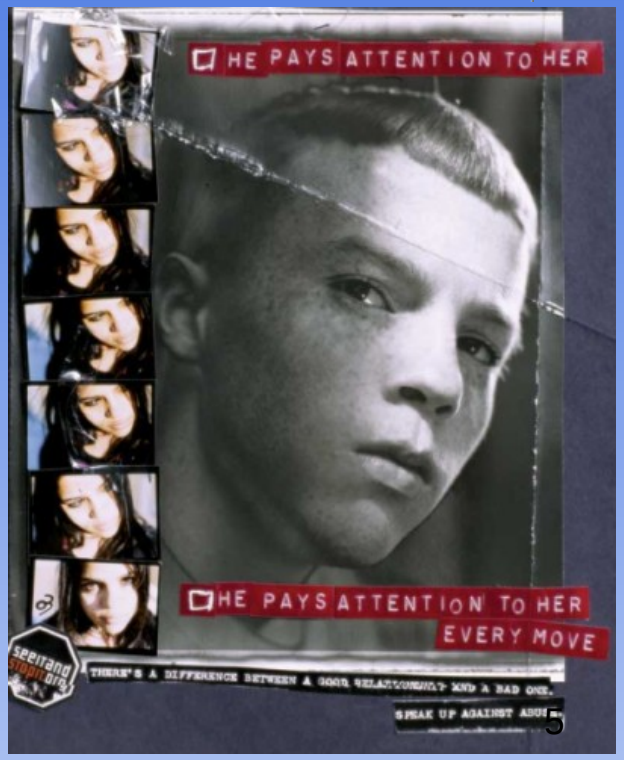
Selected Lessons

- For 7th grade students →
  - **Class #1:** What is a boundary?
  - **Class #2**: Measuring personal space
  - **Class #3:** Big Deal or No Big Deal?
  - **Class #4:** DVD segment on Shantai/Respecting Boundaries Agreement
  - **Class #5:** “Says Who” questionnaire on sexual harassment/”What Can I Do?” Tips
  - **Class #6:** Mapping Safe and Unsafe Spaces at School

The School-Wide Interventions

- Respecting boundaries agreement (counseling intervention)
- “Hot spots mapping” of safe and unsafe areas of the school
- Posters to increase awareness and reporting of DV/H with contact names for school counselors





