Effect of Social Media on Teenagers' Perceptions of Healthy Relationships

Zoë Wong-VanHaren[1], Erin Angell[1] and Mary Gloner[2]

[1]Palo Alto High School, [2]Project Safety Net

INTRODUCTION

UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

In our society, unhealthy relationships negatively impact the victims of the abuse in many different ways. Abusers "[tear] down self-esteem & self-worth ...render[ing their significant other] powerless...obligated to dating or romantic relationships" Hopson (2009).

1 in 3 females and 1 in 4 males will experience an unhealthy relationship in their lifetime (2019).

SOCIAL MEDIA CONNECTIONS

63% of teenagers with reliable internet access go online every day (Lenhart, et al.). Workshops educating 14-18 year old students in Palo Alto about healthy relationships can identify possible influences of social media on young adults' perceptions of healthy love by educating them about what unhealthy relationships look like.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

This research was **ACTION BASED**.

- A hybrid of observational and experimental research, through correlational and evaluational analysis.
- P = students at Palo Alto High School.
- Sample = students from the Social Justice Pathway.
- N (number of participants) = 130 students

- Students were surveyed before and after a half-hourworkshop about social media and unhealthy relationships.
- Surveys administered on Google Forms
- The pre-workshop survey's purpose was to determine the baseline knowledge students had.
- The post-workshop survey was administered to gauge any changes in their attitudes and knowledge of the subject matter.
- Students who were uncomfortable answering any questions on the survey were encouraged to leave them blank.

