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THE PROBLEM

Eating disorders among our young people are well hidden, dangerously glamorized, and socially contagious. Eating disorders constitute the mental illness with the highest fatality rate although, due to the stigma associated with these disorders, many are left to suffer alone (Add Verb, 2012).

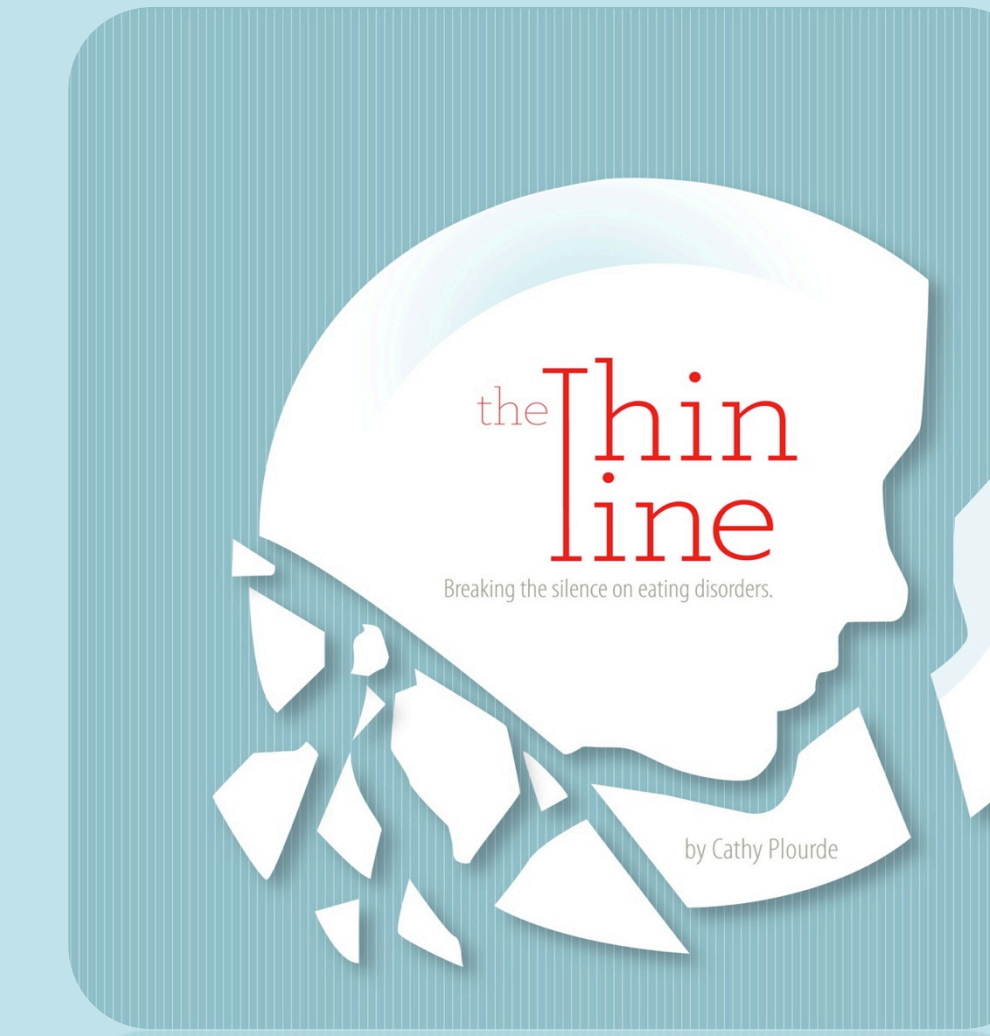
- Eating disorders in schools are as prevalent as alcohol and drug abuse (Add Verb, 2012).
- 40% of newly identified cases of anorexia are in girls 15-19 years old.
- Over 1/2 of teenage girls and nearly 1/3 of teenage boys use unhealthy weight control behaviors such as skipping meals, fasting, smoking cigarettes, vomiting and taking laxatives. (Neumark-Sztainer, 2005)



"I am your first waking thought."
Character - Voice of the Eating Disorder
Actor - Emily Dennis

Disordered eating is a phenomena that is reaching epidemic levels and is an issue that needs to be addressed (Add Verb, 2012).