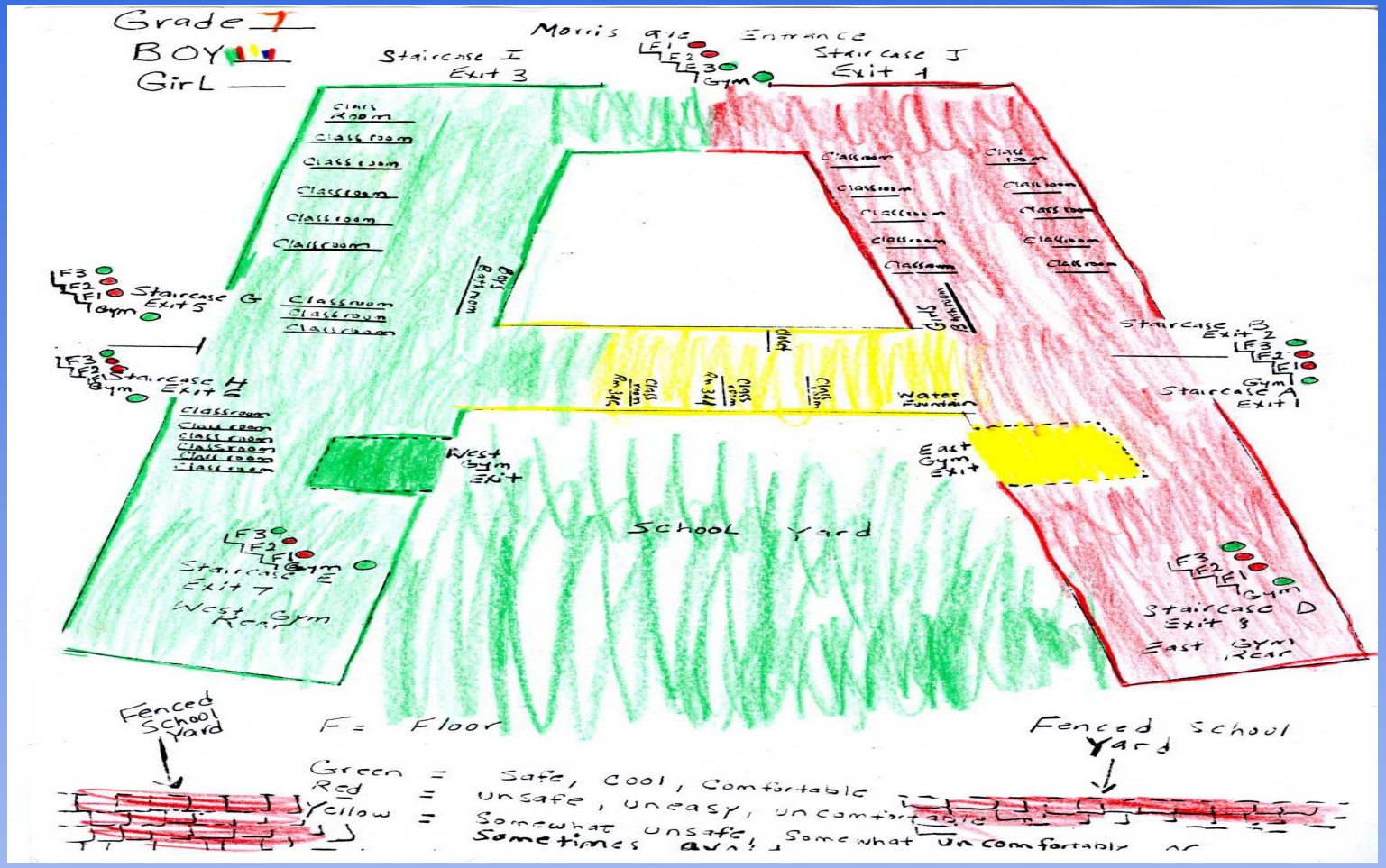
Student “hot spot” Mapping

- Some selected questions:
  - Might certain locations be considered “cool” by some people but “hot” by others?
    - If yes, which? Why might that happen?
  - Might the “hot or coolness” of certain areas differ depending on your gender? If so, why?
  - Might the “hot or coolness” of certain areas differ depending on your age and grade? If so, why?