DATA AND FINDINGS

Figure 1: *Pre-workshop vs. Post-workshop Survey Answers to 'I know where I can access resources to help myself or a friend if one of us were in an abusive relationship'*
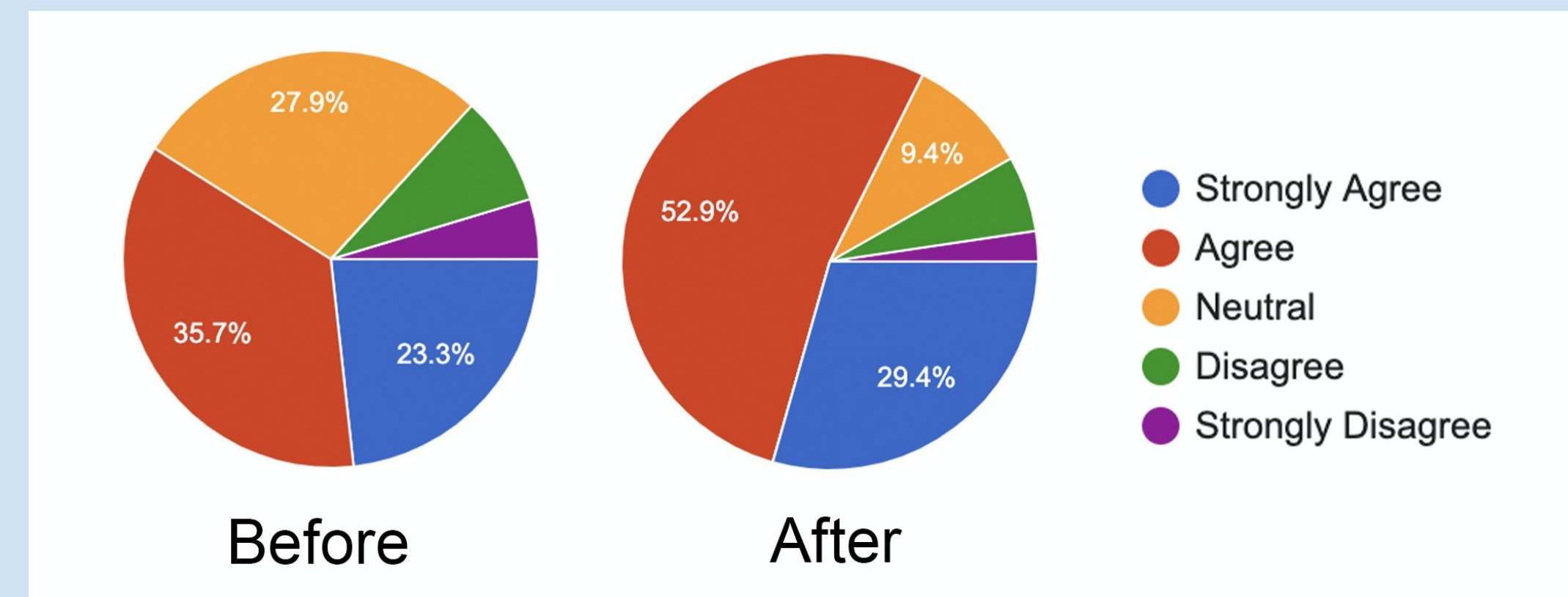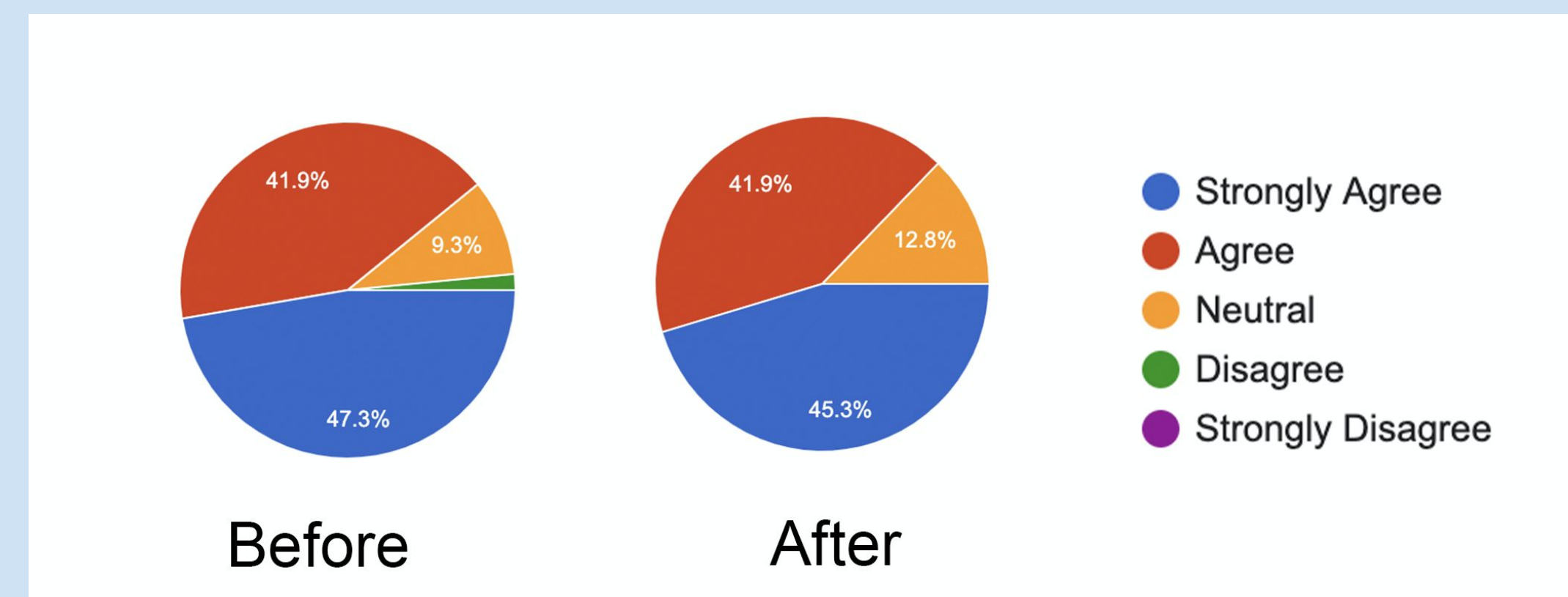

Before / After

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Figure 2: *Pre-workshop vs. Post-workshop Survey Answers to 'I know what to say if my friend is being hurt by a partner'*

Before / After

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Figure 3: *Pre-workshop vs. Post-workshop Survey Answers to 'I believe social media influences the way that teenagers view relationships'*