Eating disorders and bystander engagement: A longitudinal study on the impact of *The Thin Line* on high school students



The Thin Line uses live theatre to break the silence on disordered eating, reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness, and pave the way to prepare young adults for the intense pressure of high school, college, and beyond.

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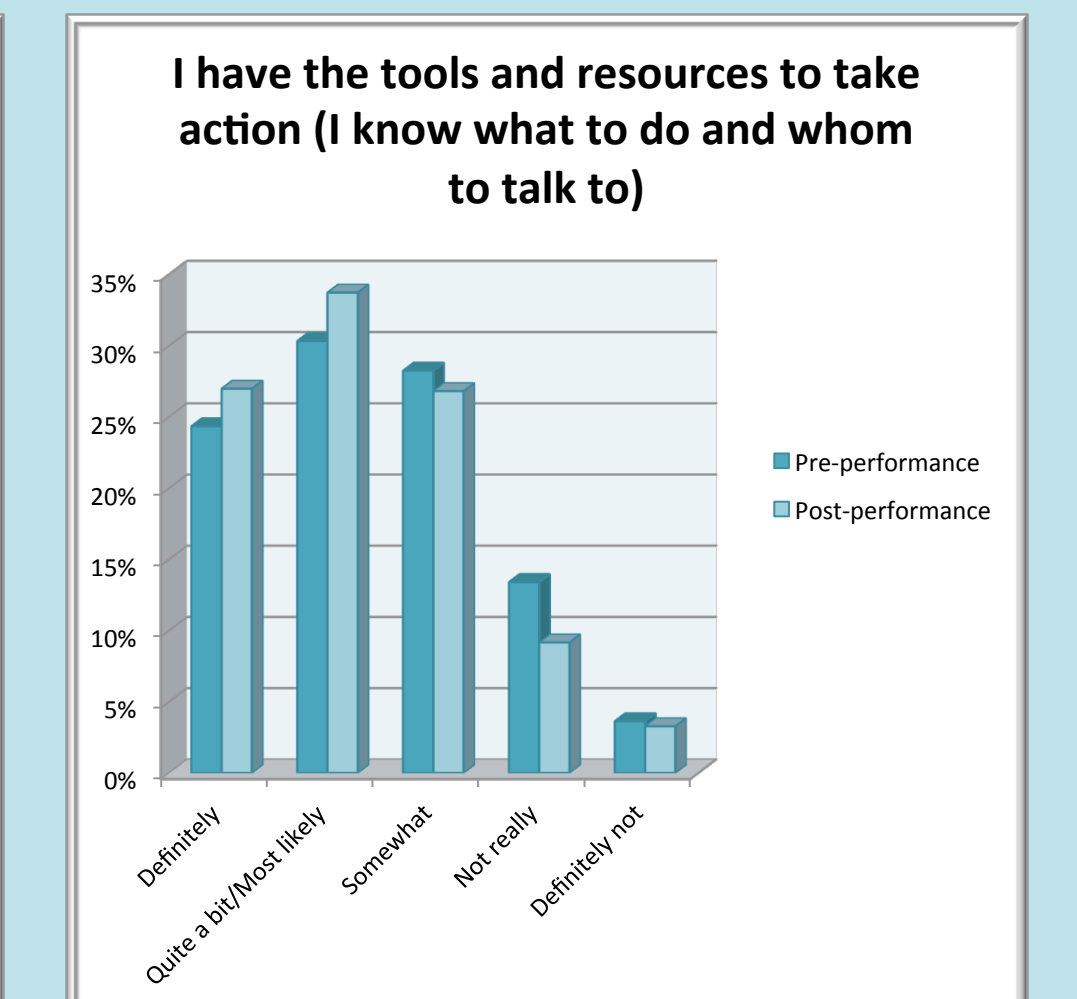
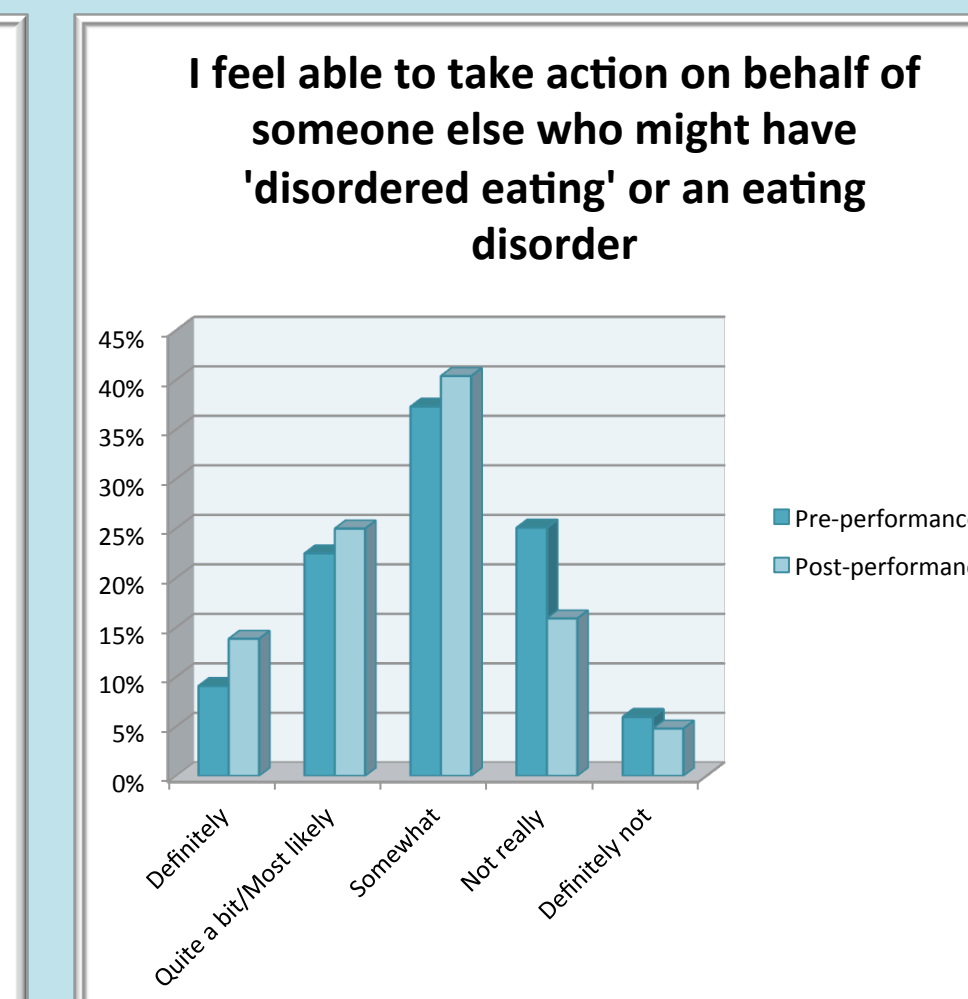
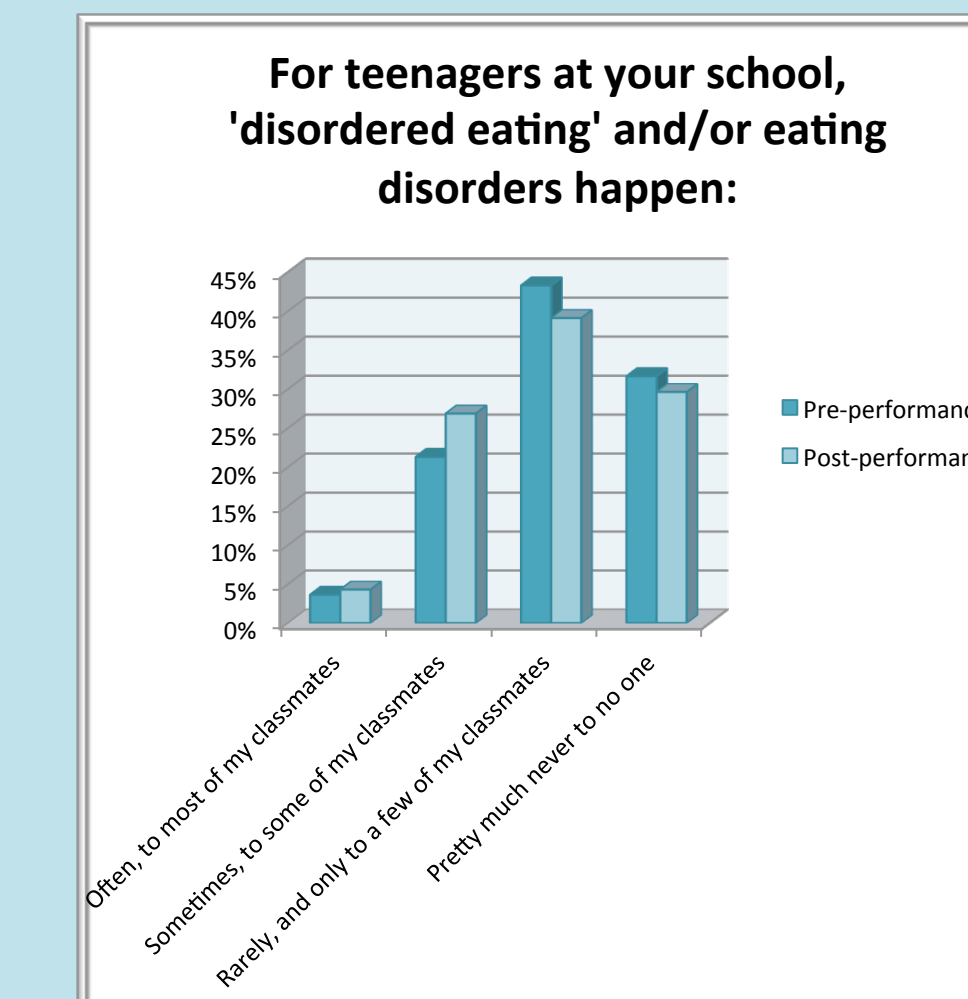
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THE RESULTS