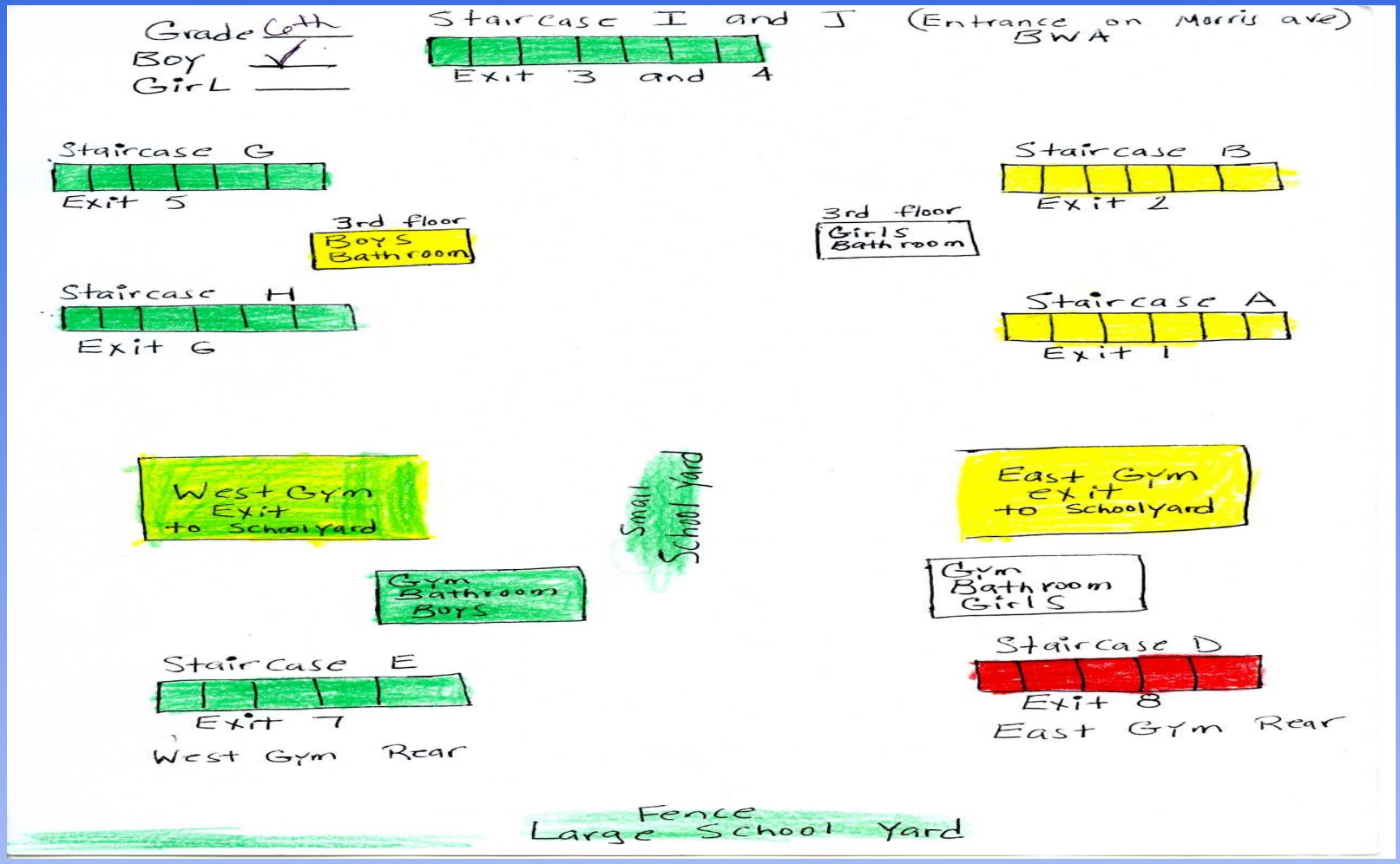
Student “hot spot” Mapping

- Some selected questions (cont.):
  - What are other reasons certain areas may be labeled as “hot” or “cool”?
  - What can we as students do to make the problem areas safer and more welcoming? How can we feel safer and more comfortable at school?
  - In what ways could the school staff make the problem areas “cooler”?

