

Sexual Victimization During the First Two Months at SUNY Geneseo:

Sex Differences in Rates and Risk

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Abstract

Few studies have examined risk for sexual victimization during the transition to college. We explored associations between sexual victimization during the first two months of campus and risky behaviors normative to the college experience, specifically hooking up and binge drinking. Undergraduates ($N = 112$) were sampled in October of their freshmen year at SUNY Geneseo and reported on their experiences of hook ups since age 14, binge drinking over the past 30 days, and experiences of sexual victimization since starting college. As expected, more women than men reported more experiences of college sexual victimization. A greater proportion of men reported binge drinking and hooking up as compared to women. Women who were sexually victimized were more likely to report binge drinking and hooking up than other women. Results suggest that binge drinking and hooking up place women, but not men, at an elevated risk for sexual victimization during the transition to college.

Sexual Victimization During the Transition to College: Sex Differences in Rates and Risk

The transition to college is a very challenging and stressful time for first year students (Bogle, 2008). Students new to college may feel pressure to conform to perceived college norms of risky behavior, including alcohol use and casual sex (Bogle, 2008). Alcohol use, including binge drinking (five or more drinks within a two-hour period), frequently occurs in college (Sher, Walitzer, Wood, & Bren, 1991). Although binge drinking may be common among college students, it is a risky behavior. Binge drinking results in health risks as well as cognitive deficits, which affects overall decision making for men and women (Abbey, 2002).

Casual sex, specifically hooking up, is also replacing dating as the predominant form of heterosexual interaction on campus (Bogle, 2008; Flack et al., 2007). According to Paul, McManus, and Hayes (2000), hook ups are common, with almost 80% of college students reporting at least one hook up. As in past research, a hook up was defined as “a sexual encounter (that may or may not include sexual intercourse) between two people, usually lasting only one night without the expectation of developing a relationship” (Paul & Hayes, 2002). According to several authors (e.g., Bogle, 2008; Paul, 2006), “hook up” is a broad term, which implies the possibility of a wide variety of sexual behaviors occurring. Accordingly, engaging in a hook up can be risky because different partners may have different expectations for which sexual behaviors will occur (Paul, 2006). Also, since hook ups are casual in nature, it is unlikely that hook up partners will be particularly invested in the wants and desires of the other partner (Flack et al., 2007). For these reasons, hooking up can lead to unwanted sexual experiences (Paul, 2006).

Risky behaviors common on college campuses may place students, specifically those new to campus, at an elevated probability for experiencing sexual victimization. Sexual victimization

is a common and harmful problem for college students. Sexual victimization involves any nonconsensual, unwanted experience of rape, attempted rape, sexual coercion, and sexual contact, as defined by the Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss & Gidycz, 1985). In a national sample of 6,159 students from 32 different colleges across the United States, it was found that 27.5% of women and 7.7% of men had experienced sexual victimization, specifically rape (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). More recently, another study by Smith, White, and Holland (2003) reported that 88% of 1,569 female college students surveyed reported at least one incident of sexual victimization, based on a shared definition with the current research. Previous research has found that unwanted sex, which is defined more broadly than sexual victimization, leads to symptoms of posttraumatic stress (Flack et al., 2007). Therefore, sexual victimization, which is considered to be more severe than unwanted sex, may be particularly stressful during the period of transition to college.

Previous research has found a relationship between unwanted sex, some of which may have involved sexual victimization, hooking up, and binge drinking. For example, Flack et al. (2007) reported that 78% of unwanted sex occurred in the context of a hook up. It has also been reported that individuals who were not in steady dating relationships were more likely to experience unwanted sexual contact (Banyard et al., 2007) because they were more likely to hook up casually. Additionally, students who reported unwanted sex were more likely to report higher frequencies of alcohol use. Abbey (2002) also found that heavy alcohol consumption, including binge drinking, increased the risk of experiencing sexual victimization, especially for women. According to Muehlenhard and Linton (1987), heavy alcohol use, which may include binge drinking, impedes one's ability to perceive risk and to resist unwanted sexual advances.

Research on sexual victimization tends to assess men's perpetration against women rather than victimization by women (Abbey, 2002). Many studies do not necessarily indicate that men experience victimization, and when men do report unwanted sexual experiences, the sex of the perpetrator is often not assessed. For example, rates of unwanted sexual contact (Banyard et al., 2007) and unwanted sex (Flack et al., 2007) have been reported, yet it is not clear if the perpetration was by another man or a woman. Therefore, more research on men's experiences of heterosexual victimization is needed. Although rates of sexual victimization may be lower for men than for women, sexual victimization is still problematic and therefore is important to study.