Preliminary Focus Group and Pre/ Post – Play data:

"Definitely take [disordered eating] seriously. If [someone who had an eating disorder] felt that their close friends weren't taking it seriously or were joking about it, then they'd feel like they didn't care or like it didn't matter and they either wouldn't change their behavior or they would feel like they would be pushed to go farther with [the disordered eating]."

-Focus Group Participant



Results from 2011/ 2012 Student Surveys (Pre- and Post-Performance)

"The play made us realize how much you might not know about a person and what they're like."

"And how [disordered eating] impacts every aspect of a person's life. One of the characters in *The Thin Line* was a girl, negative self-worth, that gave us insight into what that person might be thinking and the mental side more than just the physical side of what's happening to them."

-Focus Group Participants

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THE PURPOSE

As part of the study, Add Verb Productions is showing *The Thin Line* to select high schools located in Maine. *The Thin Line* is a 30-minute, one-person play that addresses disordered eating, with the aim to raise awareness and change behaviors.

Immediately after the performance, a panel of local professionals continues the conversation by answering audience questions and sharing resources. This is a school-based educational program geared to engage bystanders- the friends and family members of those who are ill.



L-R Mariann Mankowski, MSW Assistant Professor, Emily Dennis, Actor, and Jeannie Wood, MA, Clinical Counselor, answer audience questions as part of a post-show panel discussion, University of New England

The premise of the play, as presented in context of an empowerment/educational call to action, is to provide accurate information and a window into the arc and complexity of this mental illness.

THE METHODS

With funding from the van Otterloo Family Foundation, a longitudinal study follows 9th graders from four schools with pre, post, follow up, and focus group data. Pre-, Post-, and Follow-up data administered via survey.



"Here lies the body of a yo-yo dieter, who gained and lost 100 lbs ten times over. Heart failure."

Character - Voice of the Eating Disorder
Actor - Emily Dennis

Pre-testing assessed 9th graders knowledge on eating disorders/ disordered eating to establish a baseline of their current understanding.

Post-testing assessed knowledge of the issue after watching the performance to ascertain if there was a change in understanding.

Focus groups were facilitated across all four high schools to gain a deeper understanding of how the performance impacted knowledge on eating disorders/ disordered eating.

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THE CONCLUSION

This study informs best practices for theatre as an evidence-based educational tool in the area of eating disorders intervention.

While the study is on-going, preliminary data indicate that *The Thin Line* appears able to raise awareness and change behaviors as they pertain to disordered eating.

Little data/research exists on efficacy of art(s) and media-based interventions as a result there is legitimate concern about trivializing and subsequently, exacerbating the problem.

"The medical term anorexia means 'absence of hunger or appetite' but you and I alone know that that's not true, that you have a huge appetite, you're extremely hungry, but you're willing to deny yourself your existence."

Character - Voice of the Eating Disorder
Actor - Emily Dennis



Given the paucity of research in this type of intervention, future research is needed in order to investigate the effects of art(s) and media-based interventions.

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