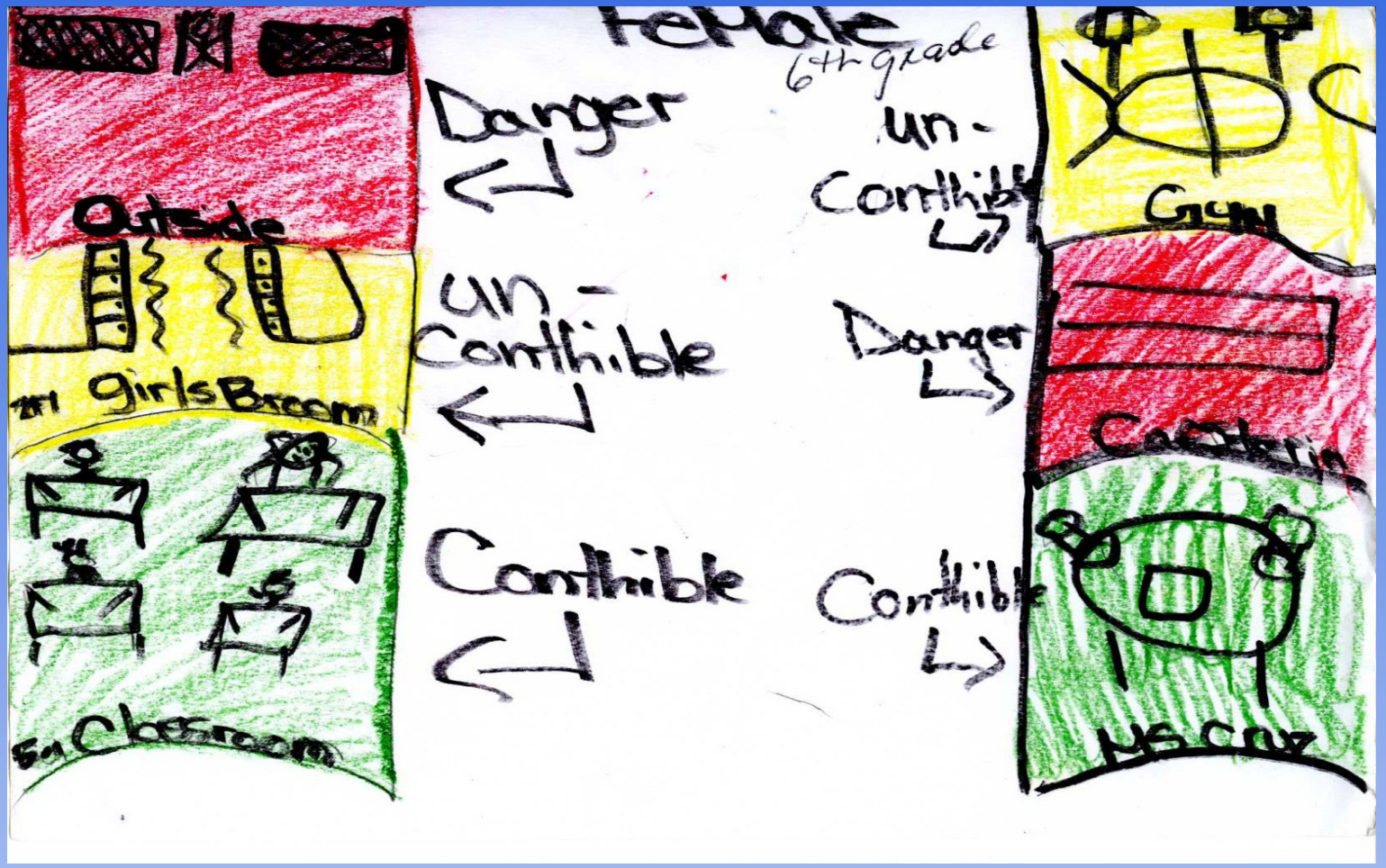
Actual Example (1) of student "hot spot" mapping