Before / After

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
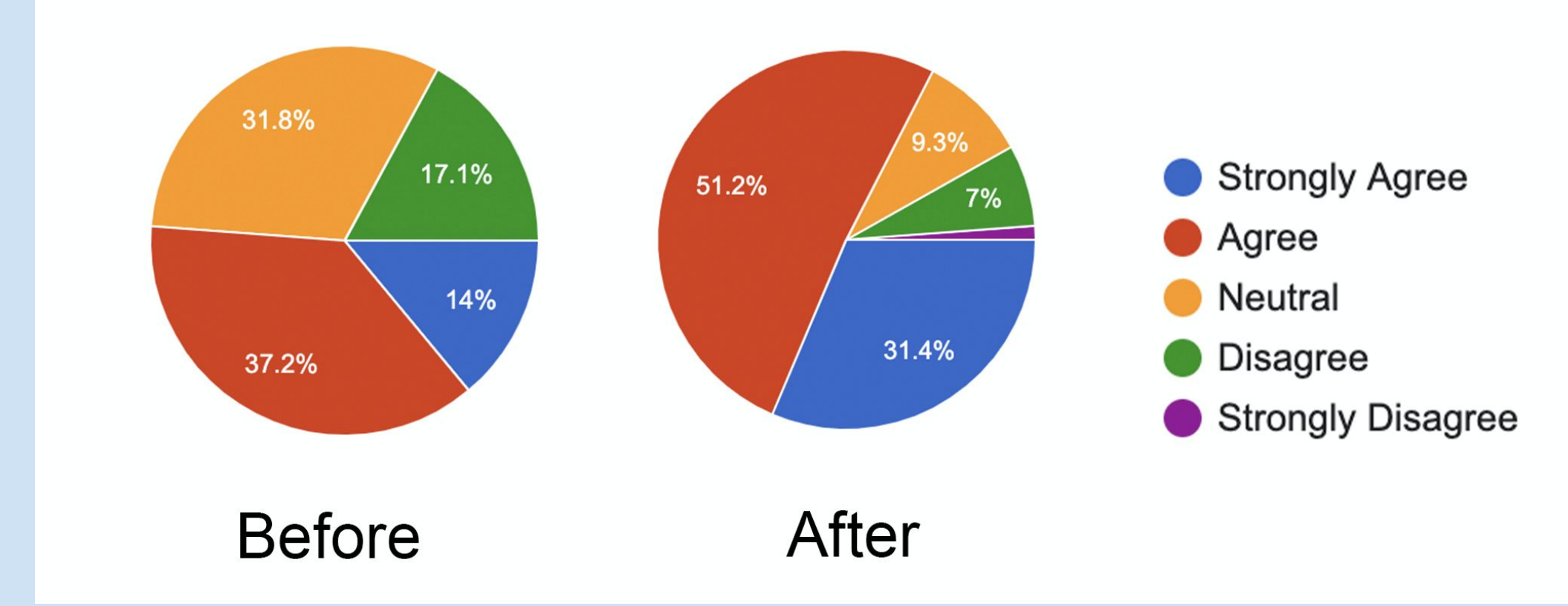- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Figure 4: *Student account of social media affecting their views of what a healthy relationship looks like*

"I used to post a lot with my ex boyfriend because I wanted my friends to think he was good.... I pushed away a lot of friends while I was dating my ex because I was in denial of how abusive he was. Social media pressured me to want to portray a perfect relationship to prove to myself that we were good together. It also helped keep track of all the good moments. It made me feel that the good moments were worth enduring all the bad ones….It also created a false image in my head of my own relationship, making me think that we really were meant to be."

IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

For iterations of the research:

- Fewer free-response questions; more multiple choice that provide quantitative data.
- Collect numerical data of how much social media use each student has
- Conduct interviews / focus groups to collect more in-depth data
- Take notes during workshops of students' responses
- Include freshmen in the sample

Furthering the research:

- Compare Palo Alto High School's data with another high school
- Cross-sectional study of students who have just started using high school vs. students who have been using social media for many years
- Research discussing the influence that popular music, TV shows, books and movies may have to students' perception of healthy love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REFERENCES

Works Cited:

Hopson, M. (2009). Chris Brown, Rihanna, and countless others: The catalyst for violence-prevention education and awareness. *Black Women, Gender Families*, *3*(2), 106-111.

Lenhart, A., Purcell, K., Smith, A., and Zickuhr, K. (2010). Social media and mobile internet use among teens and young adults. *Pew Research Center*.

One Love Foundation. (2019). *#LoveBetter*. Retrieved from https://www.joinonelove.org/

CONCLUSIONS AND ANALYSIS

Study was inconclusive because

- Sample was not sufficiently representative of total population.
- The survey was created with the notion that the majority of data would be collected from the free-response questions. The free-response questions received 61.2% and 58.8% rates of response.

However, some noticeable data:

Students awareness of where to find resources to help themselves or their peers in an unhealthy relationship increased.

Strongly agree: 35.7% → 52.9%
Agree: 23.3% → 29.4%

Students' understanding of what to say to a friend in an unhealthy relationship increased.

Strongly agree: 37.2% → 57.2%
Agree: 14% → 31.4%

Students had mixed feelings about whether social media influenced their perception of what healthy relationships look like.

Strongly agreed: Decreased, 47.3% → 45.3%
Agreed: remained the same
Neutral: Increased, 9.8% → 12.8%
Disagreed: 1.5% → 0%

Although it is difficult to tell why this might be, it is possible that the workshop created increased confusion about the effects of social media on students, causing them to have mixed feelings.