The current research aims to extend previous research findings by exploring the relationship between hooking up, binge drinking and heterosexual victimization for both men and women, specifically during the transition to college. One goal of the present research was to determine rates of heterosexual victimization for women as well as for men. It was hypothesized that, consistent with previous literature on unwanted sexual contact (Banyard, et al., 2007) and unwanted sex (Flack et al., 2007), more women than men would report sexual victimization during the transition to college (Hypothesis 1).

Next, it was expected that a greater proportion of men than women would report binge drinking (Hypothesis 2), although equal proportions were expected to report a past history of hooking up (Hypothesis 3). Banyard et al. (2007) found that men drink more frequently than women. The current research aims to extend Banyard et al. by focusing specifically on binge drinking behaviors as they occur in freshmen students over the first two months on campus. We expected that equal proportions of men and women would report hooking because past research has found hook ups to be common among both sexes (Paul & Hayes, 2002).

Based on previous research (e.g., Paul & Hayes, 2002) we expected to find a relationship among binge drinking, hooking up, and sexual victimization specifically among freshmen women. Past research has demonstrated that drinking less and being in a relationship (i.e., not hooking up casually) were protective against sexual victimization, but not as protective for women as men (Banyard et al). Therefore, it was hypothesized that binge drinking would be more common among women who report sexual victimization than among other women who do not report victimization (Hypothesis 4). According to Flack et al. (2007), participants who experienced sexual victimization reported higher frequencies of alcohol consumption.

Lastly, it was also predicted that hooking up would be more common among women who report sexual victimization than among other women who do not report victimization (Hypothesis 5). Previous research indicated that unwanted sex, which may have included sexual victimization, is most likely to occur in the context of a hook up than in other relationship contexts, such as steady dating (Flack et al., 2007). Similarly, Flack et al. also found that participants who engaged in hook ups were more likely to experience unwanted sex than participants who did not report hooking up. These findings indicate that hooking up is likely a risk factor for sexual victimization.

Method

Participants

Data were collected from 112 undergraduate students (68.8% female, $n = 77$) during their first year at a small public college in Western NY. All participants lived on campus. The average age of participants was 18.08 ($SD = 0.33$, range 18-20). The majority of participants self-identified as White (85.7%, $n = 96$) and other participants identified as Asian (2.7%, $n = 3$), African-American or Black (2.7%, $n = 3$), Hispanic (5.4%, $n = 6$), or other (3.6%, $n = 4$). Most

participants self-identified as heterosexual (95.5%, $n = 107$), while other participants self-identified as bisexual (2.7%, $n = 3$), gay or lesbian (0.9%, $n = 1$), or other (0.9%, $n = 1$). The majority of participants reported that they were not currently dating anyone (66.1%, $n = 74$).

Measures

In the present study, participants responded to questions about incidences of hook ups, unwanted sexual experiences, and binge drinking behaviors. Participants also answered questions regarding demographic variables, including their age, sex, race, sexual orientation, current relationship status and whether or not they lived on campus. The definition of a hook up was based on that by Paul and Hayes (2002); hook ups were defined as “a sexual encounter (that may or may not include sexual intercourse) between two people, usually lasting only one night without the expectation of developing a relationship”. After reading this definition, participants responded to the following item: “Since age 14, how many times have you “hooked up”?” Participants who reported one or more past hookups were classified as having a hook up history.

The 2004 updated version (Testa, VanZile-Tamsen, Livingston, & Koss, 2004) of the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES; Koss & Gidycz, 1985) is an 11-item self-report measure which was used to assess sexual victimization. There are 4 subscales: rape, attempted rape, sexually coerced intercourse, and sexual contact. In the present study, participants were asked to respond to the SES pertaining to their experiences since age 14. For each experience reported, participants indicated the sex of the perpetrator, the level of school they were in at that time (i.e., middle school, high school, or college), and if the experience took place in the context of a hook up. Participants were classified as experiencing college sexual victimization if they made a report on any SES subscale which took place during college and was enacted by a member of the other sex. Testa et al reported evidence for the validity of this measure.

Participants reported on binge drinking with a single item from a larger measure of alcohol use adapted from Sher et al. (1991): “In the past month, how many times have you had five or more drinks at a single sitting, either a beer, wine, wine coolers, liquor, or some combination of these?” Respondents were provided with Standard Drink Conversion information including a definition of a standard drink (i.e., 12 ounces of beer, 4 ounces of wine, one single mixed drink, or one shot) in order to ensure accuracy when reporting quantity consumed. Those who reported one or more instances of this behavior over the past 30 days were classified as binge drinkers.

Procedure

First year undergraduates were recruited online from a voluntary pool for a study of *First Year College Students’ Sexual Attitudes and Experiences*. Data collection sessions were held in campus classrooms during October of the students’ first year on campus. All participants provided informed consent and anonymously responded to self-report surveys administered by 1-2 female undergraduate researchers. To ensure privacy, participants were seated in alternating rows. Completed survey materials were submitted to a slotted box. Data collection sessions lasted no longer than 60 minutes. For compensation, participants were given course credit. A full debriefing was provided.