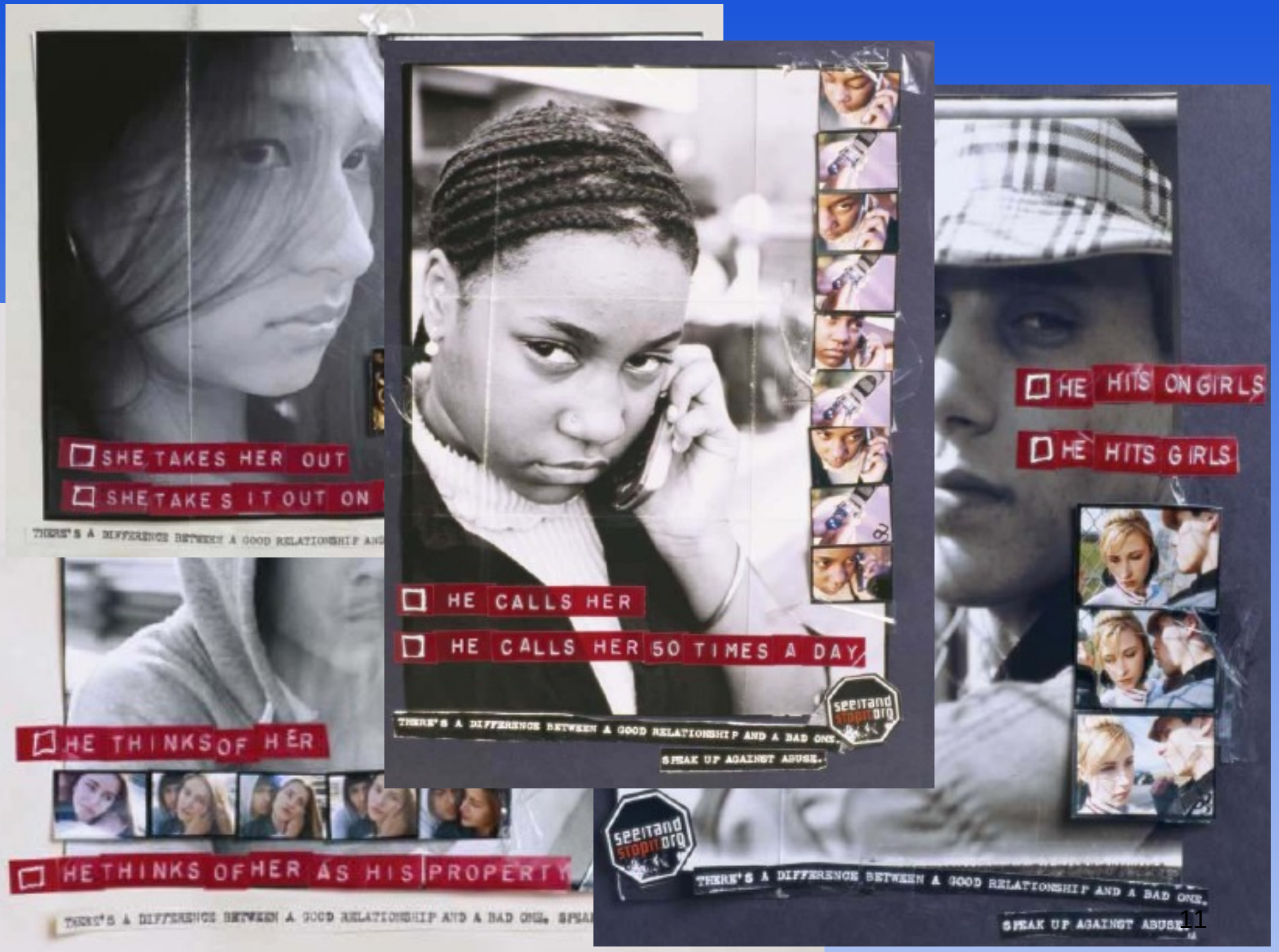


Actual Example (2) of student "hot spot" mapping



Actual Example (3) of student "hot spot" mapping




SHE TAKES HER OUT
SHE TAKES IT OUT ON
HE CALLS HER
HE CALLS HER 50 TIMES A DAY
THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A GOOD RELATIONSHIP AND A BAD ONE.
SPEAK UP AGAINST ABUSE.
seeitandstopit.org
HE HITS ON GIRLS
HE HITS GIRLS
HE THINKS OF HER
HE THINKS OF HER AS HIS PROPERTY
THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A GOOD RELATIONSHIP AND A BAD ONE.
SPEAK UP AGAINST ABUSE.

Methods

- **Setting in NYC – *largest school district in U.S*.**
  - About **1.1 million students** (ages 5-18 yrs old)
  - About **1,800 schools**
  - 2013-4 NYC Department of Education budget of **$24.8 billion**
  - **197 countries** represented in the public schools
  - Parental consent letters translated into **8 languages**: *Arabic, Bengali, standard character Chinese, Haitian Creole, Korean, Russian, Spanish,* and *Urdu*

Methods

- Students are nested within classes which are nested within schools
- 30 public middle schools with all three waves of data (2008-2010)
  - Two 6th and two 7th grade classrooms in each building
  - Total of 117 classrooms (n=58 classes in 6th grade & 59 in 7th grade)
  - 2,655 students (n=1,266 students in 6th grade and n=1,388 7th grade)

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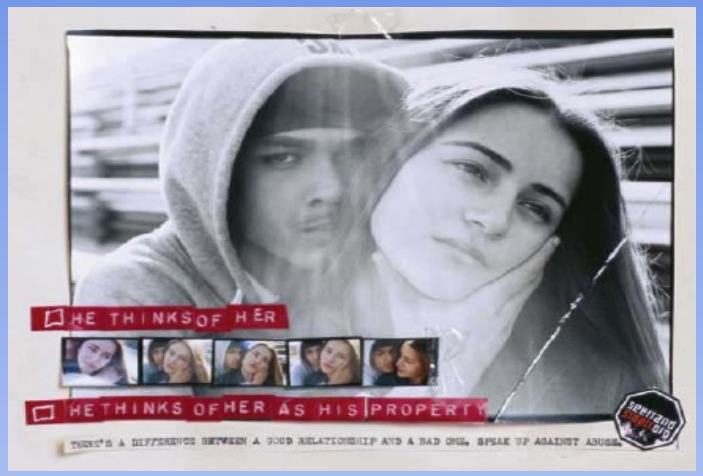
Methods

- **IRB** – informed (passive) parental consent with student assent
- Quantitative student surveys (2008-2010)
  - Before the intervention
  - Immediately post-implementation
  - About six months post-intervention
- Qualitative focus groups
  - School personnel
  - Students



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RCT Design

Intervention	Receives building-level	No building-level
Receives Classroom	7 schools & 28 classrooms **Both**	6 schools & 23 classrooms **Classroom only**
No classroom	8 schools & 30 classrooms **Building only**	9 schools & 36 classrooms **Neither**
Total	15 schools & 58 classrooms	15 schools & 59 classrooms

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Description of Sample

- 45% Hispanic
- 27% African American, 26% Asian, 26% Caucasian, 18% multi-racial, and 3% other
- 48% had been in a dating relationship (> 1 week) at least once in their lifetime; of those 44% had 1 or 2 prior partners (73% had ≤ 6)
- 70% never in relationship > than 6 months.
- Experienced sexual harassment as a victim → 69%
- Any sexual harassment perpetration against others → 46%

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Building Intervention reduces youth dating violence

Treatment – Building intervention only

- ~ 50% fewer incidents of victimization & perpetration of any dating violence at 6 months follow-up
- 2 findings p<.05 and 1 finding between p<.05 to .10 level

Both classroom and building intervention

- 31% drop in prevalence of victimization of any dating violence at 6 months follow-up (p=.09)

Classroom only intervention

No statistically significant findings

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Interventions Generally Reduce Sexual Harassment

- **The "both" and "building only" treatments reduced sexual harassment (victimization and perpetration) by 26-34% at 6 month follow-up**

- However, one undesirable result for the building only txt for having a higher prevalence of any sexual harassment at 6 months follow-up

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Building intervention reduces sexual dating violence

Treatment – Building intervention only

- ~ 50% lower prevalence and frequency of incidents of sexual dating violence victimization at 6 months follow-up
- ~ 50% lower frequency of incidents of sexual dating violence perpetration at 6 months follow-up

Both classroom and building intervention

- 27% lower frequency of incidents of sexual dating violence perpetration immediately after txt (p=.17)

No statistically significant findings for classroom only

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"Building Only" and "Both" Intervention group reduce peer sexual violence

Both classroom and building intervention

- Over 30% lower prevalence and frequency of incidents of peer sexual violence victimization (all combos significant p<.05) immediately after txt & at 6 months post follow-up
- 36% lower frequency of incidents of peer sexual violence perpetration at 6 months post txt

Treatment – Building intervention only

- Over 34% lower prevalence and frequency of incidents of peer sexual violence victimization and perpetration at 6 months post treatment

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DV/H Knowledge & Intentions

- ↑ Increases in knowledge of laws and consequences of dating violence and sexual harassment immediately post-treatment and six month post for "both" group
- ↑ Increases in behavioral intentions to reduce violence immediately after "building only" intervention: Results dissipate 6 months post txt

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DV/H Knowledge & Intentions

- Our “building only” intervention was associated with more positive intentions to intervene as a bystander (e.g., reporting an incident of violence to a teacher) at 6 months post txt
- Txt promotes some pro-social attitudes against TDV
  - “Building only” students more likely to intend to avoid perpetrating violence

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