Results

About 12.5% ($n = 14$) of the sample reported sexual victimization since beginning college. Hooking up and binge drinking were common. The majority of students reported experiencing one or more previous hook up (67.0%, $n = 75$). The average number of hook ups since age 14 was 5.97 ($SD = 13.19$, range 0-112). Almost half of the sample (48.2%, $n = 54$)

reported binge drinking in the past 30 days, defined as five or more drinks within a two hour period.

It was hypothesized that more women than men would report experiencing sexual victimization since beginning college (Hypothesis 1). To test this hypothesis, a chi-squared analysis was conducted. This hypothesis was supported, $X^2(1) = 4.33, p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .20$. As shown in Table 1, of those who reported victimization, 92.2% ($n = 13$) were women. Additionally, of female participants, 16.9% reported an experience of sexual victimization, as compared to 2.9% of male participants.

The next two hypotheses were that a greater proportion of men than women would report binge drinking (Hypothesis 2), yet equal proportions would report a past history of hooking up (Hypothesis 3). Chi-squared analyses supported Hypothesis 2, $X^2(1) = 8.45, p < .01$, Cramer's $V = .28$. Specifically, a greater proportion of men (68.6%) than women (39%) reported binge drinking. Unexpectedly, sex of participant and hook up histories were not independent, $X^2(1) = 3.91, p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .18$. This was inconsistent with Hypothesis 3. A greater proportion of men (80%; $n = 28$) than women (61.0%, $n = 47$) reported hooking up.

It was also predicted that binge drinking would be more common among women who reported sexual victimization than among other women who did not report victimization (Hypothesis 4).. As shown in Table 2, of women who experienced sexual victimization in college, 69.2% ($n = 9$) reported binge drinking. Put another way, of the women who reported binge drinking, 30.0% ($n = 9$) also reported college victimization. This provided full support for the fourth hypothesis, $X^2(1) = 6.02, p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .28$.

The last hypothesis was that hooking up would be more common among women who report sexual victimization than among other women (Hypothesis 5). A chi-squared analysis

revealed that this hypothesis was supported, $X^2(1) = 6.43$, $p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .29$. As shown in Table 3, experience of sexual victimization and history of hook ups were significantly, positively correlated. Specifically, of women who reported sexual victimization in college, 92.3% ($n = 12$) reported a history of hook ups. Additionally, of the women who hooked up, 25.5% ($n = 12$) also reported college sexual victimization.

Discussion

The first two months on campus are a risky transitional period for freshmen students. Many students engage in risky behaviors, such as hooking up and binge drinking, that are perceived to be normative on campus. Unfortunately, these behaviors place female students specifically at an elevated risk for experiencing sexual victimization in college. While male students are more likely to binge drink and to engage in hook ups than women, they are less likely to experience sexual victimization.

The purpose of the current research was to assess the relationships among binge drinking, hooking up, and sexual victimization among college freshmen new to campus. Extending previous research focused on unwanted contact (Banyard et al., 2007) and unwanted sex (Flack et al., 2007), women were more likely to experience sexual victimization than men during the first two months on campus. Women may be more likely to experience victimization because of traditional gender roles which encourage women to be passive and men to be aggressive in sexual interactions (Abbey, 2002; Gavey, 2005). Therefore, women may acquiesce to the sexual advances of men because doing so is socially accepted. While not examined in this research specifically, future research could examine adherence to traditional gender role attitudes among sexually victimized women.

In our sample, there were fewer reports of sexual victimization than what was found in a national prevalence study (Smith et al., 2003). This likely occurred because our research was based solely on occurrences of sexual victimization during the first two months on campus. Additionally, lower rates of male sexual victimization were reported in the present research than in previous research (e.g., Flack et al., 2007). Since our research was focused only on rates of heterosexual victimization, it is likely that other studies which reported higher rates of unwanted contact (Banyard et al., 2007) or unwanted sex (Flack et al., 2007) for men included same-sex victimization as well. Additionally, the definition of sexual victimization was much narrower in this research than in other past research, which enabled a direct focus on incidences of heterosexual victimization occurring for males.

As hypothesized, a greater proportion of men than women reported binge drinking over the past 30 days. This result is consistent with Banyard et al. (2007) who found that women drank less frequently than men. In the current research, it is possible that binge drinking may not be as common for women because of commonly accepted societal stereotypes that associate female drinking with promiscuity (Abbey, 2002). There was not support found for the hypothesis that men and women would report equal frequencies of hooking up. Instead, it was found that men reported higher rates of hooking up than did women. This is consistent with social scripts about normative heterosexuality. Specifically, our society emphasizes active sexuality as part of being a real man (Gavey, 2005). A sexual double standard exists such that women, but not men, are often negatively judged for hooking up (Bogle, 2008).

Women who reported college sexual victimization were also likely to report binge drinking over the past 30 days. This result is consistent with Flack et al., (2007), who found that women who were frequent binge drinkers were more likely to experience unwanted sex.

Additionally, support was found for the hypothesis that hooking up would be more common among women who experienced sexual victimization. Paul and Hayes (2002) also found that women who hooked up were more likely to experience unwanted sex. Binge drinking and hooking up may place women at elevated risk for sexual victimization, specifically during the initial transition to college. While a greater proportion of male students reported binge drinking and hooking up than men, a smaller proportion of male students reported sexual victimization. Consistent with results of previous literature (Banyard et al., 2007), it seems that such risky behaviors are not putting men at increased risk for heterosexual victimization. Previous research (Abbey, 2002) has demonstrated that unwanted sexual experiences typically occur in contexts where both perpetrator and victim are drinking heavily. Future research may examine if binge drinking places men at an elevated risk of being perpetrators, rather than victims of sexual victimization.

There were several limitations in the current research. First, as the sample population for this research was from a small and homogeneously Caucasian campus, it is possible that the results will not generalize to other more diverse campuses. Although findings have been inconsistent, at least one research study found that African-American women, may be at particular greater risk for experiencing some forms of sexual victimization on college campuses (Gross, Winslett, Roberts, & Gohm, 2006). Therefore, it is recommended that future research examine rates and risk for sexual victimization during the transition to college specifically of ethnic minority students.

One area for improvement in this research involves the specific questions asked about hook ups. In this study, participants were asked to indicate hook ups that occurred after age 14, but did not identify when the hook ups occurred. Therefore, it is not possible to determine if their

experiences with hooking up occurred in high school, in college, or both. It is possible that reported rates of hooking up were affected by this, suggesting that students hook up more in college than what is actually the case. Future research should address this issue by specifically asking participants to discriminate between experiences that occurred in high school and in college.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the current research adds to the literature by exploring rates and risk for sexual victimization specifically during the first two months on campus. In the current sample, 12.5% of participants reported experiencing sexual victimization. While 12.5% is not even one third of the sample, it is important to keep in mind that this victimization occurred specifically during the first two months on campus, which suggests that sexual victimization is a genuine problem for new students to campus. Colleges must develop programs for freshmen orientation that make students aware of the risks associated with binge drinking and hook up behaviors, both of which are normative on college campuses.

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Table 1

Crosstabulations of Sex and College Sexual Victimization (N = 112).

	College Sexual Victimization		
	Absent	Present	Total
Sex			
Female	64	13	77
Row Percent	83.1	16.9	100
Column Percent	65.3	92.9	68.8
Male	34	1	35
Row Percent	97.1	2.9	100
Column Percent	34.7	7.1	31.3
Total	98	14	112
Row Percent	87.5	12.5	100
Column Percent	100	100	100

Note: Column percentages reflect the proportion of participants within each of the two college sexual victimization categories (i.e., presence or absence of college victimization). Row percentages reflect the proportions of participants within each of the two sex categories (i.e., male or female) who report victimization during college.

Table 2

Crosstabs of Binge Drinking over the Past 30 Days and College Sexual Victimization for Freshmen Women (n = 77).

	College Sexual Victimization		
	Absent	Present	Total
Binge Drinking			
Absent	43	4	47
Row Percent	91.5	8.5	100
Column Percent	67.2	30.8	61.0
Present	21	9	30
Row Percent	70.0	30.0	100
Column Percent	32.8	69.2	39.0
Total	64	13	77
Row Percent	83.1	16.9	100
Column Percent	100	100	100

Note: Column percentages reflect the proportion of participants within each of the two college sexual victimization categories (i.e., presence or absence of college victimization) who report binge drinking over the past 30 days. Row percentages reflect the proportions of participants within each of the two binge drinking categories (i.e., present or absent) who report victimization during college.

Table 3

Comparing Crosstabs of History of Hook Ups and College Sexual Victimization for Freshmen

Women (n = 77).

	College Sexual Victimization		
	Absent	Present	Total
History of Hook Ups			
Absent	29	1	30
Row Percent	96.7	3.3	100
Column Percent	45.3	7.7	39.0
Present	35	12	47
Row Percent	74.5	25.5	100
Column Percent	54.7	92.3	61.0
Total	64	13	77
Row Percent	83.1	16.9	100
Column Percent	100	100	100

Note: Column percentages reflect the proportion of participants within each of the two college sexual victimization categories (i.e., presence or absence of college victimization) who report history of hook ups. Row percentages reflect the proportions of participants within each of the two hook up history categories (i.e., present or absent) who report victimization during college.